

**Oppression, Resistance, Empowerment, and
Formation of Female Subjecthood in the
Site of Family: A Study of Chinese
American Women's Writings**

by

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Abstract

The dissertation focuses on Chinese American women's autobiography and autobiographical writings – Jade Snow Wong's *Fifth Chinese Daughter*, Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*, and Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* – and from the context of family, examines how Chinese American women writers represent the exploration of American-born daughters as it relates to their female subjectivity within the paradoxes of the Chinese American immigrant family. My chief argument is that family is a site of oppression, resistance, and empowerment, within which Chinese American daughters construct that subjectivity.

More specifically, my dissertation serves to illustrate that the Chinese American immigrant family is a site of oppression – visited by the first-generation immigrant parents on the second-generation Chinese American daughters. It is also a site of resistance – of the Chinese American daughters to their parents' oppression. Furthermore, it is a place of empowerment – passed from the first-generation mothers to their daughters. Finally, the family is the location of the daughters' formation of their female identity and subjecthood.

Abbreviations

FCD *Fifth Chinese Daughter*

JLC *The Joy Luck Club*

WW *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood among Ghosts*

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Introduction

The earliest Chinese immigrants to America date back to the 1840's, after the United States expanded westward. They left their homes due to civil strife, the Opium Wars,¹ heavy floods, and the loss of land.² Upon Learning about the “Golden Mountain” in California, many daring young men (most of whom were illiterate) left their villages for America to “dig up gold” and lived a life devoid of family. Very few women came to America at that time: “In 1852, of the 11,794 Chinese in California, only seven were women. Eighteen years later, of the 63,199 Chinese in the United States, 4,566 were female – a ratio of fourteen to one” (Takaki 209). Reasons for the gender imbalance were myriad. First of all, traditional Chinese culture mandated men to function in the public sphere and women to remain at home to serve the aged parents-in-law and to take care of the children. According to Ronald Takaki:

The Chinese system of patrilineal descent provided for the equal division of a family's lands among all adult sons and the sharing of responsibility for their elderly parents. By keeping the wives and children of their sons at home, parents hoped they would be able to buttress family ties and filial obligations: their wondering sons would send money home and also return someday. (210)

Secondly, early Chinese workers did not intend to stay long in America, for they only wanted to earn an adequate amount of money before returning to China. Furthermore, the workers migrated often, working in various mines and railroad construction sites. Lastly, racial discrimination discouraged women from joining their husbands. The workers found that America was a white-dominant society which regarded Chinese as inferior people. In addition, the white workers, jealous of hard-working Chinese workers, persecuted them. According to Thomas Sowell, a gang of whites shot and hanged about 20 Chinese over a night in Los Angeles in 1871 (178).

When the Chinese arrived in the US to seek the American dream, they also brought along their traditional Chinese culture and values. First-generation immigrants maintained close connections with their home country. When they encountered hardships and racial discrimination, they found spiritual comfort in Chinese traditional culture. In addition, the fact that China was one of the four great

¹ There were two opium wars. The First Opium War took place from June, 1840 to August, 1842, started by British invasion; the Second Opium War took place from October, 1856 to October, 1860 started by the invasion of the western powers. The two wars made China into a semi-feudal and semi-colonial country.

² The Qing government, forced to pay large indemnities to western imperialist powers, imposed high taxes on peasants. Unable to pay the taxes, many of them lost the lands that they relied on for existence.

ancient civilizations instilled a sense of national pride, and provided emotional support during trying times.

Chinese immigrants were marginalized in their adopted country. Before the Second World War, the white dominant society rejected and discriminated against Chinese immigrants; the Chinese Exclusion Act, passed in 1882, was not abolished until 1943. Due to a variety of discriminative laws and racial prejudice, Chinese immigrants were forced to work as coolies, accepting low wages in factories, the agricultural industry in California, and mines and railway companies. Takaki notes this about Chinese laborers in his *A Different Mirror: A History of Multicultural America*:

There laborers were concentrated in the low-wage-jobs. Cigar workers, for example, received only \$287 in annual wages, and 92 percent of them were Chinese. In contrast, tailors and seamsters earned \$588 a year, and only 9 percent were Chinese. They were also segregated within individual industries and paid less than white workers. In factories where the labor force was racially mixed, whites were the skilled workers and Chinese the menial. Where they were assigned to the same tasks as whites, they were paid less than their white counterparts in a racially based differential wage system: the work was equal but the wages were unequal. (198)

The Chinese workers, in order to survive and support their families in China, did whatever work they could obtain, at the lowest wages, and were exploited by their employers. Moreover, they were often “beaten and shot by white workers and often loaded onto trains and shipped out of town” (Takaki 201). The violence and exclusion in mines, factories, and fields drove “thousands of Chinese into self-employment – stores, restaurants, and especially laundries. Chinese wash-houses were a common sight as early as the 1850’s. By 1890, there were 6,400 Chinese laundry workers in California, representing 69 percent of all laundry workers” (ibid). Denied equal rights and unable to speak English, most of the early immigrants worked and lived in Chinatowns, where they could identify with familiar culture.

It was difficult for the first-generation Chinese immigrants to blend into American society and culture due to cultural conflicts and limitation of language. Although they lived and worked in Chinatowns, they easily sensed the differences between Chinese and American cultures. The predominant American culture was characterized by individualism, personal success, freedom, equality, and adventure; in contrast, Chinese traditional culture was characterized by collectivism, solidarity, social obligation, filial piety, and so forth.

Perhaps surprisingly, first-generation³ immigrants encountered even deeper

³ In this dissertation, I refer to first-generation Chinese Americans as those who were born in China and immigrated to

cultural conflicts within their own families. Unlike their parents, who cherished Chinese culture, the second-generation – the American-born Chinese, who spoke English and accepted American culture and values – did not identify with their Chinese roots. Consequently, they “formed a unique sub-population, sub-culture, and social circles” (Yin 128). The second-generation desired to blend into the mainstream American society but were discriminated against and rejected by the white American society. They even looked down upon their parents, although they loved them deep within. In some sense, the second-generation Chinese Americans had to “amplify their efforts to assimilate into American mainstream society to make it accept them; sometimes, they even abandoned their Chinese cultural tradition without hesitation” (Yin 129).

In the US, working Chinese immigrant women had relatively more freedom to seek their self-worth and to gain their subjectivity. Arriving in America, they were free of their parents-in-law’s oppression and worked together with their husbands to support their families while taking care of their children. Thus they sometimes had more or less equal positions as their husbands though living conditions demanded that working class women to be strong enough to ensure the survival of their families. Even though most husbands exhibited chauvinism, they allowed their wives to play more important roles, like Brave Orchid in Maxine Hong Kingston’s *The Woman Warrior*. The immigrant women thus became decisively important in the family. Thomas Sowell observes that among Chinese Americans, the unbalanced gender ratio made Chinese American women apt at gaining the upper hand. Although the husband was the master of the family in public, it was very common for the wife to decide the important matters within the family (192).

My justifications for the chosen texts are threefold. First of all, the autobiography and autobiographical works highlight Chinese American women’s life experiences in struggling simultaneously against sexual and racial discrimination. Second, the stories take place in the site of the family, where different generations and cultures amalgamate and conflict with each other. Third, the poignant inward journeys taken by the female characters in exploring themselves and forming their female subjectivity are what give rise to the powerful feminist representations portrayed by the works.

In their autobiographical works, Chinese American woman writers such as Jade Snow Wong, Maxine Hong Kingston, and Amy Tan develop dramatic family stories focused on the dominant mothers (or mainly father in Jade Snow Wong’s case) and the rebelling daughters. In her book *Fifth Chinese Daughter*, Wong depicts the struggle between immigrant parents, especially the father, and the fifth daughter, in

America later; the second-generation are the descendants of the first-generation who were born in America.

her resistance to her parents' patriarchal oppression and her individualist self-actualization. Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts* tells the story of the rebellious daughter Maxine and her paradoxical mother's imposition of traditional Chinese culture, Maxine's resistance to it, her empowerment drawn from her mother's talking-stories of Chinese warrior women, and her eventual achievement of female subjecthood. Noriko Mizuta, for example, discusses the work "as a journey, the story of a Chinese American woman's crisis of identity, her cultural experience and the unfolding of her consciousness" (175).⁴

Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*, also an autobiographical work, tells the stories of four pairs of mothers and daughters, focusing on the mothers' oppression with high expectations, the daughters' resistance to them, and the daughters' eventual identification with their mothers and Chinese culture. Although the texts are different in form, they carry the same theme: family is the site of oppression, resistance, empowerment, and the formation of female subjectivity. My study of these writings demonstrates the progression from a preoccupation with generational conflicts and identity to a celebration of diversity.

All of these stories take place within the Chinese American immigrant family. In the mother-daughter plots, the daughters are both oppressed and empowered, come of age, and strive to be subjects rather than objects. They restore to themselves the erased names, find their silenced voices, and regain lost dignity. A parallel may be found in African American women's writing about the home, such as that by bell hooks:

In our young minds houses belonged to women, were their special domain, not as property, but as places where all that truly mattered in life took place – the warmth and comfort of shelter, the feeding of our bodies, the nurturing of our souls. There we learned dignity, integrity of being; there we learn to have faith. The folks who made this life possible, who were primary guides and teachers, were black women.... This task of making a homeplace was not simply a matter of Black women providing service; it was about the construction of a safe place where Black people could affirm one another and by so doing heal many of the wounds inflicted by racist domination. We could not learn to love or respect ourselves in the culture of white supremacy, on the outside; it was there on the inside.... This task of making a home place, of making home a community of resistance, has been shared by Black women globally, especially Black women in white supremacy societies. (*Yearning* 41-2)

⁴ Translations of all citations in Japanese and Chinese into English are by this author.

Since the 1970's, Chinese American literature has emerged as a relatively new ethnic literature. Accompanied by the civil rights movement, the women's liberation movement, and the rise of multiculturalism, it helped to break the monopoly of American mainstream literature. Chinese American women's literature, represented by Jade Snow Wong, Maxine Hong Kingston, and Amy Tan, has achieved great importance with its diverse representation of Chinese American women's writings in the mainstream American literary world.

The early beginnings of Chinese American women's literature⁵ date back more than a century ago, to the work by two Eurasian Canadian sisters, whose father was British and mother Chinese. One was Edith Maude Eaton (1865-1914), whose pen name was Sui Sin Far and whose short story "The Gamblers" appeared in 1896; the other was Winifred Lillie Eaton (1875-1954), whose pen name was Onoto Watanna and who published the first Asian American novel *Miss Nume of Japan* in 1899. The Eaton sisters may thus be credited with initiating the era of Chinese American women's literature.

Since the late the 1970's, Chinese American literature developed even more quickly, especially after the publication of Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*. Other great achievements include works by Jade Snow Wong, Amy Tan, Gish Jen, Fae Myenne Ng, and Mei Ng. Chinese American literature has become one of the most important ethnic literatures and attracted great attention from the fields of both mainstream American literature and the rest of the world.

Motivated by the flourishing of Chinese American women's literature, a body of criticism had also emerged. Perhaps the earliest representative work is Elaine H. Kim's *Asian American Literature: An Introduction to the Writings and Their Social Contexts*, published in 1982, which focuses on the social contexts of Asian American immigrants and Asian American literature. It provides pioneering insights for future writers. Following Kim were critics and scholars of Chinese American literature such as King-Kok Cheung, Sau-ling Cynthia Wong, Lisa Lowe, Rey Chow, Amy Ling, Shirley Geok-lin Lim, Wendy Ho, David Lei-Wei Li, Jingqi Ling, Leslie Bow, Erin Khue Ninh, Lan Dong, Mickey Pearlman, Phalipa Kafka, and E. D. Huntley, whose diverse critiques helped to raise the awareness of Chinese American women's literature and critical perspectives in the rest of the world.⁶

The introduction of Chinese American women's literature in mainland China started in 1981 with Jiang Xiaoming's "The New Rising Chinese American Writer Maxine Hong Kingston." Critical research of Chinese American literature started in

⁵ Chinese American critic Amy Ling has made important contributions to the history of Chinese American Women's Literature before 1990. See her *Between Worlds: Women Writers of Chinese Ancestry*. New York: Pergamon Press, 1990.

⁶ Aimin Cheng, Yi Shao, and Jun Lu have contributed their literature review of Chinese American literature in both America and China. For further information, see their work *A Study of Chinese American Fiction in the 20th Century*. Nanjing: Nanjing UP, 2010.

the 1990's and boomed with surprising speed. By 2004, critical theses responding to Chinese American literature numbered 238, and doctoral dissertations numbered 18 by the end of 2005.⁷ By 2011, numerous additional researches on Chinese American literature have come into being, not to mention the graduation theses of the both undergraduates and postgraduates.⁸ In all, 42 doctoral dissertations and monographs have also appeared.

The literary criticism of Chinese American literature in China can roughly be divided into the following aspects: feminist criticism, cultural and identity criticism, transcultural criticism, thematic criticism, historical studies, postcolonial criticism, aesthetic criticism, and narrative strategy studies. There are ten monographs and dissertations contributing to feminist criticism in Chinese American women's literature. Pingping Shi published *The Mother-Daughter Relationship and the Politics of Gender and Race: A Study of Chinese American Women's Writings* in 2004. Focusing on Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*, Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*, and Ng's *Bone*, Shi draws on both representative white feminist theories and theories developed by feminists of color to explore the mother-daughter relationship; she compares the similarities and differences between the three texts to justify the validity of the mother-daughter theme from a feminist perspective. Xinlian Liu's dissertation "Gender, Race, and Culture: An Analysis of Chinese American Women's Writings" (2004) examines the interrelationship between gender, race, and culture within the writings of Chinese American women. Liu analyzes the construction of multi-identity and subjectivity of Chinese American women as well as the connection with cultural traditions in their self-identification.

Xiao Wei's *Women's Writings under the Heterogeneous Cultural Context: A Comparative Study of Overseas Chinese Women's Writings* (2005) discusses the relationship between gender and feminist writings, elaborating on the formation and the development of overseas Chinese women's writings and analyzing the representative texts, focusing on how Chinese American women's writings changed from resistance to feminism, and how the hybrid cultural context impacts their writings.

Zhuo Zhang's dissertation "Construction of Gender Identity in Chinese American Literature" (2006) studies works by both male and female Chinese American writers, such as Jade Snow Wong, Louis Chu, Maxine Hong Kingston, Frank Chin, and Amy Tan, to investigate how these writers have used English literary texts to resist to the racial and sexual discrimination in America. Zhang also

⁷ Ruoqian Pu: *Ethnic Experience and Cultural Imagination: A Study of Typical Motifs in Chinese American Literature* Beijing: Chinese Social and Scientific Press, 2006, 31, 283-85.

⁸ Only taking the case of the theses on Asian /Chinese American literature written by the students that I have advised in the College of Foreign Languages, Beijing University of Technology from 2007 to the end of 2013, there are eleven postgraduate theses and thirty-four undergraduate theses completed.

examines how those authors have taken advantage of the influential power of literature to oppose the racial stereotype that mainstream American society had imposed upon Chinese Americans.

Xiaohui Chen's "*Her*" *Writing in Contemporary Chinese American Literature: A Diverse Study of Maxine Hong Kingston, Amy Tan, and Geling Yan* (2007) surveys the history of Chinese American women's literature and the feminist expression focusing on the relationship between images of women and western feminism in Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*, Gish Jen's *Typical American*, and Geling Yan's *Mulberry*.

Hefeng Guan's *Seeking Identity between Worlds: A Study of Chinese American Women's Writings* (2008) focuses on the theme of the exploration of Chinese American women's identity. Guan attempts to interpret the social and cultural structures embedded in Chinese American women's literature and thus to understand the narrative and artistic practices that have shaped their works, eventually to shed light on the general tendency of integration and synthesis in Chinese American women's identity-seeking process.

Weiming Tang's *Emergent Literature: Transcultural Metamorphosis in Chinese American Women's Writings* (2010) argues for an integrated perspective that enables a transformative rereading of Chinese American women's literature and an examination of constructing Chinese American women's cultural identity as one encompassing the full complexities of multifaceted negotiation, contestation, and transcultural metamorphosis.

Qing Cai's dissertation "Ailment-Narration of Chinese-American Women's Literature in Post-colonial Context" (2010) analyses Chinese American women writers' expression of the dual "Otherness" of women shackled by both the Chinese patriarchal culture and the mainstream white culture. The work not only demonstrates the resistance of Chinese American women to racial and gender discrimination, but also reveals transcendence over the issues of gender, class, and race in their identity construction.

Mingduan Fu's dissertation "From Pain to Healing: Transmutation of Women's Cultural Identity in Contemporary Chinese American Women's Writings" (2010), focusing on Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*, Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*, Jen Gish's *Typical American*, Ng Fae Myenne's *Bone*, and Ng Mei's *Eating Chinese Food Naked*, in an in-depth study of the evolution of cultural identity of Chinese American women. Drawing upon both feminist theory and post-colonial theory, the work identifies symbolic meanings of the images of Chinese American women and their resistance to the hegemony of the mainstream gender culture and class oppression.

Hongyan Li's dissertation "Anxious Identities in Gish Jen's Novels" (2011), taking advantage of the latest research by western sociologists and psychologists on the question of identity, investigates the desperation with which some of Jen's characters attempt to create their individual identities. It is argued that the anxiety of the characters gives expression to the author's own.

There are eight critical works on culture and identity construction that should be noted. Jingyi Wei's *Chinese Stories in the Western Context* (2002), focusing on Kingston's three main works,⁹ analyzes the significance of Kingston's revision, implantation, and creation of Chinese mythology and the Chinese American literary cannon. The other works on this theme are: Jiying Huang's "National Consciousness of Chinese Americans and Identification with America: From the 1930's to 1990's" (2001), Kuilan Liu's dissertation "Counter-Memory, De/Reconstructing Myth, and Identity Formation: A Study of *China Men*, *Homebase*, and *Donald Duk*" (2002), Yong Hu's *The Cultural Nostalgia: The Cultural Identification in Chinese American Literature* (2003), Lixing Wang's "From Cultural Conflicts to Cultural Diversity: On Chinese American Literature" (2004), Guichang Li's *The Cultural Weight: Interpretation of Contemporary Chinese American Literature* (2006), Yufeng Xue's *Cultural Study of Chinese American Literature* (2007), and Yingguo Xu's *A Study on Frank Chin's Writings* (2008).

A further three works examine the theme of transculture: Sijie Li's "Identity Portraying and Cross-Cultural Mentality Penetration: A Study of Overseas Chinese English Literature in the Late Twentieth Century" (2002), Xiaogang Gao's *Outside of Nostalgia: The Homeland Imagination in North American Chinese's Writings* (2006), and Wenshu Zhao's *Harmony and Variation: Changing Cultural Orientations in Chinese American Literature* (2009).

There are five works discuss the theme of Chinese American literature: Yaping Li's "A Comparative Theme Study of Chinese American Literature in the Middle and Late 20th Century" (2004) compares the different themes at different times; Ruoqian Pu's *Ethnic Experience and Cultural Imagination: A Study of Typical Motifs in Chinese American Literature* (2006), focusing on the motifs of "Chinatown," "mother and daughter," and "father and son," explores the role of these motifs in the development of Chinese American literature; Jun Lu's dissertation "Underlying the Construction and Maintenance of Chinese American Experience: A Thematic Study of the 20th Century Chinese American Fiction" (2008) discusses the different themes of the diverse fictions; Wenshu Zhao's monograph *Positioning Contemporary Chinese American Literature in Contested Terrains* (2004), targeting on the works of Frank Chin and Maxine Hong Kingston, studies the relationship between Chinese

⁹ *The Woman Warrior*, *China Men*, and *Tripmaster Monkey: His Fake Book*.

American literature and traditional Chinese culture; Jinping Hou's dissertation "A Study on the Theme of Bildung[sroman] of Chinese American Fiction" (2010), which chronologically explores the theme of bildungsroman from a cross-cultural perspective.

There are also three studies of Chinese American literary history: Xiaohuang Yin's *Chinese American Literature since the 1850's* (2006), Longhai Zhang's dissertation "Searching for Identity and Reconstructing History in Chinese American Fictions and Nonfictions" (1999), and Longhai Zhang's monograph *Inside the Chinese American Literature* (2012).

Four works focus on postcolonial criticism: Wei Lu's *Cultural Dialogue: A Study of Chinese American Literature* (2004), which explores Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*, Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*, Fae Myenne Ng's *Bone*, Mei Ng's *Eating Chinese Food Naked*, and David Henry Hwang's *M. Butterfly* from a postcolonial perspective, Guanglin Wang's *Being and Becoming: On Cultural Identity of Diasporic Chinese Writers in America and Australia* (2004), Aimin Chen's dissertation "Chinese American Literature and Orientalism" (2004), and Wei Lu's monograph *Chinese American Literature: Moving towards Cultural Study* (2007).

There are also three relevant works on aesthetics: Hong Fang's *Liminal Art in Kingston's Writings* (2007), Qiong Zhang's *From the Ethnic Voice to Literary Canon* (2009), Aimin Cheng, Yi Shao, and Jun Lu's *A Study of Chinese American Fiction in the 20th Century* (2010). Two additional works focus on narrative: Hong Gao's *Transcultural Chinese Narrative: Discussion Focusing on Pearl Buck, Yutang Lin, and Maxine Hong Kingston* (2005), and Yi Shao's dissertation "A Study of Chinese American Fiction Narrative Strategy" (2007). There are three edited collections: Ai-min Cheng's *A Study of Chinese American Literature* (2003), Guiyou Huang and Bing Wu's *Global Perspectives on Asian American Literature* (2009), and Bing Wu and Lili Wang's *Chinese American Writers* (2009). Finally, there is one interview record: Kuilan Liu's *The Shifting Boundaries: Interviews with Asian American Writers and Critics* (2012).

In sum, scholarship (in particular, research conducted by Chinese scholars) on Chinese American literature devotes most attention to the discussion of culture and the construction of cultural identity. It then focuses on feminist criticism, in which there is discussion of the mother-daughter relationship, Chinese American women's resistance against sexual and racial discrimination, and their construction of female identity. Finally, there is research on the literary themes of Chinese American literature and the narrative strategy, focusing on the revision of Chinese mythology and the impact of transculture in identification. The perspective of postcolonial criticism further highlights the construction of hybrid and multiple identities in

diaspora that help to deconstruct the unitary cultural identity in white dominated American society. The critique of Chinese American literature in China actually echoes correspondingly with the shift of trends in America:

A significant switch emphasis has also occurred in Asian American literary studies. Whereas identity politics – with its stress on cultural nationalism and American nativity – governed earlier theoretical and critical formulations, the stress is now on heterogeneity and diaspora. The shift has been from seeking to “claim America” to forging a connection between Asia and Asian America; from centering on race and on masculinity to revolving around the multiple axes of ethnicity, gender, class, and sexuality; from being concerned primarily with social history and communal responsibility to being caught in the quandaries and possibilities of postmodernism and multiculturalism. (Cheung, *An Interethnic Companion* 1)

In reviewing the critique of Chinese American literature, I have found, firstly, that the criticism mainly concentrates upon Maxine Hong Kingston and Amy Tan, and the works studied the most are *The Woman Warrior* and *The Joy Luck Club*; the research in Jade Snow Wong’s *Fifth Chinese Daughter* is much less. The discussion primarily focuses on the conflicts between Chinese and American cultures, the relationship within sex, race, and gender, the conflicts and reconciliation between the mothers and daughters, the identity construction of the second-generation daughters, the revision of Chinese myth, and the narrative strategy. Some of them are quite negative, in particular, the discussion on Jade Snow Wong. The critics fail to notice the value and the milestone significance of Wong’s work in Chinese American women’s writings and the role of her strategy of talking-story in the formation of second-generation’s identity.

Secondly, the feminist criticism by Chinese scholars and critics echoes the feminist criticism in America but has not gone far enough. Even though some critics conduct their study from the feminist perspective, they only involve the patriarchal oppression from their parents and the struggle of the second-generation daughters to obtain their autonomy; furthermore, the mothers are often taken as the negative element to control and oppress the daughters in their coming of age. Although several of the critics have examined the mothers’ influence on their daughters in their identity formation by telling their stories, they fail to explore further the mothers who were not only the oppressed in China, they also awakened and became strong women with autonomy to master their own destiny and, most importantly, they save and empower their American-born daughters when in trap and help them establish their female subjectivity. In addition, although there are some scholars who have

examined the identity construction of Chinese American daughters, they put more emphasis on their integration of the conflicting cultures and their hybrid identity, not on their exploration of their female voice and subjecthood in the doubly marginalized position in the white dominant American society. Moreover, they have given less examination to the significance of three female writers' creation of the androgynous warrior women in Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*, the subjective mothers and daughters in Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*, and the independent autonomous female in Jade Snow Wong's *Fifth Chinese Daughter*.

Lastly, there is relatively little discussion on family. Aimin Cheng examines the nostalgia in Kingston's *China Men* and *The Woman Warrior*, the symbolism of bone and the discovery of family history in Amy Tan's *The Bone Setter's Daughter*, and family continuity and family glory in Louis Chu's *Eat a Bowl of Tea* and Jade Snow Wong's *Fifth Chinese Daughter*. Qiong Zhang also discusses the family in Tan's works, mainly commenting on the ambivalence of the daughters with regards to inter-ethnic marriage. Their discussion primarily focuses on the function of family as locus of passing on the traditional culture to the second-generation, which becomes the oppressive factor to the young generation and their denial to it. However, no discussion probes the other aspect of the paradoxical family, that is, the site of empowering the young generation and help them to establish their subjectivity.

The study, focusing on Chinese American women's autobiography and autobiographical writings, aims to examine Chinese American women's family relationships and to discuss their exploration of the silenced voices and female subjectivity within the site of family from a feminist perspective. This dissertation takes Chinese immigrant family as a theoretical framework – a site of oppression, resistance, empowerment, and formation of the second-generation Chinese American daughters' subjecthood – to probe into their diverse journeys of establishing female subjectivity. The discussion is to illustrate that the Chinese American immigrant family is a site of oppression – from the first-generation Chinese immigrant parents with traditional Chinese culture to the American-born second-generation Chinese American daughters, of resistance – of the Chinese American daughters with American values to their parents' oppression, of empowerment – from the first-generation immigrant mothers/grandmothers to their Chinese American daughters, and of formation – of the Chinese American daughters' female subjecthood. It attempts to place at the center of the female characters and the mothers and daughters plot neglected and submerged by the previous studies in traditional literature and criticism. This work of the three writers writings raises the questions about what family means to Chinese immigrants in the adopted America, how family functions in cultural conflicts, how family impacts the American-born

daughters in their exploration and formation of female subjectivity as Chinese American women, and why family is paradoxical.

Family is a site of oppression. Family has the function of educating children and is also the site of children's primary socialization. Education in the Chinese immigrant family is different from the familial education in China due to the change of social and cultural context. Uprooted from their home country – China and rejected and marginalized by the white dominated mainstream society and culture, the first-generation immigrants who are cherishing their traditional culture attach much importance on the education of Chinese culture to their children and make them accept and inherit Chinese traditional culture and values. Therefore, as isolated diasporans, they care more about the education of their children and strive to indoctrinate them with Chinese culture and values inscribed in their own minds so that their children can keep a “Chinese heart.” The first-generation immigrant parents, particularly the determined mothers, have great expectations for their American-born daughters and wish them to become “swans” and prodigies, as what the father in *Fifth Chinese Daughter*, the mother in *The Woman Warrior*, and the mothers in *The Joy Luck Club* do to their daughters. The parents exercise their authority and perquisites to enforce their children to follow their wills. The familial education is overly coercive and oppressive; thus, family becomes the site of oppression.

Chinese American immigrant family is a site of resistance. The socialization of the children in Chinese American immigrant family is different due to the bicultural backgrounds in which the dominant white American culture is a strong one and Chinese culture is a weak one. Different from the familial education received in China, when the immigrant parents instill traditional Chinese culture to their Americanized children who have accepted the strong American culture and values they encounter rejection. The children exclude their immigrant parents and Chinese culture degraded in the mainstream American culture, particularly the traditional patriarchal culture. Consequently, the conflicts or familial battle inevitably take place between the two generations, especially between the oppressive mothers and the rebellious daughters.

Encountering the resistance from the daughters in their familial education, the persistent mothers change their ways of forcibly indoctrinating traditional Chinese culture to their daughters by talking traditional Chinese legend and national heroines and heroes in China to initiate the daughters' sense of national pride, and meanwhile they also tell their own stories happened in China to make the daughters know their true personality. In this way, the daughters reconceive their home culture and recognize their mothers rejected by them before and discover that their ancestral

cultural heritage is civilized and glorious, and their mothers are not weak and humiliating but are strong Shamans with invisible power to fight against the hardships, especially sexual discrimination to gain their freedom and respect. Consequently, the mothers become the source of female power from whom the daughters gain their spiritual power to fight against sexism and racism and draw cultural nutrition to form their cultural identification. Thus, family becomes the site of empowerment in the process of the daughters' resistance in their coming of age, as Ho asserts:

The care and education of children, especially daughters, has often been socially and historically assigned to women as domestic-familial sites. In such embodied, immediate, and permeable social spaces, many women construct and situate their understanding of a personal self and its relations to the family, community, and larger society. (35)

The point of departure shared by Chinese American women writers is the silence of their history. The sexism-inspired silencing of females has been so successful that the racial oppression of minorities in the U.S. is often characterized as "feminization." The silence imposed by white racists or Orientalists has constructed Chinese American women as alien, ahistorical, and voiceless Oriental objects. Therefore, Chinese American women writers have long been struggling for a historical voice by writing their own history in order to subvert the stereotypes perpetuated by the mainstream society and to justify their subjectivity. My discussion attempts to examine the path of Chinese American women's articulation of their female voice, both the mothers' and the daughters' voices, just as Marianne Hirsch asserts, "Rather than daughters having to 'speak for' mothers, mothers would be able to speak for themselves, perhaps 'with two voices.' Only thus can mothers and daughters speak to one another. Only thus could the plots of mothers and daughters become speakable" (*Mother/Daughter Plot* 197).

Autobiography and autobiographical writing is an effective strategy for Chinese American women writers to find their own voices. It is a mode of individual self-expression, self-assertion, and self-identification. The term autobiography "first appeared in 1809, making autobiography a quintessentially modern form" (Humm 16). Not until the late 1970's, however, did academics in the West define autobiography as a serious literary form (Bai 207). Traditional Western autobiographies often focused on the individual self. Nowadays, autobiography is a means of establishing personal identity within a certain society; as Karl Weintraub has noted, it enables the writer to raise two fundamental questions: who am I, and how did I become what I am (1). James Craig Holte also asserts that "the autobiography is a central part of the American literary tradition" (25) and "might be

the major theme in American literature” (30).

Historically, autobiographies written by men express their struggles and successes in the “public sphere.” Traditional criticism, based on male criteria, defines “good” autobiography as strong, authoritative, assertive, and representative. Women’s autobiographies, in contrast, demonstrate gynocentric features: they prescribe women’s lives, document the process of growth in which they find their subjectivities, claim their identities, raise their voices from silence, and assert themselves both in society and in the literary world. As Luce Irigaray maintains, “There is voice, there is a way to go” (209). It is through autobiographical writing that Chinese American women’s literature has successfully entered the mainstream.

Indeed, one distinguishing feature of Chinese American women’s autobiographical writings is about Chinese American women and their stories happening in their family in which women talk to one another, and their relationships with other women – mothers, sisters, and grandmothers—are vital to their growth and formation of their female identity. Thus, among Chinese American women writers, relationships within family and community, between men and women, and among women are treated as complex and significant. The writings of Chinese American women writers not only express Chinese American daughters’ experiences and struggles, but also demonstrate the history of Chinese American women. Noriko Mizuta asserts that “in minority women’s autobiographies, when women explore themselves, they explore history and culture at the same time; thus, it is the double expression of both women’s individual self and the culture” (164). Most importantly, Chinese American women writers have subverted the stereotypes perpetuated by the white mainstream society and created for themselves a new subjectivity, as Susan Stanford Friedman asserts:

Women’s autobiography comes alive as a literary tradition of self-creation when we approach its texts from a psycho-political perspective based in the lives of women. Historically, women as a group have never been the “gatherer of men, of lands, of power, maker of kingdoms or of empires” Nonetheless, this historical oppression has not destroyed women’s consciousness of self...Women have shattered the distorting identities imposed by culture and left “the sign” of their “presence” in their autobiographical writing. (55-6)

I highlight Chinese American women’s autobiographical writings because this is where Chinese American women’s literature began and where they represent the journey inward to explore their subjective female selfhood; it thus serves as well as an effective means of examining the awakening of their female consciousness, articulation of their silenced voice and erased history, and formation of Chinese

American women's identities, just as what Elaine Showalter notes that "each generation of women writers has found itself, in a sense, without a history, forced to rediscover the past anew, forging again and again the consciousness of their sex" (14). It is in their autobiographical works that Chinese American women writers transform their silence into voice and language to form the female discourse and perform their action of self-assertion and identity construction, and it is also "the transformation of silence into language and action is an act of self-revelation" (Lorde 42).

It is well known that a patriarchal society is male-dominated, male-identified, and male-centered and the nature of patriarchy is the oppression of women, which takes several forms. Historically, women have been excluded from the public sphere, even when they've been allowed to participate, it has generally been at subordinate, second-class levels. As Marianne Hirsch states:

There can be no systematic and theoretical study of women in patriarchal culture, there can be no theory of women's oppression, that does not take into account woman's role as a mother of daughters and as a daughter of mothers, that does not study female identity in relation to previous and subsequent generations of women, and that does not study the relationship in the wider context in which it takes place: the emotional, political, economic, and symbolic structure of family and society. (202)

The study utilizes the theoretical frameworks of feminism, post-structuralism, and post-colonialism to read Chinese American women's writings, to examine the works with a woman-centered perspective, and to deconstruct the politics of patriarchy. Feminist theory supplies a perspective examine the issues of female consciousness-raising, sexual discrimination and gender institution in Chinese American women's writings; post-structuralism helps to clarify the binary opposites of culture and gender and reconstruct Chinese American women's subjective identities; and post-colonialism is a tool with which to discuss the problems of "Otherness" and identification in Chinese American women's construction of multiple and subjectho in the American diasporic context.

This work mainly consists of three parts. In the first chapter, it discusses Jade Snow Wong's *Fifth Chinese Daughter* focusing on her way of rebelling against her parents' traditional cultural oppression, the empowerment received from her grandmother and mother, and her establishment of individualist female subjectivity in the site of the Chinese immigrant family. Chapter Two explores Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* by discussing the familial oppression of No Name Woman in China, of Moon Orchid in both China and America, and of the narrator Maxine in America and the resistance of No Name Woman and Maxine against that oppression. Maxine's

empowerment from her paradoxical mother's talking-stories of Fa Mu Lan, Ts'ai Yen, and Ngok Fei enables her to construct a subjectivity as a Chinese American warrior female. The last chapter examines the relationship between the four pairs of mothers and daughters in Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*, highlighting the oppression from the determined mothers' high expectation, the daughters' resistance to the oppressive mothers, the empowerment from the mothers' talking-stories, and the formation of the Chinese American daughters' female subjecthood.

I. Jade Snow Wong: Exploring Female's Voice and subjectivity in the Site of Chinese American Immigrant

Family

Jade Snow Wong's autobiography *Fifth Chinese Daughter* (1950) is a moving description of her coming of age in a Chinese immigrant family in Chinatown, San Francisco. Wong is the first Chinese American woman to write an autobiography¹⁰ exploring a Chinese American woman's independent and individual subjectivity, and she is thus credited as the pioneer of Chinese American women's autobiographical writing. *Fifth Chinese Daughter* was also the most widely-read work by a second-generation Chinese American until the publication of Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* in 1976.

In 1922, Jade Snow Wong was born into a large Chinese immigrant family with nine children in Chinatown, San Francisco. Her father came to America in 1903 from Zhongshan, Guangdong Province; her mother joined him 18 years later with her two elder sisters. Jade Snow's father owned a sewing factory, and the Wongs worked very hard to keep body and soul together in a Chinatown basement. She helped her mother with housework and took care of her younger brother from an early age. Wong graduated from Mills College in 1942 with a hard-earned Phi Beta Kappa key, supporting herself throughout her studies. During World War II, she worked as a secretary in a military factory. Wong has written two works: *Fifth Chinese Daughter* (1950) and *No Chinese Stranger* (1975). She held an honorary doctorate of humane letters from Mills College. In 1950, Wong married a fellow Chinatown native and artist, Woodrow Ong, and the couple ran a ceramics business and later opened a travel agency in San Francisco. Wong also achieved great success in her ceramics workshop. Her pottery and enamelware have been showcased throughout the country and around the world.¹¹ She died in March, 2006 in San Francisco, at the age of

¹⁰ Before Jade Snow Wong, the Eurasian Canadian sisters Edith Maud Eaton (1865-1914) and Winnifred Maud Eaton (1875-1954), whose father was British and mother Chinese, wrote about their experiences as Eurasian Canadians encountering the problems of cultural conflict and identity crisis. However, Edith Maud Eaton's essay "Leaves from the Mental Portfolio of an Eurasian" (1909), only thirteen pages long (in *Mrs. Spring Fragrance and Other Writings* edited by Amy Ling and Annette White-Parks in 1995), covers her life from four to forty. Winnifred Maud Eaton's book *Me, A Book of Remembrance* (1915) depicts the first year of her experience living away from home. Thus, I take Jade Snow Wong's *Fifth Chinese Daughter* as the first Chinese American women's autobiography and exclude the Eaton sisters' writing from that canon.

¹¹ In 1952, she was invited to give a one-woman show at the Art Institute of Chicago, and the show later moved to art museums in Detroit, Omaha, and Portland. Her work was also exhibited at the M. H. de Young Memorial Museum and the Museum of Modern Art in San Francisco, the Museum of Modern Art in New York City, the National Collection of Fine Arts at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C., and the Cincinnati Art Museum. Permanent collections of her work may be found in the Detroit Institute of Arts, the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City, and the International Ceramics Museum in Faenza, Italy.

eighty-four.¹²

The publication of *Fifth Chinese Daughter* marked Jade Snow Wong's literary success. Written in the third person, the work develops the themes of cultural conflict and identification expressed by the Eaton sisters, starting from Wong's childhood and ending with her successful American education at Mills College and subsequent career as a ceramist in Chinatown. It chronicles the coming of age of a girl, born to a poor Chinese immigrant family confined by traditional Chinese discipline, casting off the yoke of her parents and of traditional Chinese culture to pursue self-realization and individual subjecthood in America. The story revolves chiefly around the repressive father and the resistant fifth daughter, Jade Snow. The father, deeply influenced by Confucian values, disciplines his children vigorously. Furthermore, upholding the assumption of women's inferiority, he chooses to support his eldest son to go to medical school but denies his daughter's hopes of going to college. The story recounts Jade Snow's perseverance in her pursuit of a college education, without financial support from her parents, and the empowerment she gets from her grandmother that helps her establish her female subjectivity and her success in her later career.

Fifth Chinese Daughter, an instant bestseller, had been translated into nearly 20 languages. Wong was honored with a Silver Medal for nonfiction from the Commonwealth Club of San Francisco in 1951. In 1953, as part of the Leader and Specialist Exchange Program, the State Department sent Wong on a four-month speaking tour to speak to more than 200 groups from Tokyo to Karachi. "I was sent," she recalls, "because those Asian audiences who had read translation of *Fifth Chinese Daughter* did not believe a female born to poor Chinese immigrants could gain a toehold among prejudiced Americans" (*FCD viii*). In 1976, Wong was selected as an outstanding representative of Asian Americans for a PBS special documentary. In 1977, this special program won an award at the American Film Festival. *Fifth Chinese Daughter* has been reprinted five times.

Critics, both from China and the US have commented on Wong's work thus attesting to its significance in the literary canon. Chinese American critic Amy Ling highly values Wong's writing and regards Wong as the forerunner of Chinese American women's literature. She views that Wong's writing has double tones: the surface one remains polite and restrained; the selection of details and anecdotes in the work makes clear her awareness of sexism and racism, though she does not use

Wong's pottery was also featured at a 2002 exhibition at the Chinese Historical Society of America.

¹² The personal information on Jade Snow Wong is derived from Yingguo Xu's *An Anthology of Chinese American Literature*, pp63-5, Xiaohuang Yin's *Chinese American Literature since the 1850s*, pp148-66, and John Wildermuth's "Jade Snow Wong--Noted Author, and Ceramicist." 19 Mar. 2006. 2 July. 2006 <<http://WWW.sfgate.com/bayarea/article/Jade-Snow-Wong-noted-author-ceramicist-2501693.php>>, and Jade Snow Wong's "Introduction to the 1989 Edition" in her *Fifth Chinese Daughter* reprinted in 1989.

these terms. Ling also believes Wong's writing either inherits the themes of Eaton sisters of cultural conflict and exploration of female individual self or guides the Chinese American women's writings after her:

Although much less outspoken and explicit in her expression of these conflicts than would be the writers of the 1970's and 1980's, and criticized by some in this later generation for the mildness of her tone, Wong's *Fifth Chinese Daughter* is certainly part of a major theme in Chinese American literature. The theme of identity and cultural conflict, introduced a generation earlier in the work of the Eaton sisters, became in Wong's book a model for the work of later authors like Maxine Hong Kingston and Amy Tan. ("Chinese American Writing" 185)

Also in light of feminist philosophy, Shirley Geok-Lin Lim, in her "The Tradition of Chinese American Women's Life Stories: Thematics of Race and Gender in Jade Snow Wong's *Fifth Chinese Daughter* and Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*," compares the two works, defends against some male critics, and lays her finger on Wong's deficiencies. She argues that Frank Chin and the other male critics misread Wong's writings from patriarchal standpoint, which is "on a single concept of 'manhood'" (253) and also confirms the feminist continuum of Wong and Kingston's works, regarding Wong's *Fifth Chinese Daughter* as the "mother text to [*The*] *Woman Warrior*" (256). However, by comparing the two works, she prefers Kingston's first person narrative that creates the subjectivity of the oppressed women: "In *The Woman Warrior*, the narrator first-person is foregrounded, and the voices of female rebellion, impatience, anger, and assertiveness produce the figures of female outlaws, warriors, shamans, and storytellers...create a constant stream of narrator's subjectivity" (256, 257). Whereas, she perceives that although Wong is encountering a crack between "Chinese and American, oppression and freedom, patriarchy and female autonomy, home and outside, past and present" (258), her third person narrative represses the positioning of the subjectivity of the narrator and thus objectifies the protagonist's subjectivity, "The objective author/narrator, describing the (auto)-biographical subject, represses the very subjectivity of the subject, objectifies it into a distant third-person protagonist" (ibid).

In addition, in mainland China, Xiaohui Chen, grounded in the feminist perspective, holds that Jade Snow Wong struggles against the pressure of traditional culture and her father's restriction on both culture and economics to accomplish her college education by her own efforts; Wong expresses women's desire to be free from both the cultural pressure and her father's restriction to pursue her female autonomy and establish her subjectivity. She regards that Wong's writing shows Chinese American women suffering more pressure from the family than men and thus they

have more to reveal their innermost anger and pursuit:

From the perspective of a woman, oppression arising in traditional culture is more obvious, and the individual freedom exhibited by the outside world seems more important and indispensable to her. In a certain sense, when struggling to be free from the constraint of her family and clan, she reveals more of her innermost feelings than her brothers, who are freely encouraged to create their world; therefore, she is resentful of the Chinese androcracy and keeps a distance from it. (24)

Although Wong's work receives much positive response, it also obtains negative comments such as not being feminist enough and pandering to the American stereotyping of Chinese.

Patricia Lin Blinda is probably the first one to consider Jade Snow Wong's *Fifth Chinese Daughter* as insufficient feminist. In her "The Icicle in the Desert: Perspective and Form in the Works of Two Chinese-American Women Writers" (1979), by comparing Wong's *Fifth Chinese Daughter* to Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*, Blinda highly evaluates Kingston's work as a creative construction of "fluid" female self image but negatively judges Wong's work in a "fixed" literary form (53) of autobiography. She believes that although the two "exiled" women writers have the same cultural backgrounds, "their expositions of life are markedly different" (52), "In judging the works of the two women, it is far easier to evaluate Jade Snow Wong's writings: the reader is able to refer the works to all the standard criteria required of a good autobiography" (53). In addition, she deems that Wong does not rebel against sexual prejudice although she is well aware of it, "This awareness of her lesser value in comparison with her brothers where her family and Chinese society are concerned never precipitates any real anger in Wong: she is mildly aware of a certain injustice but proceeds to live in accordance with the terms which denigrates the female sex" (55). Furthermore, she believes Wong's writing is to meet the white Americans readers' expectation because "she is sufficiently aware that autobiography (a uniquely Western European genre that emerged from the Christian confessional) is the 'correct' mode of recounting the events and circumstances leading to her success as an artist and potter" (54).

Different from Blinda, Kathleen Loh Swee Yin and Kristoffer F. Paulson, in their essay "The Divided Voice of Chinese-American Narration: Jade Snow Wong's *Fifth Chinese Daughter*" (1982), with a full support of Wong's writing, argue that Wong's writing expresses her confusion about the conflicting cultures between China and America and her solution to the frustrating problem of polar cultures by integrating her self-asserting autobiography and Chinese modesty, and establishes her female independent subjectivity:

Wong reveals her successful integration of identities in a masterful blending of the autobiographical and of her natural modesty which is derived from the Chinese culture which demands the literal submergence of the individual.... Jade Snow is a fully rendered, fictional character whom Wong develops within a structured thematic purpose to depict Jade Snow's successful search for balance within the forces of the fragmented world of Chinese-American women. (53-54, 59)

Even though another feminist critic Wendy Ho acknowledges that Wong frames her difficulties and frustrations as a woman torn between Chinese and American cultures, she observes that the text "is less personal and more traditional, modest, and respectfully filial in regards to her father and her Chinese cultural roots. Wong's autobiography is written in the formal third person" (61). Hence, Ho does not even deign to discuss Wong's *Fifth Chinese Daughter* in her work *In Her Mother's House: The Politics of Asian American Mother-Daughter Writing*.

In the cultural critique, criticism is either commendatory or derogatory. Weiming Tang, applying Bhabha's theory of culture translation, examines Wong's work as a lonely journey exploring her diasporan female subjectivity by blending both Chinese and American cultures in the third space and posits that Wong solves her dilemma by forging a "middle way" to locate herself:

Jade Snow's duality is witnessed in the text as setting her on lonely journey, bewildered, questioning and finding a third way to come to terms with the two worlds in conflict.... Rather than being fixed as either the one or the other, or as the exotic ideal blending of [the] East and West, Wong's autobiographical translation of the American dream fashions into existence a "monstrified" duplicate of American identity that articulates as much a sense of novelty, difference and ambivalence as does the self-portrait of Jade Snow making pottery in a Chinatown store window. (205, 208)

Identical with Tang's positive idea, Qiong Zhang discusses the relationship between Wong's family life and her education, and to the opposite of Shirley Geok-Lin Lim, she justifies Wong's third person writing. She reckons that Wong's *Fifth Chinese Daughter* provides a sharp contrast between her strict Chinese immigrant family life and her American education. The narration in third person expresses clearly and objectively the Chinese American girl's internal conflict between different cultures. Perhaps more importantly, Wong's autobiography motivates people to consider cultural gaps between the different worlds, and is the pioneer of Chinese American literature for later generations (158,160).

However, Jade Snow Wong's *Fifth Chinese Daughter* gains much negative evaluation. Elaine H. Kim, in her *Asian American Literature: An Introduction to the*

Writings and Their Social Context (1982), underlines the anthropological meaning of Wong's writing and indicates Wong making use of her Chinese culture and her deduction of racial oppression. Kim holds that Wong's work is "valuable as a document of Asian American social history" (72), and her success is making full use of her Chinese identity by writing Chinese American family life as an "insider" to attract the "outsiders" – non-Chinese American readers' desire of exoticism, to "utilize her familiarity as an American-born Chinese with the non-Chinese world to gain status and strength in the eyes of her Chinese family and community while at the same time using her Chinese background in such a way as to win as much acceptance as possible from non-Chinese Americans" (66). Kim also reckons that Wong does not rebel against the racial abuse from a white boy and only "rationalizes" it by "seeking secrete comfort in the superiority of [her] cultural heritage" (69).

Similarly, Sau-ling Cynthia Wong claims that Jade Snow Wong's writing flatters the white dominant America in where she realizes her American dream and achieves her personal success as a female from an ethnic Chinese immigrant family and that corroborates American value of equality. She believes that Wong also does not resist against racial discrimination and does not fight for the political rights of the ethnics; she is thus to please white society, not to threaten it: "Her work is nothing but a harmless vehicle for recreation and amusement, which has no political intention" ("Sugar Sisterhood" 69).

Xiaohuang Yin provides a relatively objective discussion of Wong's work, deeming that Wong creates the image of a second-generation Chinese American woman who realizes her individual American dream through her own efforts. On the other hand, Yin also echoes the criticism of Elaine H. Kim and Sau-ling Cynthia Wong by viewing that Wong overly prettifies both America and herself to meet the non-Chinese Americans' exotic reading desire: "Wong overly beautifies American mainstream society and embellishes her personal experiences to cater to the readers, deals with some specific themes of Chinese Americans in history and culture, and successfully builds the new image of Chinese American women" (164-5).

Nevertheless, Frank Chin and his male cohorts particularly deny Wong's *Fifth Chinese Daughter* and call it a "Christian autobiography." Chin condemns Wong for her praising American culture as a civilized one and giving away her original culture as the uncivilized one, for belittling Chinese American manhood by portraying them as misogynous evil who do all the vicious things to oppress women and depicting Chinese American women as the oppressed victims of traditional Chinese culture and as the successful and righteous fighters for their rights:

It's a rigged universe in Wong's Christian autobiography. Yellow men don't stand a chance. The all-evil, all-powerful tongs are replaced by all of

Chinese manhood. Misogyny is the only unifying moral imperative in this Christian vision of Chinese civilization. All women are victims. American and Christianity represent freedom from Chinese civilization. In the Christian yin/yang of the dual personality/identity crisis, Chinese evil and perversity is male. And the Americanized honorary white Chinese American is female. (“Come All Ye” 26)

Wu Bing, drawing heavily on Elaine H. Kim, Sau-ling Cynthia Wong, and Frank Chin, argues that Wong only fights against her own father for the equality and the independence inside of her family; however, outside her family she is too full of self-hatred so that she lowers herself to the level of an animal and does not seek equality as a human being:

Although in her own family, Jade Snow Wong protests against her parents, requests them to accept her independent personality, and claims equality with her elder brother, at the American dean’s home where she has her part-time job, she juxtaposes herself with the pets – two dogs and a cat. This action shows that the influence of racial discrimination in Chinese Americans is so deep that, out of self-hatred they even do not ask for equality with American people. (78)

Guichang Li, carrying on Frank Chin and other male critics, asserts that Wong, from an Orientalist point of view, disgusts Chinese culture and portrays herself as a victim of it to try to gain non-Chinese’s sympathy; meanwhile she identifies with American culture and regards it as a embodiment of equality, freedom, and democracy. He argues, “Wong’s autobiography distorts Chinese American culture with Orientalist ideology, twists the whole image of Chinese Americans, and destroys the racial identification of Chinese Americans.... Wong, positioning herself on the stand of an American, Orientalizes Chinese and Chinese Americans in the weak position as the ‘Others’” (113-4, 115).

Disagreeing with Shirley Geok-lin Lim and endorsing Chin and Kim, Guanglin Wang argues that Lim never questions how this specific text functioned in the dominant culture and interacted with the dominant discourse of assimilation when it was first published in 1950. Wang considers that Wong’s writing is to pander to the white American readers and her success is the result of her assimilation into the mainstream society. He asserts:

Targeting a predominantly white readership, Wong wrote in the third person in a modest Chinese way to highlight her personal struggle between her Chinese silence and her American individuality, between her desire to free herself from Chinese patriarchal restrictions and her effort to prove to her father that her assimilation would enable her to achieve and accomplish

much in mainstream culture and society. (140)

although the critics focus on the patriarchal oppression from the traditional Chinese culture in the Chinese immigrant family and Jade Snow Wong's pursuit of female independent and individual selfhood, they fail to note that the same family also serves as a source for empowerment of Jade Snow to establish her subjecthood. My discussion concentrates on the examination of Jade Snow Wong's immigrant family as a space of oppression, resistance, and empowerment to discuss Jade Snow Wong's internal exploration of her female voice and individualist self-assertion through resistance against patriarchal oppression, the empowerment by her grandmother and mother with the talking-stories, and the formation of her independent Chinese American female subjectivity.

A. The Oppression of the Traditional Culture in the Site of Immigrant Family

Chinese American immigrants, uprooting from China and being denied by the American mainstream society, firmly entrench in traditional Chinese culture and inculcate it to their American-born children, and they believe it is their root and will be great importance to their offspring; therefore, they enforce them to learn and accept it, which becomes a kind of oppression to their children. In *Fifth Chinese Daughter*, the Chinese immigrant family becomes a site of oppression of patriarchal culture as well as sexual prejudice to American-born Chinese girl, Jade Snow, in her growing up.

To begin with, Jade Snow suffers the oppression of patriarchal culture in her family since her childhood. First of all, growing up in the Chinese American immigrant family with rigid parental discipline, Jade Snow has to take orders without any query and to obey them unconditionally. Order, obedience, and propriety are the main doctrines in Jade Snow's family. The parents have absolutely authority over their children, and there is no equal mutual communication between parents and children, but the orders from the father or mother and the expectation of the children to obey them. Her parents always send various orders for her to follow and command definite respect from the children. "Respect and order – these were the key words of life" (*FCD* 2), narrates Jade Snow. She is also not allowed to ask questions because she is taught that a "little girl never questioned the commands of Mother and Father" (*FCD* 2) and her "father did not like questions" (*FCD* 4). Thus, she has to obey the orders to learn Chinese, to recite Chinese poems, and to practice Chinese calligraphy. Furthermore, as a girl, Jade Snow has to behave properly. Throughout history,

Chinese women have been taught to follow the doctrines of “the three obediences and four virtues” and “the three cardinal guides and the five constant virtues” and become proper women, so that they cannot disgrace their family. Hence, during early childhood, the problems she encounters “were entirely concerned with what was proper or improper in the behavior of a little girl.... She must always be careful to do the proper thing. Failure to do so brought immediate and drastic punishment” (*FCD* 2). What is the more serious is that her father has indisputable authority: “[O]ne did not dispute one’s father if one were a dutiful little girl taught to act with propriety” (*ibid*). She is asked to keep silence when eating, and she cannot speak loudly before guests because her father “said that one was not supposed to talk when one was either eating or thinking, and when one was not eating, one should be thinking. Only when in bed did one neither eat nor think” (*FCD* 4). In addition, modesty is promoted and encouragement is restrained in this family. In Chinese culture, modesty is one of the virtues in people’s behavior that inspires people to go forward and continuously makes progress. Therefore, when Jade Snow runs to report to her father that she has skipped a grade in school, her father “quietly stopped the child’s rush of excited words: ‘That is as it should be.’ That was all he said, with finality” (*FCD* 19). When the disappointed Jade Snow turns to her mother for praise, her mother responds, “Your father was right” (*ibid*). To the parents, they just want to warn her to be modest; however, to the American born Jade Snow who is attending American school, she feels discouraged. Lastly, Jade Snow has no freedom to make friends and date boys because her father restricts her. Traditional Chinese culture places particular emphasis on women’s behavior and chastity. According to Confucian doctrine, it is improper for men and women to touch each other’s hands in passing objects, which intensifies the alienation between men and women to avoid intimate physical contact and improper feelings and restricts individual freedom. Therefore, when Jade Snow, as a seventeen-year-old girl, wants to go to on her first date with a boy, her father forbids her: “Where and when did you learn to be so daring as to leave this house without permission of your parents? You did not learn it under my roof” (*FCD* 127). Definitely, the father declares his authority: without the his permission, the daughter cannot do anything on her own will. The reason for her father’s prohibition is that “he would be convinced that she would lose her maidenly purity before the evening was over” (*ibid*). The father believes that it is utmost important to maintain his daughter’s “maidenly purity” which ensures the fame of the family and clan. Thus, when Jade Snow defends her freedom and rights to decide her own thing with her American teacher’s “unfilial theory,” her father rages:

A little learning has gone to your head! How can you permit a foreigner’s theory to put aside the practical experience of the Chinese, who for

thousands of years have preserved a most superior family pattern? Confucius had already presented an organized philosophy of manners and conduct when the foreigners were unappreciatively persecuting Christ. (*FCD* 128)

Actually, in addition to the obedient daughter's open resistance to his authority, what gets on his nerves and irritates him is the intrusion of the "foreigner's" philosophy to his daughter, which threatens his Chinese "organized philosophy of manners and conduct," and to which he has been sticking and embracing. It is just this philosophy that represses his young daughter and makes her try to free from it.

In addition to the oppression of traditional Chinese culture, there is another serious gender prejudice in her family. Traditional Chinese culture has been preferring boys to girls and regarding women inferior to men. Accordingly, Jade Snow's family always welcomes the birth of boys and inhospitalizes girls. There are always big parties for the birth of boys; whereas, there is no celebration for the birth of girls. For example, when Jade Snow's mother gives birth to a second son, the father is very happy and decides to have a big party to celebrate: "At last we have the happiness of another son to carry on the Wong name. We must have a fine celebration when his age reaches a full month. In the meantime, to announce the good news we shall send out red eggs to our friends and invite them to come here to taste pickled pigs' feet" (*FCD* 25). Then, the family has a big party, "The Wong family had never before seen such merrymaking" (*FCD* 27). However, the different treatment between her younger sister and brother makes Jade Snow into deep thought and uncomfortable: "Forgiveness from Heaven, because he was a brother, was more important to Mama and Daddy than dear baby sister Precious Stone, who was only a girl. But even more uncomfortable was the realization that she herself was a girl and, like her younger sister, unalterably less significant than the new son in their family" (*ibid*). The parents' different attitude towards boys and girls inspires Jade Snow's consciousness of gender difference and most importantly, awakens her female consciousness: she, as well as her sisters, is inferior in the family just because she is a girl.

Another gender prejudice that oppresses Jade Snow more is her father's different attitude towards the education of his sons and daughters. In Chinese traditional moral ethics it is often said that innocence is the virtue for women, which indicates that there is no need for women to have talents, and what they need is to submit to their husbands. Furthermore, even if they have knowledge, they should not show it; on the contrary, they should deliberately conceal it and behave more humble and modest before their husbands. Moreover, if women gain talents, they would have their own determined minds and ideas about everything, would request their rights, and would thus threaten the shaped gender system and the symbolic order. Therefore,

Jade Snow's father believes that Jade Snow does not need more education than what is required for raising and educating children because she eventually will marry into someone else's family, and even if she gains more achievement, it has nothing to do with the Wong's. Thus, when Jade Snow asks for his financial support for her college education, he refuses, "Jade Snow, you have been given an above-average Chinese education for an American-born Chinese girl. You now have an average education for an American girl. I must still provide with all my power for your Older Brother's advanced medical training" (*FCD* 109). To the father, Jade Snow, as a girl, has received enough education for a future wife and mother of the other's family. Thus, he gives his limited financial support to his son:

You are quite familiar by now with the fact that it is the sons who perpetuate our ancestral heritage by permanently bearing the Wong family name and transmitting it through their blood line, and therefore the sons must have priority over the daughters when parental provision for advantages must be limited by economic necessity. Generations of sons, bearing our Wong name, are those who make pilgrimages to ancestral burial grounds and preserve them forever. Our daughters leave home at marriage to give sons to their husbands' families to carry on the heritage for their names. (*ibid.*)

Her father's attitude makes Jade Snow to realize that it is unfair for a girl; meanwhile, she feels the confinement of the strong power of the traditional culture far from America: "[S]he felt imprisoned. She was trapped in a mesh of tradition woven thousands of miles away by ancestors who had had no knowledge that someday one generation of their progeny might be raised in another culture" (*FCD* 110).

In brief, in *Fifth Chinese Daughter*, Chinese immigrant family where traditional Chinese patriarchal culture thrives is a space of oppression for Chinese American women. Wong's expression shows that even though the time-honored Chinese culture has contributed greatly to the progress of the world, it still has the negativity of patriarchal culture degrading and oppressing women.

B. Resisting Objectification as the "Other" by Articulating a Female Voice

In *Fifth Chinese Daughter*, Chinese American immigrant family becomes the locus of repressing women; nevertheless, it also becomes a site of resisting patriarchal oppression and gender discrimination and of breaking the the imposed silence. Awakening from her gender consciousness, Jade Snow begins to resist the gender oppression.

Most of all, Jade Snow gains her female consciousness to resist patriarchal

oppression not only from the familial oppression of her parents but also from her American school education. On the one hand, she obtains the gender consciousness of inequality between the boys and girls from the oppression her parents. As discussed above, they prefer boys to girls, and they support the Old Brother's medical education instead of Jade Snow's college education. Jade Snow becomes aware of her inferior status in the family only because she is a girl, which helps her to awake her female consciousness. On the other hand, she acquires the consciousness of the inequality between the parents and children from her American education, which motivates her to rebel against the oppression. American school education attaches importance to equality between kinds of people and to the rights of individuals. Her instructor particularly stresses the equal relationship between parents and children in which there should be no order and obedience, "Today we recognize that children are individuals, and that parents can no longer demand their unquestioning obedience. Parents should do their best to understand their children, because young people also have their rights" (*FCD*125). The instructor's words make Jade Snow obtain the concept of equality.

Gaining the consciousness of equality, the awakening Jade Snow begins to resist against the patriarchal oppression. Her first rebellion is to ask her rights to determine her own action. When her father denies her freedom and rights to go on her first date, Jade Snow, having kept her silence and accumulated her anger for a long time, finally bursts out, "I can now think for myself, and you and Mama should not demand unquestioning obedience from me.... Then why can't I choose my friends? Of course independence is not safe. But safety isn't the only consideration. You must give me the freedom to find some answers for myself" (*FCD* 128-9). The words are very significant; they represent that the young girl has awakened and achieved her gender consciousness. This is the rebellious voice from the young girl who have been obediently and silently following the orders of her parents, the voice of asking for her rights as a woman, and the voice of declaring her independence.

Next, the awakening Jade Snow fights against her father's gender prejudice. Her father used to say, "Education is your path to freedom" (*FCD* 108). As a girl, growing up in Chinatown, she wants to fulfill herself and find a better life different from that of most women in China and Chinatown. Since she realizes that the most possible and effective way to change her life and fate is to go to college and to receive an advanced education, she asks for her father to send her to college. The father refuses her, which makes Jade Snow bursts out, challenging her authoritative father:

How can Daddy know what an American advanced education can mean to me? Why should Older Brother be alone in enjoying the major benefits of

Daddy's toil? There are no ancestral pilgrimages to be made in the United States! I can't help being born a girl. Perhaps, even being a girl, I don't want to marry, *just* to raise sons! Perhaps I have a right to want more than sons! I am a person, besides being a female! Don't Chinese admit that women also have feelings and minds? (*FCD* 109-10)

This is Jade Snow's articulation that marks her awakening of female and individual consciousness, her pursuit of female autonomy, and her rebellion against familial oppression. She is no longer the obedient fifth daughter in the family; instead, she is an individual in pursuit of her female equality, freedom, and rights. She no longer passively accepts the father's orders and constraints; instead, she makes judgments and decisions by herself and rebels against her father's unquestioned order. As Amy Ling observes, "For Jade Snow Wong, silence was an externally imposed condition. When she broke free of her father's control, she broke into words, reporting the conditions she had overcome to arrive where she had" (*Between Worlds* 127).

Moreover, she no longer wants to be oppressed as the inferior and subordinate to men; she refuses to play the traditional gender roles defined for women merely to be an obedient daughter, and a nice wife to serve her husband and educate her children; all in all, she refuses to be the oppressed "Other" and the "second sex"; on the contrary, she wants to be a self-defined and an equal female individual. Jade Snow's voice is the voice of an awakened and self-determined Chinese American girl with strong will and self-assertion, which parallels to what Patricia Hill Collins stresses as the African American woman's voice: "The voices of these African-American women are not those of victims but of survivors. Their ideas and actions suggest that not only does a self-defined, articulated Black women's standpoint exist, but its presence has been essential to Black women's survival" (93).

C. Empowerment and Formation of Chinese American Female Subjecthood

In *Fifth Chinese Daughter*, Jade Snow Wong not only expresses the familial oppression and the resistance against it in the locus of her Chinese American immigrant family, but she also describes the family as a source of empowerment with her grandmother and mother's talking-stories, with which she asserts her female subjectivity and forms her female subjecthood as a Chinese American artist and writer.

Wong narrates her matrilineal empowering within a continuum, starting from her grandmother who starts to tell a story, then her mother who relays the story, and

finally Jade Snow who completes the story with her literary creation. It is well known that Maxine Hong Kingston and Amy Tan are especially gifted at writing about matrilineal relationships. However, I would argue that it is Jade Snow Wong who pioneers the matrilineal theme in Chinese American women's writing by depicting a linear matrilineal relationship in her work: grandmother-mother-daughter. Although Wong does not describe much of the matrilineal relations, she portrays clear and vivid images of Grandmother and Mama who talk stories that influence and empower the coming of age Jade Snow in her formation of female subjective identity.

Indeed, the stories that Grandmother relays become the source of Jade Snow's coming of age that influence and nurture her greatly. Jade Snow portrays a close, warm, and cozy relationship with her grandmother in her childhood: the grandmother and granddaughter work and play together. The two form a strong bond: a good storyteller who tells her stories of "back home in China" and a truehearted listener who will extend her story into the future:

Grandmother was full of wonderful surprises and delightful stories from another world – the world she called "back home in China." After the diapers were folded, Forgiveness was asleep, and his bottled milk prepared, Grandmother and Jade Snow would start one of their favorite pastimes, either folding squares of white paper into miniature pagodas.... As they played back and forth, the pattern often became quite intricate, and Grandmother invariably developed an arrangement that baffled Jade Snow completely. During these games, Grandmother heightened the entertainment with her stories, and after a while Jade Snow pieced together a picture of Grandmother's former world. (*FCD* 29)

The description brings the grandmother back to life as a determined, independent, persistent, and magnanimous woman who influences, nurtures, and empowers Jade Snow. Grandmother is a left-behind wife whose husband went to America to seek his fortune in San Francisco's Chinatown. She adopted three children, one girl and two boys, because she had no children of her own. She took care of the family, and with the money sent from her husband she was able to have a better life than some of the other villagers. Since "Grandmother was a woman of courage and ambition" (*FCD* 30), with the money sent home to her, she was determined to make more money with it and to enrich her family:

I saved and saved our money from your grandfather – the average woman cannot work to make any money in China. With some capital, I decided to raise pigs. Pork was everyone's favorite meat, and it could be salted and cured. I thought it would be a simple matter to raise hogs on the low hills behind the house. Buying a few pigs at a time, I finally accumulated a

drove of forty-five. And then disaster struck. An epidemic swept them, killing them one by one until I had only eight left. (*FCD* 30)

The action of raising pigs reveals Grandmother's independence and business capacity. She can run her business by herself independently from the starting of "a few pigs" to "a drove of forty-five," which shows her hard working and capacity of developing her business at a time when there were a few women doing her own business. Furthermore, although encountering the failure of her first venture, Grandmother was not defeated; on the contrary, she chose to free herself from it by visiting relatives for some time, which shows her broad bosom and true visionary: "In fact, I was so annoyed at those pigs that I decided to forget my disgust over the failure of my first venture by leaving home altogether for a while. So I went to visit my country cousins, leaving both the pigs and the house with your mother, who was eleven at the time" (*FCD* 30). In fact, not only she herself is strong-minded, she also nurtures her eleven-year-old daughter to be independent as well.

In addition to, Grandmother also teaches Jade Snow the principle of the survival of the fittest, which benefits her greatly in her later life as a female to make continuous improvement and to achieve success in the society. She knows well that the world is competitive and challenging, and it is even much harder for a woman who is disadvantaged in the gendered society to survive and live in it. Since a woman is the "second sex" with prior weak position in the society, if she is not strong enough to make progress and to desire to advantage in the society, she would fall into disuse, could not survive, not to mention to live equally and respectfully. Therefore, when one of the seeds fails to grow, Grandmother teaches her the truth that one should take advantage of the opportunity:

We have provided all of them the same care, but some just cannot avail themselves of this opportunity, while others have made the most of what they have and are bursting forth with their best for us to admire.... We will discard the weak ones, just as in life those who do not try are left behind.... Be a good girl, and in your years of schooling, study your books very hard with your heart's full interest. Remember, the ones who do not try are left behind. (*FCD* 32, 36)

Cherishing Grandmother's teaching, Jade Snow studies very hard, skips grades in primary school, and graduates from college with honors. She owes much of her achievement to her Grandmother, who inspires her to be strong, independent, and the "fittest."

Besides Grandmother, Mama is another important person who influences Jade Snow in her way of exploring her female subjectivity, although she sometimes serves as the surrogate of her father. Actually, Mama is a paradoxical character. On the one

hand, she obeys her husband and always stands with him in upholding the traditional Chinese code and in disciplining the children, and she sometimes even “spanked [Jade Snow] until the wooden hanger broke” (*FCD* 3). On the other hand, she is a hard-working, strong, and capable woman who helps Grandmother to support the family even when she is very young and helps her husband to support the big Wong family and its nine children by working hard in the familial factory. During Jade Snow’s growth, Mama also empowers Jade Snow with her own story, which Grandmother starts with beginning of her business of raising pigs and Mama finishes the later part of the story:

I fed them and drove them near the house. Not one died after I took over. I wasn’t much older than you then, but every night I had to bring them heavy pails of hot mash. I remember still how their sudden grunts in the darkness would frighten me, and I would throw out their food hastily. I could not flee fast enough back to the house, to climb shivering into the comfort to my bed, while their grunts seemed to pursue me in the darkness.... Your grandmother sold them after I raised them. (*FCD* 31)

Mama not only continues to run the business of raising pigs after Grandmother’s failure due to the epidemic, but also prospers the business after she takes the role of Grandmother. More importantly, she relays on to encourage Jade Snow to become a strong and independent girl after Grandmother; thus, Grandmother and Mama form a maternal continuum to empower young Jade Snow.

The story of Grandmother and Mama influences and inspires Jade Snow to become an independent, strong, and creative female. She not only finishes her college education but also starts her career first as a secretary in an American military firm, later a ceramist and a writer. She is the first to open a pottery workshop in Chinatown. Her pottery soon becomes popular and has been collected by many museums in America. She is the first person in Chinatown who can afford to buy a car.

Most importantly, empowered by her Grandmother and Mama’s talking-stories, Jade Snow establishes her female subjecthood. Three of Jade Snow Wong’s achievements mark the formation of her female subjective identity, which at the same time make her parents query and come to realize their gender prejudices and lead to the final reconciliation between the two generations. The first one is the completion of her college education. It is very important for Jade Snow to finish advanced education because she comes to know that knowledge is power and it is the only path for her to gain freedom and self autonomy. Equipped with knowledge, Jade Snow becomes a self-defined and self-reliant female individual. After her graduation, she finds a position as a secretary in an American military company. It is very crucial for

Jade Snow to have a career because as a professional woman, she has the space, “a room of her own,” in which she can develop her talent as a female, to discover herself as an independent female, and to form her individual personality with autonomy. Jade Snow, empowered with knowledge, is similar to what Collins stresses in African-American women’s writing: “By portraying African-American women as self-defined, self-reliant individuals confronting race, gender, and class oppression, Afrocentric feminist thought speaks to the importance that knowledge plays in empowering oppressed people” (221).

The second mark of Jade Snow Wong’s achievements is that she wins coastwide essay contest sponsored by a San Francisco newspaper with the prizes of the privilege of christening a Liberty Ship and a war bond. Jade Snow’s prize causes a great sensation in Chinatown, which brings great glories to both Jade Snow and her family:

Letters of congratulations poured in from individuals, business firms, and the War Production Board in Washington. Jade Snow was asked to speak on the radio, to broadcast overseas. Her picture was printed, not only in the contest-sponsoring newspaper, but in all the Chinese papers, which carried translations of the main points of her essay.... Now even Chinatown felt a burst of pride that one of their female citizens had won a contest in competition against Caucasian-Americans. (*FCD* 196)

Winning the prize is significant for both Jade Snow and her parents. For her, it is an event that reveals the capacity and wisdom of a female, which transforms the image of traditional Chinese women and writes a glorious chapter in the history of Chinese American women. Simultaneously, Jade Snow’s prize also changes her parents’ notion that only sons can glorify the Wong family, making them look at their fifth daughter with new eyes: “For the first time, Daddy and Mama had the opportunity of understanding how their fifth daughter’s mind worked. They received some inkling of how she related theoretical knowledge to practical action. They were surprised and thoughtful by turn” (*FCD* 196). In addition, Jade Snow’s prize not only makes her father change his notion that men are superior to women, but also suffuses him with “a rare, happy glow” of pride from his fifth daughter whom he belittles and refuses to support her college education and whom he never expects to succeed in the American world and become such a somebody who surpasses his sons and glorifies the Wong family. He reveals his heartfelt pride for his fifth daughter:

Everywhere I went to purchase groceries today, my fellow countrymen were congratulating me, and saying, ‘We are reading in the papers that your fifth daughter has won great honor in the American world. You must be very satisfied to have your family name so glorified by a female.’ I tell

them that you have done it all yourself. But even I must now add my congratulations to those you have already received! (*FCD* 196)

The father even voluntarily shakes hands with Jade Snow in state signifying his respect to her, which makes her sigh with emotion: “[F]or the first time, Daddy held his hand in a sincere gesture of respect for his daughter. Jade Snow ... would never forget the most distinguished handshake she had ever been privileged to receive” (*FCD* 196). This handshake is very meaningful for Jade Snow because her father who is full of the patriarchal ideas finally recognizes the ability of his fifth daughter as well as the females in general and changes his prejudice against women. Her father has been educated by her success and changed his traditional views, as he notes in his letter to his cousin in China:

You do not realize the shameful and degraded position into which the Chinese culture has pushed its women. Here in America, the Christian concept allows women their freedom and individuality.... I am hoping that some day I may be able to claim that by my stand I have washed away the former disgraces suffered by the women of our family. (*FCD* 246)

Moreover, christening the Liberty Ship has even more significance in Jade Snow Wong’s establishment of her subjective subjectivity. When she declares, “I christen thee the *William A. Jones!*” She not only names the ship, but also names herself: Jade Snow Wong, a poor immigrant’s fifth daughter, a female, earns the honor to christen the ship through her own efforts. It is not only her great honor, but also the honor of all women. Furthermore, Jade Snow’s striking of the bow of the ship with the champagne bottle (*FCD* 197) symbolizes the breaking of a taboo for women in Chinese traditional culture, in which women are prohibited from going on ships, an act believed to bring the ship misfortune. Jade Snow not only boards the ship, but also christens it. Her action not only breaks the cultural taboo, but also breaks free of the traditional cultural constraint. Like the Liberty Ship riding through waves, Jade Snow Wong overcomes the obstacles on her way to fulfilling her goal as a free and independent Chinese American woman.

The third achievement that marks the establishment of her female subjecthood is the opening of her ceramic business in Chinatown in the 1940’s, which caused quite a stir when she sat in a Grant Avenue storefront and spun her pottery wheel. In order to save money from renting an independent retail store, to attract the attention of the publicity and to solicit business, and more importantly, to show her creation of art work, Jade Snow asks the owner of the China Bazaar shop to use his front window space to exhibit her pottery making. Her workshop is also the store in which she sells her pottery. Her creative process attracts much publicity: “A woman in the window, her legs astride a potter’s wheel, her hair in braids, her hands perpetually messy with

sticky California clay, her finished products such things as coolies used in China, the daughter of a conservative family, running a business alone” (FCD 244). The most important thing is that she creates what Virginia Woolf refers “a room of her own.” The window show reveals her artistic talent and her assertion of self-worth. In the first place, the window is like a stage to show her creative works of her heart. In there, she produces various gorgeous and multicolored ceramic with a female’s creation, and some of the works become the permanent collections in some American museums and an Italian museum. Secondly, the window show reveals the image of a Chinese American woman who is confident, strong, perseverant, and independent. In Chinese traditional culture, women should not show their faces in public; and in universal gendered culture, women should play their roles of taking care of the husband and children at home, the private sphere. However, Jade Snow, neglecting the misunderstanding and even the sneers from the community, challenges the code of conduct by not only daring to show her face but also making her creative art works in public. This is a pioneering work for Chinese American women in the history. Therefore, the store window “forms a prime location for resisting objectification as the Other” (Collins 95). As she herself looks back on the significance of her pottery shop in her life, Wong asserts:

I did not step into the window to be a ‘pioneer’ but felt it was the option which would enable me – 60 years ago – to be free of Chinese culture’s relentless subjugation of women. I would also avoid being boxed into [the] twin American obstacles of prejudice against women in the corporate world and against Chinese [people] economically, legally and socially. The window was my first step in the life journey, which has led me to where I am today. (Wong G.)

Jade Snow Wong’s autobiography represents her exploration of her female voice and subjectivity. Jade Snow used to be an obedient girl disciplined by her parents and a silent girl in the immigrant family. However, she becomes awakened and fights for her individual freedom and rights by articulating her silenced anger and pursuing her female subjectivity. She succeeds. She finds her voice and her life goal by writing her own story and creating her art works as well, as Audre Lorde notes, “[T]he transformation of silence into language and action is an act of self-revelation” (qtd. in Collins 98).

Fifth Chinese Daughter is an account of coming of age in which the fifth daughter, empowered by her Grandmother and Mama, breaks the silence imposed on her by her family and by Chinese traditional culture and gains her female subjectivity. Wong’s narrative structure of the three generations of women telling the same story is like an ingenious relay: Grandmother is the first runner/teller who starts the story;

Mama is the second runner/teller who continues and finishes the story of their venture in China; and the third runner/teller is Jade Snow who not only retells the story of her female pioneers but also enlarges their stories with her own story of coming of age, as Trinh T. Minh-ha notes:

Storytelling, the oldest form of building historical consciousness in community, constitutes a rich oral legacy, whose values have regained all importance recently, especially in the context of writings by women of color. She who works at un-learning the dominant language of “civilized” missionaries also has to learn how to un-write and write anew. And she often does so by re-establishing the contact with her foremothers, so that living tradition can never congeal into fixed forms, so that life keeps on nurturing life, so that what is understood as the Past continues to provide the link for the Present and the Future.... Every woman partakes in the chain of guardianship and of transmission – in other words, of creation. (148-9)

Indeed, Jade Snow gets empowered by her Grandmother and Mama’s storytelling; thus, the three generations of the Grandmother, Mama, and the granddaughter form a continuum of storytelling voicing female’s silences and requiring their rights.

D. Gaining the Rights of Saying and Expressing Female Experiences

No doubt, Jade Snow Wong’s *Fifth Chinese Daughter* is a successful autobiography of a Chinese American girl; nevertheless, the autobiography has been devalued or even disparaged by a number of Asian American critics both in America and in mainland China, among them Patricia Lin Blinda (53, 54, 55), Shirley Geok-Lin Lim (258), Elaine H. Kim (66), Frank Chin (26), Sau-ling Cynthia Wong (69), Wu Bing (78), Guanglin Wang (140), and Guichang Li (113-4), whose views are mentioned earlier in this chapter. Their objections can be mainly concluded into the following points: 1) Wong’s third person writing represses the very subjectivity of the subject. 2) Wong’s writing devalues Chinese and Chinese American men. 3) Wong’s work does not resist against American racial discrimination. 4) Wong’s autobiography caters to the white Americans and denies Chinese culture. 5) Wong’s autobiographical writing beautifies white America. In fact, Wong’s writing is a female bildungsroman depicting the experience of a gender-biased Chinese American daughter’s coming of age, through which Wong starts a feminist discourse and expresses the oppressed female’s experiences.

First of all, Shirley Geok-Lin Lim believes that Wong's third person writing represses the very subjectivity of the subject. I would argue that it is not important in what person, what matters is that a woman is the protagonist in the work. Firstly, it is reasonable to consider the writing from the social context. Jade Snow Wong was born into a Chinese immigrant family in 1922, in which she received traditional Chinese ethics, that is people should be temperate, kind, courteous, restrained, and magnanimous; and inevitably Wong retains modesty and restraining in her writing, particularly at the time when there were a few Chinese American women writers. Therefore, it is understandable and reasonable for Wong's writing in third person. Next, Wong was writing in the 1940s, which is about thirty years earlier than that of Kingston, and Wong did not experience the women's liberation movement in the 1960s and 1970s as Kingston did; therefore, compared with Kingston's writing, indeed, Wong's is weaker than that of Kingston's. However, putting her into the social context, the autobiographical writing is a pioneer work that puts a female as the protagonist of the narration and explores an ethnic female subjective identity. Moreover, Wong fully establishes her female subjecthood by resisting to gender prejudice, by being empowered by the talking-stories of her grandmother and mother, and most importantly, Wong's form of talking-story starts the feminist expression in Chinese American women's writings and influences the later writers such as Kingston and Tan, as well as Japanese American writers, Monika Sonei, Wakako Yamauchi, Hisaye Yamamoto, and Japanese Canadian writer Joy Kogawa.¹³ Furthermore, she constructs her cultural identity by integrating both Chinese and American cultures, which dispels the cultural binary that has been confusing Chinese

¹³ The writers respectively wrote their autobiographies after the publication of Jade Snow Wong's *Fifth Chinese Daughter* in 1950. Monica Sone. *Nisei Daughter*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1953. Wakako Yamauchi. *Songs My Mother Taught Me: Stories, Plays and Memoir*. New York: Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 1994. Hisaye Yamamoto. *Seventeen Syllables and Other Stories*. Latham: Kitchen Table, Women of Color Press, 1988. Joy Kogawa. *Obasan*. Toronto: Coach House Press, 1981.

Americans. I believe that the value of the writing should depend on the influences and contribution in the field and not on whether it is in the first person or the third person.

The second of the criticisms is that Frank Chin and other male critics condemn Wong for her devaluing Chinese and Chinese American men in her work. As a Chinese American-born girl growing up in the immigrant family saturated with traditional Chinese culture, Jade Snow feels confined and repressed by it. What she does just exposes the patriarchal oppression to women and her struggle against it. Wong certainly attacks the paternalistic male who oppresses women. It is undisputed that in traditional Chinese family, the Father is the head and wields his power of patriarchy. Therefore, Wong is dissatisfied with the august father in *Fifth Chinese Daughter* who dominates the family and disciplines the children rigidly. However, Wong also portrays and promotes many ideal positive male images. She describes her father as enlightened, educating, and respectful. For instance, he supports all his children to attend schools and receive basic education including the daughters under the limited living conditions. In addition, he educates his children with Chinese culture; for example, he teaches Jade Snow Chinese poems and calligraphy in person after his long-day hard work. Furthermore, when Jade Snow finally achieves her success by her own efforts after her graduation, he sincerely shows his respect to Jade Snow and becomes very proud of her.

However, the male critics only focus on Wong's resistance against it and neglect the oppression from it to women, and they only assert the preservation of Chinese American men's masculinity with gender-blind patriarchal ideology. For them, Chinese American men have been distorted and castrated – feminized – by the white mainstream society, and have been thus devoiced. Therefore, they believe that the most important task for Chinese American writers should be to restore and reclaim Chinese American manhood and find their silenced male voice. Indeed, it is absolutely appropriate for Chin and other male critics to attempt to right the wrong. However, while seeking the equality of Chinese American men with white Americans, they must not ignore the problem of the inequality between men and women in Chinese American society, and it is imperative not to forget the other part of Chinese Americans – Chinese American women who have been discriminated, doubly marginalized, and distorted by the racists and sexists in the white-dominated

American society and culture and in the Chinese community. Chin and other male critics fight only for the rights as equal Americans for men and articulate Chinese American men's "wounded," "sad," and "angry" "scream" and the "fifty years" of their "whole voice" ("Come All Ye" xi), but ignore Chinese American women's issues of both racial and sexual discrimination. For them, Chinese American women cannot be juxtaposed with Chinese American men because they are the inferior "Others." In fact, both Chinese American male and female, as well as Asian American male and female, should unite together to fight for their proper rights and social status.

The third of the criticisms is that Wong's work does not resist against American racial discrimination. It is also reasonable and fair to examine her work from the historical and social context in which *Jade Snow Wong* lived in. A literary work should be considered a reflection of its time, place, and circumstances rather than an isolated creation. When Wong was writing, Chinese Americans were still influenced by the Chinese Exclusion Act, and the racial discrimination still existed in the white dominant American society. Hence, Chinese Americans were still constrained to express their feelings openly. Also, Wong's writing appeared before the civil rights movement, women's liberation movement, anti-Vietnam war, and the multiculturalist movement, which wrought fundamental changes in the minds of the American people. Compared with the writers after the 1970's, like Kingston and Tan, Wong's writing obviously lacks a strong ethnic consciousness and an openly critical perspective against racial discrimination. What she emphasizes more is the creation of a better understanding of Chinese Americans by mainstream white society. Her aim, different from that of the Chinese Americans after the 1960's and 1970's who stress the rights of the ethnicities and air their grievances against racial discrimination, is primarily to reveal and correct the distorted images of Chinese Americans and to introduce Chinese culture to the white mainstream. Last but not least, she was confined by her parents' strict discipline that all the children should not fight with others: "Even if another should strike you, you must not strike him, for then your guilt would be as great as his" (*FCD* 14).

Actually, Wong resists against racial discrimination with her inner power when she grows up. When she seeks for a job, she encounters the racial discrimination and fails several times, so even one college placement officer suggests her to go to Chinatown to find a job but not in white American society where she is denied: "If you are smart, you will look for a job only among your Chinese firms. You cannot expect to get anywhere in American business houses. After all, I am sure you are conscious that racial prejudice on the Pacific Coast will be a great handicap to you"

(*FCD* 188). Although stung and angry, Jade Snow does not become dejected. “No, this is one piece of advice she was not going to follow, so opposed was it to her experience and belief. She was more determined to get a job with an American firm” (*FCD* 189). With her endless efforts, she finally finds her a satisfied job as a typist-clerk in an office called “War Production Drive” (*FCD* 191). With this opportunity, she works hard to achieve recognition and gets promotion from a typist to a secretary, “She found dignity and respect accorded her in the shipyard. Sometimes at conferences she would be the only woman present in a room full of men” (*FCD* 194). Wong’s way of resisting against racial prejudice is to show her competence and gain respects from the whites with it.

The fourth of the criticisms is that Wong’s autobiographical writing caters to the white Americans and denies Chinese culture by introducing too much Chinese customs and food. Firstly, it is the literary tradition inherited from the previous writers such as Yan Phou Lee, Pardee Lowe, Lin Yu-tang, and so forth¹⁴ who mainly introduce “Chinese things” to the Americans, and it was well received in American society. Therefore, in Wong’s writing, she partly continues the style of the former writers to make the Americans know China and Chinese Americans better. Secondly, Wong loves Chinese culture and identifies with it. She intends to introduce the non-Chinese the Chinese characters, living style, and their cultural customs. Considering the work was written during and after World War II, at a time when the Chinese Exclusion Act had lasted for sixty-one years and was only recently abolished, negative stereotypes of Chinese American perpetuated by the American government and society still impacted non-Chinese American views. Even though American society began to reshape those views, non-Chinese still did not know much about Chinese Americans. Jade Snow Wong writes, in part, to educate the mainstream to understand Chinese better and to change their distorted stereotyped images of Chinese. In the “Introduction to the 1989 Edition,” she declares:

[I]n behavior, we emphasize personal modesty, self-reliance, dependability, courtesy, and modulated voices. In values, we esteem love of books and learning, reverence for natural world, service to fellow man, moderation, living within one’s means. Are these values different from those of non-Chinese? Our basic and greatest value is family cohesiveness. (*FCD* x)

The fifth of the criticisms is Wong’s autobiographical writing beautifies white America. It is understandable. Firstly, Wong establishes her values of equality, freedom, and human rights from American education, and it is from these values that she obtains woman consciousness and starts to pursue her equality as female, her freedom as an individual, and the human rights as both an individual and a female.

¹⁴ For further information, see Xiaohuang Yin’s Chapter Two in his *Chinese American Literature since the 1850s* (2006).

She succeeds. She gains her personality, career success, and respect from the men and white Americans. Secondly, it is in America that she has the opportunity to receive advanced education and realize her American dream as a Chinese American woman, and most importantly, she establishes her subjective Chinese American female identity.

Although attacked by various critics from both abroad and China, Wong takes an outstanding position in Chinese American literature. Her writing is the first autobiography written by a Chinese American woman taking herself as the protagonist in search of her individuality and her female independent subjectivity. In that regard, she is the pioneer who establishes the foundation of Chinese American women's literature. She notes, "At a time when nothing had been published from a female Chinese American perspective, I wrote with the purpose of creating better understanding of the Chinese culture on the part of Americans. That creed has been my guiding theme through the many turns of my life time" (*FCD* vii). Before Jade Snow Wong, Chinese Americans literature had been marginalized in the American literary world. It is Jade Snow Wong who first "intrudes" successfully into the canon of American literature, in turn inspiring a generation of Chinese American women writers such as Maxine Hong Kingston, Amy Tan, Gish Jen, Fae Myenne Ng, and so forth to create a discourse of their own. Jade Snow Wong is the first to write an autobiography representing the dilemma between conflicting cultures, values, and the identity issues that the second-generation Chinese American daughters encounter. As she explores Chinese American women's individual subjectivity in the paradoxical immigrant family that both constrains and empowers her, she initiates the writing of maternal story-telling that gives the daughters a sense of their roots and empowers them to become independent individuals. Amy Ling justifies Wong:

Kingston herself considers Jade Snow Wong a literary mentor, describing her as 'the Mother of Chinese American literature' and the only Chinese American author she read before writing her own book. "I found Jade Snow Wong's book myself in the library, and was flabbergasted, helped, inspired, affirmed, made possible as a writer – for the first time I saw a person who looked like me as a heroine of a book, as a maker of a book." (*Between Worlds* 120)

To sum up, in *Fifth Chinese Daughter* Jade Snow Wong represents the Chinese American family as a paradoxical site of oppression, resistance, and empowerment. Oppression comes from her parents, especially her father, shaped deeply by traditional Chinese culture; the conflicts are mainly between the father and the American-born daughter. Jade Snow resists and rebels against her father during her coming of age. However, Wong also depicts her family as a space of empowerment.

The grandmother is Jade Snow's feminist pioneer who empowers her to become independent and self-reliant. Even though her father forces his patriarchal Chinese culture down the daughter's throat, he also passes down the positive Chinese cultural heritage that she cherishes and helps her form the Chinese American cultural identity in the immigrant family: "My grandmother and parents established their bit of familiarity in San Francisco. Recreating the China they knew, enforcing what they thought correct, they gave me a precious heritage that I have transmitted to my children.... My Chinese heritage has been my strength and advantage" (*FCD* ix, xi).

II. Maxine Hong Kingston: Construction of an Androgynous Woman Warrior Transcending the Paradoxes of Family

Following Jade Snow Wong's path, twenty-five years later, another Chinese American writer, Maxine Hong Kingston pens her sensational *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts*. It recounts the journey of self-discovery of a second-generation Chinese American woman, living between cultures, during which the narrator finds her voice and female subjectivity. The work consists of five episodes, each of which centers on a different woman's story, with the narrator's own search for female subjecthood as its unifying theme. If Wong's autobiography *Fifth Chinese Daughter* starts a new genre for Chinese American literature, then Kingston's autobiographical work *The Woman Warrior* takes Chinese American literature to the peak.

Maxine Hong Kingston was born into a Chinese immigrant family in Stockton, California on October 27, 1940, the eldest of six children. Kingston's father, a village teacher, emigrated from the village of Say Yup, Candong in 1924, and her mother joined him in 1940. Unable to find a decent job in America, he first ran a gambling house and later a laundry shop. Her mother, previously a midwife, also became a labor worker. Both her father and mother worked every day of the year to survive in their adopted country. Maxine was named after a lucky white gambler who frequently came to her father's gambling house. Kingston's first language was Say Yup, a dialect of Cantonese. An extremely bright student, she won eleven scholarships that allowed her to attend the University of California at Berkeley. Kingston first majored in Mathematics, later switching to English Literature and receiving her B. A. degree in 1962. She married her classmate Earl Kingston, an actor, in 1962. They moved to Hawaii where they both taught for the next ten years. They have one son, Joseph.¹⁵

In 1976, while Kingston was teaching Creative Writing at the Mid-Pacific Institute, a private school in Hawaii, she published her first book, *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts*, which caused a great sensation and established her position in American literature. She was awarded the National Book Critics Circle Award for the best nonfiction book of 1976. Following that came the publication of *China Men* in 1980, a companion to *The Woman Warrior*, and that book won the American Book Award in 1981. Her novel *Tripmaster Monkey: His*

¹⁵ The personal information on Maxine Hong Kingston is derived from Yingguo Xu's *An Anthology of Chinese American Literature*, pp 135-7 and "Maxine Hong Kingston: Biography." 31May, 2014 <<http://www.biography.com/people/maxine-hong-kingston-37925#awesm=~oGmURS3yhljY5c>>.

Fake Book published in 1990 received the Pen West Award for fiction. She was also awarded the 1997 National Humanities Medal by President Bill Clinton. Championing harmony and peace, her work *The Fifth Book of Peace* was published in 2003. In April 2007, Maxine Hong Kingston was awarded the Northern California Book Award for her most recent work, *Veterans of War, Veterans of Peace* (2006).

The Woman Warrior is the first Chinese American work (in fact, the first Asian American work) to receive national acclaim, and Kingston is the first canonized Asian American writer in the English language. In 1991, the Modern Language Association published *Approaches to Teaching Maxine Hong Kingston's The Woman Warrior*, placing her in a published teaching series that includes such authors as Homer, Shakespeare, Chaucer, and Milton. As Elaine H. Kim asserts, *The Woman Warrior* has achieved status as an American literary classic, and the book is used as a standard text in American literature courses across the country (*Asian American Literature* 79). David Leiwei Li further affirms the value and significance of the work as

a book that changed forever the face and status of contemporary Asian American literature. Although it could not claim chronological precedence in the post-1965 Asian American corpus, *The Woman Warrior* remained the first text to both enter the arena of national culture and arrest American public imagination. Its appeal to the shared category of gender produced a heterogeneous readership beyond ethnicity; its postmodern play of the folk fanned commercial interest in the future publication of Asian American texts; and its extensive review and study by critics of legitimate cultural affiliations also enabled the scholarly excavation and preservation of Asian American literary tradition. (44)

The Woman Warrior has received extensive attention since it was published in 1976 from the scholars of America, Asia, as well as China. Amongst Americans, Kathryn Van Spanckeren asserts that Kingston's work is the best known of a growing body of Asian American women writing, and acknowledges this new voice in the context of Asian and Western traditions: "Kingston's book overthrows patriarchy, installing a discourse that merges women's lives into an enlightened, inclusive text, residing in the timeless moment of the cosmic dance" (50). Joan Lidoff further claims that "Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* exemplifies the telling of the self's story by the telling of others' stories" (117). Diane Johnson also regards the work as one in which "the vivid particularity of her experience, and with the resources of a considerable art, Kingston reaches to the universal qualities of female condition and female anger that the bland generalities of social science and the merely factual history cannot describe" (qtd. in David Li 49).

Even though Kingston's work gains credits for its unique expression, some white critics see Kingston's work from their Orientalist frame of reference as a book written by an "Other," full of the Chinese exoticism that fits their stereotypes. Barbara Burdick in the *Peninsula Herald* notes, "No other people have remained so mysterious to Westerners as the inscrutable Chinese. Even the word China brings to mind ancient rituals, exotic teas, superstitions, silks and fire-breathing dragons" (qtd. in Kingston, "Cultural Mis-readings" 56). Similarly, Margaret Manning of the *Boston Globe* writes that "Mythic forces flood the book. Echoes of the Old Testament, fairy tales, the *Golden Bough* are here, but they have their own strange and brooding atmosphere inscrutably foreign, oriental" (ibid). Another reviewer, Joan Henriksen, further echoes the Orientalist viewpoint: "Chinese-Americans always 'looked' – at least to this WASP observer – as if they exactly fit the stereotypes I heard as I was growing up. They were 'inscrutable.' They were serene, withdrawn, neat, clean and hard-workers. *The Woman Warrior*, because of this stereotyping, is a double delight to read" (ibid). Views by white critics with racial and cultural prejudices against China were even beyond Kingston's expectation: "What I did not foresee was the critics measuring the book and me against the stereotype of the exotic, inscrutable, mysterious oriental. About two-thirds of the reviews did this" (Kingston, "Cultural Mis-readings" 55).

In addition, Kingston's work also receives conflicting reviews within Asian American critics. Represented by Elaine H. Kim, Asian American women critics Amy Ling, Sau-ling Cynthia Wong, King-kok Cheung, Wendy Ho, and others review the book as a canon of Asian American literature from the perspectives of gender, race, and culture. In her *Asian American Literature: An Introduction to the Writings and Their Social Context*, Kim asserts that "*The Woman Warrior* is about women, but it is primarily about a Chinese American's attempt to sort fact from fantasy in order to come to terms with paradoxes that shape her life as a member of a racial minority group in America" (199). Following Kim, Amy Ling holds that Kingston's work resists not only against sexism, but also against racism: "Kingston is probably the one most consciously and outspokenly feminist, and yet her sympathies are large. She may protest misogynist tendencies in her ancestral culture but she also protests racist tendencies in the dominant culture. Injustice is wrong whatever its source and one is duty-bound to right/write it" (163). Sau-ling Cynthia Wong also discusses Kingston's book as a distinctly Chinese American creation, for it "is to establish the legitimacy of a unique Chinese American (as opposed to 'Chinese Chinese') experience and sensibility" ("Cultural and Historical Contexts" 27). In her *Articulate Silences: Hisaye Yamamoto, Maxine Hong Kingston, Joy Kogawa*, King-Kok Cheung, focusing on Kingston's articulation of Chinese American women's silences imposed

by both sexism and racism, claims: “*The Woman Warrior* openly and even stridently expresses feminist messages said to be often veiled in women’s fiction.... This text implies that the hidden injuries to race are even harder to bring to the surface than female oppression” (25). Furthermore, Wendy Ho, in *In Her Mother’s House: The Politics of Asian American Mother-Daughter Writing*, explores the mother-daughter relationship in *The Woman Warrior*, arguing that the work reveals the oppressive and empowering possibilities and life choices for women in challenging the dominant and marginalizing ideologies and institutions that define them (117).

Kingston’s work not only owes a debt to but also surpasses Jade Snow Wong’s *Fifth Chinese Daughter* in many aspects. Therefore, *The Woman Warrior* annoys numerous Asian American male critics because the images of Chinese American women created in the work do not go well either with the images of Chinese women perpetuated in traditional Chinese culture, or with the images in male writers’ writings, in which they “often portray the Asian American male as hero and female as villainess” (Kim, *Asian American Literature* 199). Represented by Frank Chin, the male critics reject Kingston’s work as a “fake” which distorts traditional Chinese culture, devalues Chinese American men, and caters to the mainstream white readers (“Come All Ye” 26). Stephen Sumida denies Kingston for attacking only sexism and not racism (220), and Benjamin Tong indicts Kingston as well for catering to the whites (6). Sheng-mei Ma condemns Kingston for her internalization of Orientalism and also for her estrangement from China and Chinese culture for the sake of acceptance into the mainstream white culture (34).

Echoing the Asian American male critics, some scholars in China (both male and female) feel uncomfortable about Kingston’s attack on traditional Chinese patriarchal culture. Guang-lin Wang asserts that Kingston only condemns patriarchal culture in China, whereas she neglects the existence of it everywhere around the world, thereby reinforcing the Orientalist stereotypes of the Chinese constructed and perpetuated by the westerners throughout history (139). Likewise, Jingyi Wei insists that even though Kingston translates Chinese culture into American culture to construct for the narrator a Chinese American identity, she does not resist racism; instead she only fights against her mother fiercely (*Chinese American Literature* 121). Ping-ping Shi, on the one hand, endorses the positive impact of the relationship between the mother and daughter in the formation of Maxine’s identity, from the estrangement of the two because of the daughter’s assimilation into the mainstream American society to the re-identification of the two with mutual empowerment (21). On the other hand, she comes to assert that Kingston achieves her feminist agenda by sacrificing Chinese culture: “Kingston’s feminist consciousness, in other words, is not fostered and prompted by the white-dominated feminist movement of the 1960’s

and 1970's.... It, rather, originates from her instinctive reaction as a child to the misogynist culture of her most immediate surroundings – Chinatown in Stockton, California” (81). She further stresses, “Although guilty of pushing their androcentric Asian American nationalist agenda at the sacrifice of Asian American feminist concerns, the Chinese American male critics are certainly right in condemning the condescension of cultural colonialism implicit in white feminists’ critical acclaim of Kingston’s work” (58). Ruoqian Pu echoes the above critics and considers that Kingston’s work represents a feminist anger against Chinese American ethnic politics: “The anger conceals racial self-hatred imbued by American mainstream culture. It is right on this point that Chinese American women’s sexual politics are not popular and become the opposite of Chinese American ethnic politics” (198).

Observing the critiques of Kingston’s *The Woman Warrior*, it is obvious that white feminists highlight women’s oppression from the perspective but neglect the stance of race, and some other reviews reflect the Anglo-Saxon Orientalists’ absorption with their commanding white supremacy. The viewpoints from Asian American female critics help us to understand Kingston’s work further and deeper feminist meaning; whereas, Asian American male critics focus only on racial discrimination and ignore Asian American women’s double oppression from both racism and sexism and the gender asymmetry institutionalized in their lives. Many critics from China who are indulged in their cultural nationalism overlook Kingston’s expression of Chinese American women’s struggle to find their silenced voices, to work out the paradoxes of the family, and to construct a Chinese American woman’s subjective subjectivity. My discussion of *The Woman Warrior* aims to examine Kingston’s representation of the Chinese immigrant family as a paradoxical site of the traditional cultural oppression of women, of the concurrent resistance of women to familial oppression, of the empowerment of the protagonist as an androgynous woman warrior, and of the transcendence of the familial paradoxes to form Chinese American female subjective identity.

A. Family: The Locus of Monitoring, Disciplining, Punishing, and Oppressing Women

In *The Woman Warrior*, Kingston not only depicts the family in China oppresses and murders the narrator’s aunt No Name Woman but also describes the Chinese American family as a site of oppressing American-born Chinese American girl from the parents’ rigid education of traditional Chinese culture to be a chaste girl who would not disgrace her family and of the misogynist oppression from both parents and the community stemming from traditional Chinese culture.

Family is the smallest unit of society, performing the roles of maintaining the social stability and disciplining its members in the code of social laws and rules, as well as traditional patriarchal culture. Family is especially the location of observing disciplines and obeying laws to make females into “docile women” and of punishing those who disobey the laws of the symbolic order. Thus, family actually functions as a prison that executes the laws of the Father that confine women. Since family is the primary level of the social pyramid, it is under multiple layers of surveillance by the whole society, which forms a network of observing and punishing; hence, a family is similar to Michel Foucault’s prison cell for women. In his *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1977), Foucault puts forward that a prison is a form of surveillance and discipline, a new technological power, which can be found in schools, factories, hospitals, military barracks, etc. Foucault likens this disciplinary power to Jeremy Bentham’s panopticon, a building that demonstrates how individuals can be supervised and controlled efficiently.

According to Foucault, the panopticon allows for a constant observation characterized by an “unequal gaze.” Perhaps the most important feature of the panopticon is that it was specifically designed so that the prisoners could never be sure whether they were being observed at any moment. The “unequal gaze” causes the individual to internalize the discipline. This means that individuals are less likely to break rules if they know and believe they are under surveillance, even if they are not, and the prison develops from this idea of discipline and aims both to deprive the individual of his freedom and to reform him. Foucault describes the formation of the disciplinary power thus:

What was then being formed was a policy of coercions that act upon the body, a calculated manipulation of its elements, its gestures, its behaviour. The human body was entering a machinery of power that explores it, breaks it down and rearranges it. A “political anatomy”, which was also a “mechanics of power”, was being born; it defined how one may have a hold over others’ bodies, not only so that they may do what one wishes, but so that they may operate as one wishes, with the techniques, the speed and the efficiency that one determines. Thus discipline produces subjected and practiced bodies, “docile” bodies. (138)

Foucault’s argument is that in order to construct docile bodies, the disciplinary institutions must constantly observe the bodies they control and ensure the internalization of the discipline within the bodies being controlled. Prison is one part of a vast network, including schools, military institutions, hospitals, and factories,

which build a panoptic society for its members; it is the final site in which punish the individual who breaks the law. As Foucault notes, “A power to punish that ran the whole length of the social network would act at each of its points, and in the end would no longer be perceived as a power of certain individuals over others, but as an immediate reaction of all in relation to the individual” (129). Although Foucault has discussed how prison disciplines and punishes the individual under the panoptic surveillance within the framework of law, he did not explore how a family functions as a prison and works similarly to discipline and punish the individual who departs from the norms of the moral. However, Foucault has provided the framework through which to analyze how family works in the social panoptic network in Kingston’s *The Woman Warrior*.

In *The Woman Warrior*, Kingston first depicts the familial oppression through the tragic story of No Name Woman in China, the result of which coincides Michel Foucault’s discipline and punish under the surveillance of the “panopticon.”

No Name Woman is a victim of patriarchal oppression from both her family and clan because of her adultery. In the strongly patriarchal Chinese society before 1949, a woman’s position and destiny was determined long before she was born. Chinese women have virtually no position in either history or culture, or “no name” as Kingston indicates. There have been many rules such as the “three obediences and four virtues” that define and restrain women’s behavior, especially women’s sexuality, in Chinese traditional culture. The rules are just like a circle to enclose and confine women in it. If a woman who dares to break the rule or circle, she must be punished by the people who are watching around it. No Name Woman breaks the taboo. Sometime in the 1920’s, she became pregnant after her husband went to America to “dig up gold.” No Name Aunt’s act of adultery and pregnancy surely breaks the patriarchal and moral laws; thus, she causes the wrath of the public and must be punished:

The village had also counting. On the night the baby was to be born the villagers raided our house. Some were crying. Like a great saw, teeth strung with lights, files of people walked zigzag across our land, tearing the rice... at first they threw mud and rocks at the house. Then they threw eggs and began slaughtering our stock. We could hear the animals scream their deaths – the roosters, the pigs, a last great roar from the ox. Familiar wild heads flared in our night windows; the villagers encircled us. Some of the faces stopped to peer at us, their eyes rushing like searchlights. The hands flattened against the panes, framed heads, and left red prints. (WW3-4)

Not only the villagers attacked and ruined the house of No Name Woman's parents, where she was living after she was sent back home by her parents-in-law because of her shameful adultery, and much worse, even her own family members also detested and cursed her, "Aiaa, we're going to die. Death is coming. Death is coming. Look what you've done. You've killed us. Ghost! Dead ghost! You've never been born" (WW 13-14). Family, the warm harbor of refuge, turns into the cold place to drive her to death. It is certain that a woman such as No Name Woman who breaks the taboo would be punished to die and "would be no marker for her anywhere, neither in the earth nor the family hall," and "[n]o one would give her a family hall name" (WW 15). Hence, The desperate No Name Woman jumped into the family well with her newly born daughter, "Toward morning she picked up the baby and walked to the well" (ibid.). No Name Woman not only kills herself but also her baby daughter because she clearly knows that she "had taken the child into wastes," and her daughter would continue to suffer from her punishment, "A child with no descent line would not soften her life but only trail after her, ghost-like, begging her to give it purpose" (ibid.). No Name Woman as well as her newly-born daughter were forced to die by the patriarchal culture. In the history, chastity is a male demand to women, and women are the objects of the demanding. Hence, if a male philanders, he is at most regarded as "misconducted"; whereas to a woman, if she loses her chastity, no matter for what reason, even if she is raped, she would also be a filthy woman and marked with "disgraceful" for ever.

A woman's body and sexuality not only becomes a familial problem but also becomes a village as well as a social issue; therefore, No Name Woman is murdered by the conspiratorial powers of the three. The "three obediences and four virtues" constitute the ground-work of both the familial and social ethic that sustain the feudal moral principles, in which the chastity of a woman is uppermost. Hence, No Name Woman's adultery and illegitimate pregnancy is a threat to the social system, a breaking of, the clan and village the shaped moral order, a shame upon her two families, and no doubt they would cooperate with one accord to discipline and punish her. If the punishment from the clan and village is a fatal blow, then the condemnation and curses from her own family – a shelter which should protect her from the outside attack – are the last straw that causes her death, and it is obvious that the family becomes an executer of patriarchal law. Of course, the other two powers help the family to finish the murder of No Name Woman.

Moreover, the tragedy is even though No Name Woman pays two lives for the price of her adultery, it is not enough to punish her; what even worse is she, as a

shame and ugly scar of the family, is intentionally forgotten as if she has never been born into the world and existed in it. Kingston states: “The real punishment was not the raid swiftly inflicted by the villagers, but the family’s deliberately forgetting her. Her betrayal so maddened them; they saw to it that she would suffer forever, even after death” (WW 26). No Name Woman is the shameful mark of sex to the family, “I have believed that sex was unspeakable and words so strong and fathers so frail that “aunt” would do my father mysterious harm” (WW 15). Therefore, the family members deliberately erases all the memory related to her so that she can be forever punished for her “crime.” Even if in the family of the adopted America, the name of No Name Woman is still strictly forbidden to keep the secret and erase the shameful woman: “I have thought that my family, having settled among immigrants who had also been their neighbors in the ancestral land, needed to clean their name, and a wrong word would incite the kinspeople even here” (WW 15-6). No Name Woman’s tragic story is not only an epitome of the inferior status of women in China, but also of the fate of women universally. It is clear that a woman in patriarchal society should be docile, silent, and passive; if she is not, there is no way for her to live in it. Hélène Cixous observes: “Either the woman is passive; or she doesn’t exist. What is left is unthinkable, unthought of” (“Sorties” 92). No Name Woman is not the former because she commits adultery, so she has to die and to be erased silently.

No Name Woman dies silently. This silence is a oppressive one. Oppressive silence refers to the voicelessness and the failure in breaking silence of the inferior part under cultural, economic and political hegemony. In patriarchal society and culture, patriarchy takes its strategic policy of oppressive silence to control the voice of the oppressed women, so that the society is totally articulated in the voice of the oppressor and also for its benefit. In his work *The Power of Silence*, Adam Jaworski observed:

Oppressive silence is a result of silencing measures, which have been widely used by power groups to exert control over the dominated ones. It is taken almost for granted in cultural anthropology that human thoughts and social structures are organized along the lines of simple, binary oppositions, for example: I/other, man/woman, majority/minority, mainstream/margin. West/East. ... Silence toward oppression is a desirable state for all the oppressors, for thus they can do everything they prefer to the oppressed. To obtain this aim, the oppressors may use subtle but equally effective forms of silencing, such as brainwashing, indoctrination, and negative stereotyping of the dominated group. (130)

The story of No Name Woman reminds readers of how Chinese women are

under the constant surveillance of the family, clan, and village. Different from No Name Woman, the story of Moon Orchid in *The Woman Warrior* shows another Chinese woman who is disciplined into submissive, silent, and docile one in the space of family both in China and in America.

Moon Orchid, as her name implies, is a typical representative of another kind of women – docile, dependent, and weak. After her husband left for America to study medicine, Moon Orchid lived in Hong Kong for thirty years first with her daughter and later with a housemaid after her daughter was arranged by her husband to study in America. During the long separation, her husband did not divorce her, but got married with another woman and started his own hospital in America. The subordinate Moon Orchid never doubted her husband and never dared to ask him to bring her to America to be with him. Instead, she lived on the money he sent regularly and suffered in loneliness for more than thirty years, passively waiting for him to call her to join him, but he never did. At last, it was her sister Brave Orchid who takes her to the United States to claim her husband. Nevertheless, she even thought that she should not come to America to “disturb” him. Taken to meet her husband, she shook with fright: “I’m scared. Oh, let’s turn back. I don’t want to see him.... He’ll throw me out. And he’ll have a right to throw me out, coming here, disturbing him, not waiting for him to invite me” (WW 144). Facing the man she has not seen for more than thirty years, “[A]ll she did was open and shut her mouth without any words coming out” (WW 152). So frightened as she was, even if she met her husband, she failed to claim him back, so she was abandoned permanently. She had to live with her daughter at first, later with Brave Orchid, and at last in an asylum – where she died in silence. She is the kind of the abandoned women as Simone de Beauvoir describes:

[She] no longer is anything, no longer has anything. If she is asked how she lived before, she does not even remember. She let her former world fall in ashes, to adopt a new country from which she is suddenly driven; she forswore all the values she believed in, broke off her friendships, she now finds herself without a roof over her head, the desert all around her. (666)

If No Name Woman is a victim of patriarchal culture who breaks the taboo of patriarchal culture, Moon Orchid is another victim who honestly obeys patriarchal culture. She is educated and reduced by her family in China and its patriarchal culture to a docile, dependent, and good for nothing figure, and is forced to die or we can say “murdered” by her betraying husband in America. Indoctrinated in traditional Confucianism, once she is sure her husband has abandoned her, Moon Orchid’s spiritual foundation collapses, and her dream of uniting with her husband also evaporates. Moon Orchid has been submissively waiting for her husband and

dreaming to live happily with her husband for more than thirty years because she believes that a woman's duty should be obedient to her husband and play her gender role well in the family. Accordingly, she never takes active action to deal with her problems and never has an "improper thought" of coming to America to claim her husband, and surely she is a "angel" of the patriarchal culture. However, as a feminist writer, Kingston "kills" this passive "angel" disciplined and shaped by patriarchal culture. To Kingston, Chinese American women who have to struggle against sexism and racism to survive in the white dominant society must be strong enough to fight against all aspects of inequality. Thus Kingston "murders" the weak Moon Orchid, as Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar declare, "[W]omen must kill the aesthetic ideal through which they themselves must be 'killed' into art" (17). Kingston exactly does the same – killing the obedient "angel" and creating the powerful "woman warriors."

After revealing the oppression from the family in China, in *The Woman Warrior*, Kingston continues to unfold the Chinese American immigrant family performing the duty of observing and disciplining the daughter's behaviors and oppressing the young daughter. To begin with, the narrator's mother – Brave Orchid warns her grown-up daughter – Maxine not to disgrace the family by telling her the secret shame of the family: "'You must not tell anyone,' my mother said, 'what I am about to tell you. In China your father had a sister who killed herself. She jumped into the family well. We say that your father has all brothers because it is as if she had never been born'" (WW 3). Brave Orchid firstly requests Maxine to keep the familial secret because "domestic shame should not be made in public." No Name Woman is surely a shame for the family because of her disgraceful adultery. If people in the community get to know No Name Woman's shameful story, Maxine's family would be humiliated, and her family would bow its head to them. In addition, since Brave Orchid has personally witnessed No Name Woman's isolation, violent death, and permanent erasure for her breaking the rules of the symbolic order, if it were not meant for the daughter to draw a lesson from No Name Woman, the mother would never disclose the secret family shame: "Now that you started to menstruate, what happened to her could happen to you. Don't humiliate us. You wouldn't like to be forgotten as if you had never been born. The villagers are watchful" (WW 5). This is the mother's real intentions. She reminds her daughter to behave well because the villagers are ever watchful; if she follow in No Name Woman's steps, she would also be punished and erased silently as No Name Woman does. At the same time, Brave Orchid instills in her daughter the values of Chinese traditional culture and demand her daughter be a chaste girl, and Brave Orchid, at this point, becomes a thorough apologist for traditional Chinese moral principles. Through the mother's warning, Kingston subtly represents the connection and passing down of traditional values

from home country to adopted country.

Through the tragedies of *No Name Woman* and *Moon Orchid*, Kingston not only condemns the traditional Chinese culture that oppressed women but also attacks racial discrimination against Chinese Americans in American history. Both women are lonely wives left behind in China while their husbands work and struggle in America. They remind readers of the notorious Chinese Exclusion Act prohibiting the entrance of Chinese immigrants, especially women, to America, which was passed in 1882 and was renewed again and again until its repeal in 1943. The act shows white Americans' racial prejudice and hostility towards Chinese people and culture. On the one hand, the Chinese Exclusion Act limited the entry of Chinese immigrants. On the other hand, it completely segregated overseas Chinese communities from mainstream American society (Qiong Zhang 13), and deprived them of their rights as citizens. The direct consequences of the act were the separation of the China men and their families, especially the separation of the husbands and wives, which caused the group of the left-behind wives in China and the formation of bachelor societies in China towns. According to Xiaohuang Yin, "At the beginning of the twentieth century, Chinese communities were almost all bachelor societies.... In 1900, the ratio of males to females was 12:1 in California, 36:1 in Boston, 50:1 in New York, and the rate in whole continent was 19:1" (23).

The Chinese Exclusion Act is a double-edged sword to Chinese sojourners as well as bachelors and their families. To the sojourners/he bachelors, after a day of hard work, had no warm family to return to. Consequently, they went to drink to drown their homesickness; they went to the gambling houses to spend their money to keep their minds occupied; some even visited prostitutes to satisfy their physically needs. Most pitifully, most of them died alone in the strange land. To their families, the children could not see their fathers and receive their care; to the left-behind wives, they suffered doubly at home: they had to serve their parents-in-law and nurture their children, but could not enjoy normal family life and affection, just like their husbands did. They also had to suffer both psychologically and physically. Both *No Name Woman* and *Moon Orchid* become the victims of the Chinese Exclusion Act: *No Name Woman*, after living alone for the years of her husband's absence, commits adultery and jumps into the family well with her baby daughter; *Moon Orchid*, separated from her husband for more than thirty years, becomes a fragile and irresolute woman, an abandoned wife, goes insane and dies in an asylum.

Kingston's narrative of the tragic stories of *No name Woman* and *Moon Orchid* is a double-tuned narration that not only interrogates Chinese traditional patriarchal culture, but also attacks American racial discrimination. On the surface, the stories expose the fate of the two oppressed women, but under the surface there is another

voice condemning the racist Chinese Exclusion Act and its lasting influence in the dominant white American ideology. Kingston raises the familial tragedies of *No Name Woman* and *Moon Orchid* to the level of the problems of social institutions and culture; she breaks the silence and names the erased invisible no-name women of the world as well. More importantly, Kingston's tragic stories of the two women not only express the suffering of women in the past, but also use the trauma as inspiration for the author to start the journey of finding the voices and identities as a Chinese American woman. Kingston's narrative of the two women is never a quiet act of story-telling. On the contrary, "It is a painful re-membering, a putting together of the dismembered past to make sense of the trauma of the present" (Bhabha 63).

Through the tragic stories of *No Name Woman* and *Moon Orchid* happened in the oppressive families in both China and America, Kingston demonstrates that family in China is an agent of cultural and social oppression; it functions as a tool to form women into docile and subordinated being, and to conspire with the patriarchal system to maintain the imbalanced gender structure. The nuclear immigrant family in America also carries forward the traditional Chinese patriarchal culture which oppresses women.

In addition to the familial oppression of *No Name Woman* and *Moon Orchid*, Kingston depicts the oppression that Maxine suffers in her Chinese immigrant family and community, which is the misogynous prejudice. In traditional Chinese culture, boys are valued over girls because a boy would inherit the family name, pass down the family line, and expand the family tree; whereas, a girl would marry and give birth in her husband's family. A boy would belong to his family forever; a girl would belong to another family. Therefore, in Maxine's childhood, she often heard of such saying from her parents or the emigrant villagers, "Feeding girls is feeding cowbirds" (WW 46); "Girls are maggots in the rice"; "It is more profitable to raise geese than daughters" (WW 43). When her parents take the girls out, the emigrant villagers shake their heads at them and lament, "One girl – and another girl" (46), which makes her parents ashamed to take them out together. Even when her great-uncle, the ex-river pirate, takes the children shopping, once he hears girls' voices, he would turn on to girls and roar: "No girls!" (WW 47) Girls are despised as "cowbirds" and "maggots," and they are obviously not welcomed and are detested.

The third oppression is that Maxine is denied to value her school achievements and to support her college education. In the traditional patriarchal culture, it is no virtue for women to have talent because women do not need education as long as they can fulfill their filial duty to their parents-in-law and take good care of their husbands and children. Thus, when the expectative Maxine tells her mother that "I got straight A's, Mama" (WW 45), her mother replies coldly as if it has nothing to do

with her: “Let me tell you a true story about a girl who saved her village” (Ibid). When Maxine tells her mother that “I’m going to college” (WW 202), her mother replies: “I don’t see why you need to go to college at all.... Everybody else is sending their girls to typing school. ‘Learn to type if you want to be an American girl.’ Why don’t you go to typing school? The cousins and village girls are going to typing school” (WW 203). Brave Orchid denies or discourages Maxine to get further education for the following reasons.

Firstly, Brave Orchid’s values are deeply rooted in the Chinese traditional concept that “it is a moral integrity for women to have no talent and knowledge.” A girl does not need to be bright and wise, not to mention to get higher education by going to college. On the contrary, a girl should play her gender role well in the private sphere defined by the gendered culture: get married and be a good wife after receiving some education. Therefore, it does not matter whether Maxine gets straight A’s or receive further education to Brave Orchid.

Secondly, Brave Orchid clearly knows how white American society denies non-whites – especially ethnic women. She herself graduated from a midwifery school in China, but her qualifications are not recognized in America, where she becomes a cleaner in her family laundry. Therefore, she anticipates that her daughter, as a descendant of Chinese immigrants, will probably have the same fate as her own, no matter how high a degree she may achieve.

Thirdly, the mother’s idea is clear: straight A’s are useless because “[y]ou cannot eat straight A’s” (WW 46), while the real skills are more practical as the girl who saved her village with her martial arts. Straight A’s are good for nothing, nor can they recover the land taken away by the local government from her family. Furthermore, it is no use for a girl to get straight A’s because it does not benefit her own family at all, but only her future husband’s family. Therefore, to Brave Orchid, it is better for her daughter to be like Fa Mu Lan who, skilled in the martial arts, goes into battle to replace her father, fulfills her filial duty, defeats the invading enemies, and finally saves the whole village. These might have seemed more practical and more realistic goals for a Chinese American girl. In brief, even in the Chinese immigrant family and the community in America, gender discrimination still exists.

In conclusion, women are oppressed in the space of family both in China and the adopted America in various forms. The unruly No Name Woman was forced to commit suicide with her daughter by jumping into the family well because of her breaking through the moral code of women; the docile Moon Orchid also was driven to die because she was disciplined into a too obedient woman to do anything by herself; the young American-born Maxine was oppressed by the traditional Chinese patriarchal culture in the Chinese American immigrant family. There is no doubt that

family is a space of oppressing women in kinds of families.

B. Diverse Resistance in the Site of Family

Family plays multiple roles in the process of their children's coming of age, particularly the immigrant family in the adopted country. In *The Woman Warrior*, Kingston describes family as a locus of monitoring, disciplining, punishing, and oppressing women through the stories of No Name Woman, Moon Orchid, and Maxine. However, she also presents family as a space of resisting the various oppression.

Kingston unfolds the story of No Name Woman in the opening chapter, in which she not only narrates the tragic suffering of No Name Woman, but also her resistance to it.¹⁶ No Name Woman's first resistance is her silent suicide, which shows her resentment and revenge to her family. Her kinsfolk detested her for her disgracing the family and could not provide any support for her when she was threatened by the crazy villagers and when she was giving birth to the baby, and she was driven to die directly by her family even though traditional patriarchal culture is the indirect murderer. Therefore, the spite No Name Woman intends to revenge her kinsfolk by throwing into her family well, as Kingston observes that "she was a spite suicide, drowning herself in the drinking water. The Chinese are always very frightened of the drowned one, whose weeping ghost, wet hair hanging and skin bloated, waits silently by the water to pull down a substitute" (WW 16). Committing suicide becomes a weapon of No Name Woman, an aggressive behavior, a way of punishing the alive guilty people who oppress and desert her.

The second of No Name Woman's resistance is to meet her sexual desire, which affronts the social moral code. Both men and women have their instinctive desire, so does No Name Woman. Different from ordinary women, she does not endure her loneliness and gives up her sexual desire, instead she pursues her love. Her adultery reveals her desire both for physics and emotion, and this desire is revolutionary resistance to the social moral ethics because it breaks the constraint for women in the symbolic order, distorts and subverts the moral discipline, and upsets the patriarchal society. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari assert:

If desire is repressed, it is because every position of desire, no matter how small, is capable of calling into question the established order of a society: not that desire is asocial, on the contrary. But it is explosive; there is no

¹⁶ To express her feminist philosophy, Kingston interprets No Name Woman as a passive victim of patriarchal system to reveal the oppression of it to women; on the other hand, she portrays No Name Woman as an active forerunner of woman warrior to rebel against the system and free from its oppression.

desiring-machine capable of being assembled without demolishing entire social sectors. Despite what some revolutionaries think about this, desire is revolutionary in its essence – desire, not left-wing holidays! – And no society can tolerate a position of real desire without its structures of exploitation, servitude, and hierarchy being compromised. (126-27).

No Name Woman's third resistance is never disclosing her lover's name and protecting him from punishment, which is the antagonism to the patriarchal culture and symbolic order. In Chinese society, once the adultery comes to light, the immoral man and woman would be punished, even to die. No Name Woman undertakes the due obligations on her own and swallows all the pressure and pain, but she never reveals her lover's name: "She kept the man's name to herself throughout her labor and dying; she did not accuse him that he be punished with her. To save her inseminator's name she gave silent birth" (*WW* 11). This action, on the one hand, indicates that No Name Woman is a brave woman and dares to bear the responsibility on her own shoulder; on the other hand, it demonstrates that No Name Woman, a single woman, challenges and rebels against the powerful and gigantic patriarchal system. Even though she fails and commits suicide, she gives it a solid punch.

No Name Woman's resistances manifest that she is an active agent, not a passive victim: a positive fighter against the patriarchal system, a rebel against the Confucian taboo, a breaker of the shaped conventions. In doing so, from a feminist perspective, Kingston endows No Name Woman with her subjective individuality, which deconstructs the stereotyped image of the traditional Chinese female as docile, patient, and weak-willed.

No Name Woman's resistances in the family in China are the only opening of the prelude, and Maxine's resistances in Chinese immigrant family are the formal performance. First of all, Maxine runs counter to her mother's order to keep the family secret; on the contrary, she discloses the "shameful" story of No Name Woman to the public. Because she believes that No Name Woman is a victim of the rape; thus, her tragedy is a grievance, a wrong, and an injustice:

My aunt could not have been the lone romantic who gave up everything for sex. Women in old China did not choose. Some man had commanded her to lie with him and be his secret evil. I wonder whether he masked himself when he joined the raid on her family.... His demand must have surprised, then horrified her. She obeyed him; she always did as she was told. (*WW* 6)

Maxine further imagines that the weak obedient No Name Woman obeys the man, and does everything he demands of her, because he threatens her: "If you tell your family, I'll beat you. I'll kill you. Be here again next week" (*WW* 7). Therefore, No Name Woman becomes a double victim: she is the victim of the man's rape and of the

strong patriarchal system that disciplines and punishes her. The injustice is that in the patriarchal society, usually it is the victim of the rape, the woman, who has to be punished – not the man who commits the rape. Likewise, in this story, it is No Name Woman who is driven to die, but not the man who rapes and makes her pregnant, and even there is no one intends to find out the sinful man. Furthermore, No Name Woman is one of the stay-at-home wives whose duty is to fulfill their piety, raise children, and suffer loneliness while their husbands make money in America. What matters is they have to abide by the morality defined for women in China. Even though neither husbands nor wives enjoy normal family life, the husbands in America often visit prostitutes to satisfy their needs,¹⁷ and no one accuses them; whereas, the stay-at-home wives have to strictly obey the social and cultural norm for women. In addition, American racial discrimination is also responsible for No Name Woman's suffering. Under the surface of the story, it is the history of American racial discrimination that should be responsible for her tragedy and that of the other grass wives because just the the Chinese Exclusion Act issued in 1882 and its renewal prohibited the reunion of Chinese sojourners and their left behind wives and children. Thus, to Maxine, No Name Woman's tragedy is a grievance, a wrong, and an injustice caused by Chinese traditional culture.

Fouling her own family nest by disclosing No Name Woman's story opens Maxine's process of resistance, which starts her own resistance to the misogynist ideology pervading her family and community as well. To begin with, she resists misogyny both in speech and action. Misogyny has been existing universally in the world. It is the ideology of hatred of women, contempt for women, or prejudice against women. Under the consciousness of misogyny, women have been socially marginalized and excluded from the public sphere and sexually belittled, discriminated, and objectified, and they have been in the subordinate status. Thus, to get rid of the injustice and gain the equality of women, Maxine resists misogyny with both action and words. When her parents say, "Feeding girls is feeding cowbirds" (WW 46), she would rebel in action, "I would thrash on the floor and scream so hard I couldn't talk. I couldn't stop" (ibid). When her mother reprimands her for a scene she makes before the villagers, "Bad girl! Stop!" Maxine would retort: "I'm not a bad girl. I'm not a bad girl" (ibid). When the villagers say, "When you raise girls, you're raising children for strangers," Maxine would yell: "I'm not a girl" (ibid). The resistance of words and action lay the foundation of establishing her subjective female identity.

¹⁷ In *Eat A Bowl of Tea*, Louis Chu depicts the vivid and diverse bachelor life in New York Chinatown.

Furthermore, Maxine resists to her mother's indoctrination of traditional Chinese moral code of chastity. Chastity is the outcome of ethics and morality, which requires a female not to have premarital sex before marriage and not to have sexual intercourse with other man besides her husband. After the establishment of monogamy, women were descended to the subordination of men and their reproduction tool. One of women's duty is to give birth to and raise children for the husband, and another one is to abide by chastity for the husband. In addition, to pass on the familial property to the next generation of his own blood lineage, the husband, as well as the society, has more and more strict requirement to the woman's chastity. A woman must keep her chastity; if she loses it, she would be the burning shame of the family and would blow up her family's face, and she therefore must be strictly punished. In less severe cases, she would be driven out of the family as well as the clan, and in the severe cases, she would be imposed brutal corporal punishments such as being drowned, burned, and even put to death by dismembering the body. Whereas, if a woman abides by her chastity, she would uphold the family honor and thus be respected. Fully understanding the confinement of chastity for women, Maxine rejects to follow the code in her way. She falls in love with her childhood playmate who comes to look for her in the army, and gets pregnant in the military camp before her marriage, which definitely is in defiance of traditional Chinese ethics. By doing so, Maxine not only denies her mother, but also subverts the stereotyped image of the traditional Chinese female.

In addition to fighting against misogyny and denying her mother's infusion of traditional Chinese moral code of chastity, Maxine also resists to accept the gender role defined for female. Gender is a culturally and socially shaped group of attributes perpetuated to both the male and female, and gender difference is a carefully constructed system of ensuring male domination and their interests. Therefore, in this gender structure, men are the dominant power, and women are the the "Other" of men or the "second sex" as Simone de Beauvoir described. In *The Woman Warrior*, Maxine has a strong gender consciousness: "There is a Chinese word for the female *I* – which is 'slave'"¹⁸ (WW 47), so from childhood she refuses to be identified as a girl or to be trained to be a woman: "I refused to cook. When I had to wash dishes, I would crack one or two" (WW 47). Obviously, Maxine does not want to play a female gender role defined by traditional culture: "Even now, unless I'm happy, I burn the food when I cook. I do not feed people. I let the dirty dishes rot" (ibid). Furthermore, Maxine rejects her mother's suggestion to become a typist after high school as the other immigrant girls do. The mother expects the daughter to be an

¹⁸ The Chinese word for it is 奴.

ordinary woman in society and to fulfill the same gender role as American or other immigrant girls do; hence, she fights against her mother: “I’m not going to be a slave or a wife. Even if I am stupid and talk funny and get sick, I won’t let you turn me into a slave or a wife. I’m getting out of here, I cannot stand living here anymore” (WW 201). Maxine’s words demonstrate that she does not want to become a gendered woman; on the contrary, she wants to be a woman free from the gender role.

Next, Maxine also resists gender difference by blurring the gender border of male and female to dispel the binary opposition of gender. Maxine wants to become both a woman lumberjack and a writer: “I want to be a lumberjack and a newspaper reporter.... I’m going to chop down trees in the daytime and write about timber at night” (WW 202). According to the gender division defined by traditional patriarchal system, it is usually men who are physically powerful become lumberjacks and women who are physically weak do the light work, and men do the superior mental work such as a writer and women do the inferior manual work such as house work. However, Maxine wants to do both the physical and mental work, which subverts the gender structure and blurs the border of gender roles. Kingston intends to express the following things through Maxine’s challenge: 1) Women are capable of doing the work usually done by men, particularly the brain work occupied by men. 2) The gender line should be abolished so that both men and women can develop and release their potential capabilities; in so doing, the gender oppositions would be dispelled and there would be no gender oppression. 3) It is the attempt to break the chain of “private sphere” confined to women and to “invade” the “public sphere” – the domain of men – to compete with them, so that she can prove that there should be no gender difference and gap between the different genders.

Moreover, Maxine resists traditional female gender role and wants to become a reporter so that she can “report the crimes” committed against No Name Woman as well as the women in both China and America and speak the unspeakable to the public. “My aunt haunts me – her ghost drawn to me” (WW 16), Maxine confesses, and she believes that No Name Woman was spite soul who was forced to commit suicide silently together with her newly-born daughter, and she was erased deliberately by her own family and nameless as if she had never been born. Therefore, to become a writer or reporter is a crucial matter for Maxine, only if she becomes a writer can she rights the wrongs for the erased spite No Name Woman, speaks the unspeakable “shameful” story of No Name Woman, reports the crime committed on her, and avenges her with the power of pen. “Reporting,” notes Bhabha, “is never a quiet act of introspection or retrospection. It is a painful re-remembering, a putting together of the dismembered past to make sense of the trauma of the present” (Bhabha 63). Indeed, by writing downing the tragic story of No Name Woman in the

past, Maxine not only names the dead spite No Name aunt, but also gives the erased No Name Woman the voice to articulate her silences, and more importantly, Maxine finds her forerunner for her to follow and becomes a woman warrior in future.

Kingston, by depicting Maxine's series of resistance in her family, develops a mother-daughter plot of inoculating and resisting, which is prime importance to young Maxine to explore her Chinese American female subjecthood. The plot awakens Maxine's female consciousness, articulates the enforced silences, creates feminist discourse, and thus weakens men's authority and power. Firstly, the mother-daughter plot articulates the enforced silences and engenders female consciousness. The mother tells the shameful No Name Woman's suicide story with the intent to prevent the daughter from disgracing the family. In spite of her mother's expectation, the resisting and rebelling daughter not only discloses the family secret, disobeying the mother as well as the invisible authority – the father – but also takes the “shame” of the family as “pride,” regarding No Name Woman as her model, and finally puts the story “on her,” because “she was a spite suicide, drowning herself in the drinking water” (WW 16). Secondly, the mother-daughter plot, unlike the stories written by most of the male writers, positions the female characters and narrative on the center and strengthens female power, which marginalizes the male characters and weakens their authority and power. More importantly, the admonishing mother and the rebellious daughter achieve a double female narrative and discourse, which echoes what Elaine Showalter calls “double-voiced discourse”: “to make the invisible visible, to make the silent speak” (31). Maxine, haunted by the voices and distorted images that violate her, bearing the pains of the past, is now slowly acquiring the tools to change the disabling images and memories, to replace them with self-affirming ones, to recreate her pasts and alter them “for the past can be as malleable as the present.”¹⁹ As Marianne Hirsch asserts:

The story of female development, both in fiction and theory, needs to be written in the voice of mothers as well as in that of daughters. It needs to cease mystifying maternal stories, to cease making them objects of a “sustained quest.” Only in combining both voices, in finding a double voice that would yield a multiple female consciousness, can we begin to envision ways to “live afresh.” Only thus can feminists begin to imagine a form of consciousness and of subjective creating, and created by, the social and ideological revolution that feminism has only begun to effect. (161)

It is just in this “double-voiced discourse” that by writing the story of No Name Woman and the “shame” of the family, Kingston restores the history of No Name

¹⁹ The statement was found in King-Kok Cheung's *Articulate Silences: Hisaye Yamamoto, Maxine Hong Kingston, Joy Kogawa*, 74. Cheung was citing Gloria Anzaldúa, *Making Face, Making Soul/Haciendo Caras: Creative and Critical Perspectives by Women of Color*. Ed., San Francisco: Aunt Lute Foundation Books, 1990.

Woman as well as all the erased women, articulates the enforced silences, and names the distorted women.

In sum, in her *The Woman Warrior*, Kingston takes family as a locus of resistance against the oppression of women. Although family in China functions as a tool to defend the traditional patriarchal values, in America, family plays the role of resisting the oppression in both China and America. Maxine's resistance creates the female narrative and discourse that is of resounding importance to Chinese American women as well as all women in the world.

C. Talking-story, Empowerment, Adaptation, and Re-identification

In *The Woman Warrior*, having represented the family as a locus of oppression and of resistance, Kingston also describes the Chinese American immigrant family as a site of empowerment through the mother's talking-story, with which Chinese American daughter Maxine obtains her female power, comes of age, and constructs her female subjecthood. To achieve this, Kingston adapts the Chinese myths of Fa Mu Lan, Ts'ai Yen, and Ngok Fei to serve her feminist formation of Maxine a hybrid Chinese American female identity.

Wendy Ho asserts, "Talk-story with its fluid, organic form is continuously open to the speaker's embellishment and transformative imaginative power, and becomes a way of telling and enacting stories that are not one story but many" (123). Indeed, talking-story is the primary vehicle of nurturing and empowering the American-born daughter Maxine to survive the oppression from both sexism and racism in the white dominated society and to establish her subjective Chinese American female identity. In *The Woman Warrior*, Kingston employs talking-story as a crucial strategy to enable the young Maxine possibilities to discover her cultural roots and spiritual power and inherit them. It is through the talking-stories that Kingston finds the treasure source and space to enlarge her imagination, to create the Chinese American culture, to rewrite Chinese American woman warriors, and to make them to live in it. Wendy Ho describes the influence of the Chinese talking-story:

Within this talking-story tradition, there is no fixed, unitary, or right story to be told through all space and time. Each story has its own validity in the continuum of cultural survival, power, and moral accountability. The point of talking-story is to retell the stories – not to simply reproduce them, and this is one way women create culture. It is the Chinese tradition of talking-story, therefore, that provides the social, emotional, and political space from which Chinese American women continue to tell their stories.

(143)

In *The Woman Warrior*, Brave Orchid talks stories of Fa Mu Lan, Ts'ai Yen, Ngok Fei, and herself. As Kingston recalls: "Night after night my mother would talking-story until we fell asleep. I couldn't tell where the stories left off and the dreams began, her voice the voice of the heroines in my sleep" (WW 19). The first of the mother's talking-stories that empowers Maxine is of Fa Mu Lan. The folklore of Fa Mu Lan dates back to the South and North Dynasty (420-589 AD), originally as a ballad. In "The Ballad of Mu Lan," the heroine was, like other women of her time, obedient and filial to her parents and strove for her family honor. She enlisted in the army disguised as a man to take her aging father's place in the fight against the invaders. In disguising as a man, she fought valiantly in battle and returned in triumph as a hero – later a heroine after she revealed her female gender – receiving great honors from the emperor who awarded her a high position. However, seeking neither position nor wealth, Fa Mu Lan returned to her hometown and resumed her traditional female gender role. To commemorate her filial piety and her contribution to the country, she was immortalized as "xiaoliejiangjun" (general and paragon of filial piety) in the Tang dynasty, and a temple was built in her honor ("Hua Mu Lan").

The second story is of Ts'ai Yen, who was born in the Eastern Han Dynasty period in A.D. 177, the only daughter of the scholar-statesman Ts'ai Yung. She was well-educated from childhood. Widowed at a very young age, she returned to live in her parents' home but was captured in A. D. 195 by the raiding Southern Hsing-nu, an ancient nomadic people in northern China. During her twelve-year sojourn in Hsing-nu territory, she was made the concubine of a barbarian chieftain and had two children by him. In A.D. 207, she was ransomed back by Cao Cao, Lord of the Wei Nation and a good friend of Ts'ai Yen's father, leaving her half-barbarian sons behind. After returning to central China, she was married a third time to Tung Ssu.

Well known as a poetess, musician, and calligrapher, Ts'ai Yen was the author of "Eighteen Stanzas for a Barbarian Reed Pipe (*Hu Jia Shi Ba Pai*)," a long autobiographical narrative poem with five characters to a line. Her "Sorrow and Resentment" was the first such work in Chinese literary history.²⁰ Here are the last few lines:

The barbarian reed pipe originated from barbarian lands.

When transcribed to the *Qin* [a stringed Chinese musical instrument], however, its tunes remain the same.

Even though the eighteen stanzas have ended, sounds linger on, evoking endless sentiments.

²⁰ For further information, see "蔡文姬(caiwenji)." 21 Dec. 2005<<http://WWW.chinamedley.com/juxian/caiwenji/>>.

Thus we know that the subtle marvels of strings and pipes are Nature's work.

Sorrows and joys vary from person to person, but when transformed they become connected.

Barbarian and Han lands are different, with different customs.

Heaven is separated from earth; mother and child are scattered east and west.

Alas, my woe is vaster than the sky.

Even though the universe is immense, it cannot contain my suffering. (qtd. in Wong, "Cultural" 35)

The poem records her suffering during the war, her deep longing for the sons she had to leave behind when she returned to China, the agony of the separation, and her further suffering thereafter.

The third story Brave Orchid talks is that of Ngok Fei. Historically, Ngok Fei (1103-1142) was a warrior of the Nan Song Dynasty who fought to defend his people from the invasion of Jin. Before he embarked on his campaigns, his mother carved four words on his back: Jing Zhong Bao Guo – repaying the country with supreme loyalty. Inspired by his mother's encouraging words, Ngok Fei fought bravely against the invaders and defeated them, and has been memorialized as a national hero.

Finally, it is Brave Orchid's own story. She was very insightful, courageous, and resolute. Breaking through the traditional limitations for women at a time of early 1930s when there were a few women attending school, particularly in the countryside, Brave Orchid went to a midwifery school after her first two children died. She worked very hard on her study and trampled all the difficulties in school; particularly, she fought against the haunting ghosts alone in the school dormitory and finally drove them out. After her graduation, she served the villagers and was highly respected. When she came to America to join her husband, at the age of forty-six, she gave birth to six children, all the while working with her husband in their family laundry to support the family. She nurtured her children with kinds of Chinese stories, such as those of Fa Mu Lan, Ts'ai Yen, and Ngok Fei. She took her sister Moon Orchid to America to claim her husband who deserted her and worked in the field to earn money to support her family in China even in her seventies.

Brave Orchid talks kinds of stories to nurture her children with Chinese culture and to provide them the surviving skills. As Wendy Ho asserts:

It is through telling and transforming her mother's stories that she breaks her own suffocating silence, vindicates the ancestral women in her family and culture, and reclaims their names and stories for herself and for other women in socially and politically creative ways. Maxine learns

to assert her identity against the institutions that seek her erasure, marginalization, and confinement as a Chinese American woman. She is no longer the absolute silent/silenced object of racist or sexist culture or history. Hers is not a passive, ahistorical positioning of self, but an active subversive and difficult one. (Ho 123)

However, these stories are not adequate for Chinese American women to survive in the adopted white dominant America and to serve Kingston in the construction of Maxine's subjecthood in the present American society, where Chinese American women have been doubly marginalized and discriminated. Hence, the author Kingston has to revise the original stories to serve her feminist representation and to create new stories and new warrior women. On the one hand, she combines the spirits and characters of Fa Mu Lan, Ts'ai Yen, and Ngok Fei into one to create her new warrior Maxine. On the other hand, she transcends their limitations by revising their stories to adapt to the situation of the second-generation Chinese American daughter to establish her individual female subjectivity. Thus, Kingston's vests traditional Chinese stories with her imaginary new feminist ideology to make them fresh, powerful, and vital. Adrienne Rich, in her essay "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision," asserts the importance of revision in women's writings:

Re-vision – the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction – is for women more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival.... We need to know the writing of the past, and know it differently than we have ever known it; not to pass on a tradition but to break its hold over us. (35)

Kingston adapts the legend of Fa Mu Lan by discarding the dross of being loyal to the feudal emperor who is the representative of patriarchy and selecting the essence of manifesting women's power and subjectivity. Even though the original Fa Mu Lan is a national hero, she is either filial and submissive to her father – the master of her family – or loyal to the emperor, the ruler of a feudal society that oppresses women. Actually, Fa Mu Lan exemplifies a tool of the ruling class to educate and condition the people into blind devotion. Her story fulfills the people's expectations of a filial daughter and a loyal fighter and patriot, and that is the reason why the legend of Fa Mu Lan has been passed down through history by generations. Living between the two cultures and struggling against the racial and sexual oppression of white American society, Kingston, a feminist writer, disapproves of Fa Mu Lan's complicity to sustain the patriarchal system to oppress women; on the contrary, she is determined to dispel and overthrow the system and free women from the oppression of it. Thus, she has to create a new and more powerful Fa Mu Lan who is meant to fight against sexism and racism in America.

Accordingly, Kingston's new Fa Mu Lan/Maxine started her life as a seven-year-old girl in a fantastic world. She was guided by the birds into her fairyland – a picturesque place with a river winding between misty mountains. In this imaginary fascinating wonderland, Maxine stayed for fifteen years, until the age of twenty-two, during which period she mastered martial arts and the “Dragon ways” of surviving skills from an old Chinese couple. As soon as she returned home, she went to battle in her father's place, disguising herself as a man like what Fa Mu Lan did. Before leaving, her father and mother carved the words “revenge” and “oaths and names” (WW 34) on her back, echoing the story of tattooing Ngok Fei in the Song Dynasty whose mother carved “repaying the country with supreme loyalty” on his back. However, Kingston transfers the words of Ngok Fei's mother to “revenge” (WW 34) carved on Fa Mu Lan/Maxine's back. The change of the words reveals completely different aims. Ngok Fei's mother inspired her son to be loyal to the government and the emperor, to be a national hero, a patriot, who should devote himself to his emperor and country; whereas what Maxine's parents carved is “revenge,” completely different from that of Mother Ngok. Maxine's mother expects her to avenge for her spite aunts as well as the women oppressed by the patriarchal system.

Kingston creates an androgynous overwhelmingly brave and powerful Maxine/Fa Mu Lan by combining the two figures of Fa Mu Lan and Ngok Fei into the one from the two different times and genders. She led an uprising all the way to Beijing, overthrew the government, killed the emperor and other misogynist barons, liberated the women in prison, and led them as a band of sword women who were forged into a mercenary army. She defeated the enemy completely in the end and started a new era that opened a new page in history for women: “This is a new year, the year one” (WW 45). This new warrior Fa Mu Lan/Maxine is strong and powerful, courageous and skillful in the battle, combining the power both of men and women. Kingston states:

Sinologists have criticized me for not knowing myths and for distorting them.... They don't understand that myths have to change, be useful or be forgotten. Like the people who carry them across oceans, the myths become American. The myths I write are new, American. That's why they often appear as cartoons and kung fu movies. I take the power I need from whatever myth. Thus Fa Mu Lan has the words cut into her back; in the traditional story, it is the man, Ngok Fei the Patriot, whose parents cut vows on his back. I mean to take his power for women. (“Personal Statement” 24)

By strengthening Ngok Fei's power to Fa Mu Lan, Kingston creates a powerful androgynous Chinese American woman warrior.

In addition, the new Maxine/Fa Mu Lan, distorting the traditional Chinese moral code, fell in love with her childhood friend, gave birth to a son during the war, and fought with the baby “inside her big armor” (WW 40). Kingston revises the original legend to give her narrator power and subjectivity. Cheung notes:

More than simply invoking a traditional legend told her by her mother, Maxine projects her own desires onto the warrior. Whereas the original legend celebrates filial piety, Maxine’s fantasy elaborates upon the warrior’s military prowess, sexual exploits, and triumphant vengeance. Furthermore, unlike her prototype, Fa Mu Lan, who is not known to have been tattooed, Maxine-as-warrior has magical words etched onto her back. Since military, sexual, and verbal power are traditionally male prerogatives, the fantasy opens Maxine to unconventional ways of asserting herself. (*Articulate Silences* 86-7)

Kingston revises the traditional legend of Fa Mu Lan to posit a different purpose of fighting. The traditional Fa Mu Lan joins the army firstly to play her gender role as a filial daughter, secondly to fulfill the duty to safeguard the country and the emperor, and thirdly to serve and uphold the social system that has been oppressing women. Whereas Kingston’s new Maxine does not fight against invaders; instead, she fights against the emperor and the barons, the representatives of the patriarchal system, and liberates the female slaves, and enlists them as soldiers/fighters. Kingston’s end goal is to subvert the oppressive patriarchal system and liberate the oppressed women because the “Chinese executed women who disguised themselves as soldiers or students, no matter how bravely they fought or how high they scored on the examinations” (WW 39). For Kingston and all the oppressed women, only after the overthrow of patriarchal system can women be liberated, have a new life, and start their new history and era as human being equal to men.

Furthermore, Kingston’s Maxine/Fa Mu Lan, rather than a national hero who protects her home and defends her country in the original myth, is a “female avenger” (WW 43) of the wrongs committed to No Name Woman and Moon Orchid and a word warrior to “report a crime” (WW 53) against women. This new warrior not only not to safeguard the the emperor and the country, but also uses her sword to kill the emperor and barons to avenge her two spite aunts. In addition, by creating the new woman warrior, Kingston transfers the furious battlefield of sword to the silent war place of words, and now writing is fighting. She uses her pen to write down the tragedies of her aunts and the crime committed to them so that the spite women’s grievance can be open wide. This is also a war, a word war, not a war on the battlefield with swords: “The idioms for *revenge* are ‘report a crime’ and ‘report to

five families.’ The reporting is the vengeance – not the beheading, not the gutting, but the words” (WW 53). Thus, this new Maxine/Fa Mu Lan is not only a woman warrior fighting against patriarchal oppressors in the battlefield but also a word warrior “reporting crime” committed to women in the word war.

Kingston’s re-imagining of Fa Mu Lan challenges and subverts the patriarchal cultures both in traditional China and America; it also blurs the border between genders. Maxine, disguised as a man, breaks through the confinement of the female gender role and fights as valiantly as a male soldier; she becomes a “general” (WW 39) traditionally a position filled by men, which demonstrates her superior power both physically and mentally. In this way, I believe, Kingston asserts that it is the gendered culture that deprives women of the opportunity to develop their talents and abilities and to demonstrate their power and creativity on a par with men. If given the proper environment and liberated from traditional constraints, women can function as well as men in both the public and private spheres. Furthermore, Kingston’s Maxine shifts gender roles easily between masculinity in the public sphere – battlefield and femininity in the private sphere – family: “Wearing my black embroidered wedding coat, I knelt at my parents-in-law’s feet, as I would have done as a bride. ‘My public duties are finished,’ I said. ‘I will stay with you, doing farmwork and housework, and giving you more sons’” (WW 45). It is by transferring gender of Maxine that Kingston negates the imposed definition of femininity and deconstructs the patriarchal ideology of gender structure:

Even more important, they wanted to say this woman went away to war and came back and was not brutalized. She came back and she could be whole. She could still be a woman, a family person and community person. The reason she went to war was to take her father’s place, and when she came back, she took another kind of service: she was changed, and she will change the community by her presence in it. She will raise children and teach them new ways. She was not dehumanized or broken by the war. And so it’s important to figure out how we can do that. How do you come back from a war and then turn back into a beautiful woman? And give that beauty to your family and community? (Moyers 16)

Kingston also adapts Ts’ai Yen’s story and creates a new Ts’ai Yen who is both a sword warrior and word warrior. After she was captured, unlike the prototype who just followed the orders of the Hsing-nu, the new Ts’ai Yen became a brave soldier who volunteered to fight by their side, and she was “desultorily when the fighting was at a distance, and she cut down anyone in her path during the madness of close combat” (WW 208). However, unlike the Hsing-nu women who “were said to be able to birth in the saddle” (ibid), she gave birth on the sand. When she spoke Chinese to

her children, they imitated her with senseless words and laughed. Although the new Ts'ai Yen could live and fight with the Hsing-nu, she could not enjoy their music and tried to avoid the disturbance of it at first. At last, Ts'ai Yen, no where and no ways to escape, had to accept Hsing-nu's music and joined her own voice to the Hsing-nu's music:

Then, out of Ts'ai Yen's tent, which was apart from the others, the barbarians heard a woman's voice singing, as if to her babies, a song so high and clear, it matched the flutes. Ts'ai Yen sang about China and her family there. Her words seem to be Chinese, but the barbarians understood their sadness and anger. Sometimes they thought they could catch barbarian phrases about forever wandering. Her children did not laugh, but eventually sang along when she left her tent to sit by the winter campfires, ringed by barbarians. (WW 208-209)

Kingston revises Ts'ai Yen's story to supply the possibilities of identification for the alienated Brave Orchid and Maxine in the adopted America. Brave Orchid is alienated from the world of white Americans and the world of her American-born children, and Maxine is alienated from the Chinese world of her parents and the world of white Americans. Unlike the prototype who left her husband and children returned to China, both of them do not want to go back to China. To survive and situate the alienated mother and daughter in America, instead of struggling against her Chinese past and her American present, Kingston's Maxine has to seek a path to negotiate her ancestral culture with American reality into a song, in which the Chinese American women's sadness and anger are in it. More importantly, Kingston's new Ts'ai Yen is no longer a passive, sensitive, and plaintive woman whose sheds tears of being homesickness, nor a woman who can only write poems and compose music to voice her sorrow. On the contrary, this Ts'ai Yen is an active, independent, and capable woman, who can grasp her own destiny in her own hands and "translate" the conflicting "barbarians" culture with her Chinese culture to create a hybrid one, within which she can locate her cultural identity.

Kingston's revision breaks on the hold of tradition and vitalizes Chinese American women to construct their subjectivity. However, her adaptation has been attacked by Frank Chin, who perceives her new American story not as a triumph but as a failure of the imagination. Chin, starting from a patriarchal nationalist position and ignoring Chinese American women's double oppression, misunderstands Kingston's feminist motivation, interpretation, and stance. He regards Kingston's writing is unreal and unauthentic, divorced from Chinese culture, and created to curry favor with white Americans, as it "completely escaped the real China and Chinese America into pure white fantasy where nothing is Chinese, nothing is real,

everything is born of pure imagination” (“Come All Ye” 50).

According to Maggie Humm, revision is the powerful slogan of contemporary feminist writing, and feminist revision makes a historical, cultural, and psychic examination of women’s cultural past; it is the exposure of moral values encoded in language (244). Since the traditional myths mark the traditional patriarchal ideology, Kingston has to rewrite them to fit the situation of Chinese American women who are doubly oppressed in the white dominated America. Her revision gets rid of phallo-centrism, stresses women’s autonomy, and integrates the ancestral culture into the new one – Chinese American culture – so that she can locate Maxine a cultural identity. Thus, Kingston’s revision not only re-examines women’s experiences and status in history and links those experiences to contemporary realities, but most importantly, Kingston also creates a new space in which to restore Chinese American women’s erased history, to find their silenced voice, and to form their subjective womanhood. King-Kok Cheung thus confirms Kingston’s interpretation of the work in culture identification: “In reshaping her ancestral past to fit her American present, Kingston is asserting an identity that is neither Chinese nor white American, but distinctively Chinese American. Above all, her departures from the Chinese legends shift the focus from physical prowess to verbal injuries and textual power” (“Don’t Tell” 169). Chinese scholar Jianhua Liu also affirms that, as a Chinese American, Kingston’s rewriting is to “make the past serve the present, adapt Chinese things to foreign needs,” and it expresses her intention to change the stereotyped images of Chinese and women (94).

In addition, Kingston’s revision incardicates the “inter-ethnic harmony” and highlights the cultural integration. The traditional story of Ts’ai Yen’s exile and alienation can only be redeemed by “returning to China, the central Kingdom, the seat of one’s ancestral civilization” (Wong Sau-ling, “Cultural” 34) because she considers Han land as her real homeland. In her poems, she poignantly expresses her anger and humiliation at being made a slave and concubine by the invading nomadic tribe. In contrast, the adapted version highlights Ts’ai Yen’s song in which the conflicting cultures are integrated: the “words” (WW 208) symbolize Chinese culture; the “music” symbolizes American culture; and the “song” (WW 209) that Ts’ai Yen sings is a harmonious combination of the two. King-Kok Cheung notes, “The Chinese version highlights her [Ts’ai Yen’s] eventual return to the Han people. Kingston’s version, by contrast, dramatizes inter-ethnic harmony through the integration of disparate art forms” (*Articulate Silences* 94). On the other hand, by rewriting Ts’ai Yen’s story, Kingston negotiates Maxine a hybrid cultural identity, which champions the dispelling of cultural conflict not by confrontation, but by cultural dialogue, translation, and understanding. Kingston’s exploration of Chinese American women’s

hybrid identity in the in-betweenness is neither Chinese nor American, but the combination of the two. Thus, Kingston's writing "overcomes the given grounds of opposition and opens up a space of translation: a place of hybridity, figuratively speaking, where the construction of a political object that is new, neither the one nor the other" (Bhabha 25).

Indeed, Kingston revision, starting from the stance of feminism, explores the ways of stressing the autonomy and subjectivity of women, dispelling the binary opposition of conflicting genders and cultures, and creating a space to locate Chinese American women's subjecthood and hybrid culture. Responding to Chin's attack, Elaine H. Kim argues that his condemn hurts the progress of women's self-autonomy and intensifies the binary oppositions of genders by believing that his "indisputable status as a pioneering advocate for Asian American literature and culture is undermined by his insistence on a system of binary oppositions that denies women an autonomous subjectivity" ("Such Opposite Creatures" 75).

D. Paradoxes, Transcendence, and Formation of Female Subjectivity in the Site of Family

In *The Woman Warrior*, Kingston unveils the multiple paradoxes of the family that the narrator Maxine encounters. The paradoxes reduce Maxine to confusion, ambivalence, and silence. Hence, Kingston transcends the paradoxes by creating a group of androgynous warrior women and harmonious relationship between different genders and cultures with the Chinese Daoist philosophy of harmony, through which Kingston absorbs the quintessence of traditional Chinese culture and rejects the dross of it and completes Maxine's journey of exploring her female subjectivity.

Family is paradoxical for Chinese immigrants because it imposes the oppression upon the second-generation daughters as the immigrant parents instill their original cultural values in them, which are usually against the ones they accept from the American culture, induces them into confusion, and make them self-split. However, family also functions as the important locus of empowering the daughters and providing them the diverse possibilities of exploring their voice, integrating their split selves, and forming their identity. Thus, family becomes a paradoxical place. Wendy Ho observes:

In part, paradox is the key that opens the way to a more inclusive understanding of a continually transforming world where things are

sometimes one, sometimes many. It confuses the logic of reason, of exclusive binary oppositions as a matter of principle; it encourages flexibility and a willingness to participate in the process of creating and discovering unexpected, surprising meaning. (144)

Indeed, Maxine's family is a such paradoxical place. Amongst the paradoxes that Kingston represents in the work, the first paradox of the family is the mother Brave Orchid, who both oppresses her daughter Maxine with traditional Chinese culture by demanding Maxine to be a chaste daughter and not to disgrace the family as No Name Woman does, and at the same time she protects Maxine from committing the same mistake and being punished. She probably is the aggregate of all paradoxes represented in the family. Raised in traditional Chinese culture in China, Brave Orchid has internalized the patriarchal moral code. To make her daughter to survive in the Chinese American community and the white dominated American society, she has to imbue her daughter with it, and thus she is in collusion with men to abide by the patriarchal principles. To her, No Name Woman's adultery causes both the humiliation of the family and her silent suicide and forever erasure. She thus warns her daughter: "Don't humiliate us. You wouldn't like to be forgotten as if you had never been born. The villagers are watchful" (*WW* 5). Her aim of telling the story of No Name Woman to her daughter is to warn Maxine not to make the same mistake; if Maxine were to do what her aunt had done, she would be punished and erased as well. Moreover, Brave Orchid's admonition is also another paradox that serves both to warn and to protect Maxine. On the one hand, the warning reveals how desperately she wants to instill in her daughter the values of the traditional culture so that she can grow up a virginal, respectful, and honorable woman, and in this way Brave Orchid becomes a thorough apologist for the traditional Chinese morality and principles; on the other hand, the warning is also meant to protect her daughter. Brave Orchid has witnessed in person the consequences of the isolation of No Name Woman, her violent death, and permanent erasure, if it were not meant for her daughter to draw a lesson from it, she would not tell her the shameful story since "domestic shame should not be made public."

The second paradox is that Brave Orchid not only requests Maxine to become an ordinary girl and a wife who should not receive much education, but also tells her the stories of Fa Mu Lan, Ts'ai Yen, and Ngok Fei, who are the outstanding historical heroine, poet and musician, and national hero, to empower and inspire Maxine to be a warrior woman, as Maxine notes:

After I grew up, I heard the chant of Fa Mu Lan, the girl who took her father's place in battle. Instantly I remembered that as a child I had

followed my mother about the house, the two of us singing about how Fa Mu Lan fought gloriously and returned alive from war to settle in the village. I had forgotten this chant that was once mine, given me by my mother, who may not have known its power to remind. She said I would grow up a wife and a slave, but she taught me the song of the warrior woman, Fa Mu Lan. I would have to grow up a warrior woman. (WW 20)

The next paradox is the traditional Chinese culture that Maxine inherits from the immigrant family. This culture, on the one hand, is a patriarchal one oppressing women such as No Name Woman and Moon Orchid. No Name Woman is forced to commit suicide because of her adultery, and Moon Orchid is a submissive victim who has been forged by traditional culture into a docile woman and the model of the “three obediences” and “four virtues.” On the other hand, it is the same Chinese culture that fostered the woman warriors of Fa Mu Lan, Ts’ai Yen, as well as Brave Orchid herself.

The paradoxes of Chinese American immigrant family are actually the externalizations of the conflicting cultures and the binary oppositions of genders. To transcend the paradoxes, Kingston, inheriting the harmonious philosophy of Chinese Daoism, explores the unique possible solutions by creating a group of androgynous woman warriors who are combined both the traits of masculinity and femininity and two couples who are in a very harmonious relationship.

The word “androgyny” originates from the Greek words andro (male) and gyny (female), which together describe a psychological and psychic mixture of traditional masculine and feminine virtues. Androgyny, as a blending of gender traits, may be the best term to describe male and female hybridizations, by which masculinity and femininity are not conceived as binary opposites, but as two separate objects combined in one person. Virginia Woolf used to say that the brightest people are the most androgynous. To dispel the binary oppositions of gender and culture and to establish the subjective identity for the oppressed and marginalized women both in China and America, Kingston creates a group of warrior women and two couples embodying those androgynous traits to exemplify the solution of the issues.

The first androgynous warrior woman is No Name Woman. According to one of Kingston’s interpretations, No Name Woman is the pioneer of the narrator Maxine who possesses the female’s perseverance and male’s bravery. As a female, she is loyal to her love and dares to break the taboo and to pursue her true love and happiness by committing adultery despite the most rigorous patriarchal sanctions; meanwhile, she is heroic, and she dares to act and to bear responsibilities. To protect her lover, she refuses to disclose his name; she would rather die by jumping into the family well with her newly-born daughter than betray her love. Thus, Kingston

reconfigures No Name Woman as a subjective woman challenging her social institution, breaking the moral taboo, and becoming Maxine's "forerunner" (WW 8). The image of No Name Woman subverts the stereotyped Chinese submissive women.

The second androgynous warrior whom Kingston creates is Fa Mu Lan. Actually the prototype is an androgynous heroin. Disguising herself as a man, Fa Mu Lan goes to fight bravely in her father's place and performs outstanding military exploits. The new Fa Mu Lan, instead of fighting for the emperor and defending the country, kills the emperor and the barons who degrade and oppress women, frees the women in prison, and organizes those liberated women into army to fight for the liberation of the more oppressed women. She follows her forerunner No Name Woman who pursues true love falls in love with her childhood boy friend in the army, even gives birth to a son in the camp, and puts the baby into her bosom when she is leading her soldiers to fight during the battle. After the war is over, she returns home to play a "normal" gender role as a daughter-in-law, wife, and mother. Of course after the fight baptism, this returning woman is different from the one before the war, and she is more determined and strategic to fight against sexism and racism.

The third androgynous warrior woman is Ts'ai Yen, who is both a sword warrior in battle fighting bravely with the "barbarians" and word warrior articulating her voice in her song and writing. As a sword warrior, this Ts'ai Yen puts up a fearless fight in the battle field and gives birth on the sand, unlike the women in the China on bed and the barbarian women in the saddle, and this place is the in-betweenness, which symbolizes the space that Chinese American women situate. On the other hand, The gentle and silent poet and musician in the original story now becomes a word warrior who breaks her silence with a "high and clear" (WW 209) song filled with her grief and indignation to be heard by the barbarians, "Ts'ai Yen sang about China and her family there. Her words seemed to be Chinese, but the barbarians understood their sadness and anger.... Her children did not laugh, but eventually sang along when she left her tent to sit by the winter campfires, ringed by barbarians" (ibid). Ts'ai Yen's song is an articulation of her "sadness and anger" and is also her high and clear voice to notify the "barbarians" and to claim their rights as a Chinese American woman. The song is also the integration and hybridity of the cultures, which has been confusing and tangling her. In addition, this created Ts'ai Yen is not only a poet, but also a story-teller who can "report crimes" and avenge for oppressed women: "Here is a story my mother told me, not when I was young, but recently, when I told her I also talk story. The beginning is hers, the ending, mine" (WW 206). Combining the characteristics of both a fighter and writer, Ts'ai Yen thus becomes an androgynous warrior woman. By adapting this character, Kingston implies that the American-born second-generation Chinese women who have been influenced by both Chinese and American

cultures should absorb the essence of the both, resolve the conflicts and dualities, and create a new culture in which they locate themselves.

The fourth androgynous figure is Maxine's mother, Brave Orchid who plays the gender role of both a woman and man. On the one hand, Brave Orchid, as her name indicates, is a courageous and strong woman, a powerful Shaman endowed with both femininity and masculinity. When in China, she defied the traditional code by attending a medical school and became a midwife. On the other hand, she also plays a male gender role. In America, while nurturing her six children, she works side by side with her husband in the family laundry to support the family. Even in her seventies, she still does part-time jobs to earn money to support her relatives in China. Most importantly, she empowers her daughter by talking-stories to inspire Maxine to be a warrior woman.

The fifth androgynous warrior created by Kingston is the Chinese old woman, the martial arts instructor. First of all, she is an independent female, free from the restraints of traditional patriarchal culture. She both plays her female gender role as a woman and a male gender role as a martial arts instructor. Moreover, she never oppresses Maxine with patriarchal values as Brave Orchid does; on the contrary, she encourages Maxine to learn the living skills as an independent female by taking dragon lessons, taking survival tests, and learning martial arts to become a strong woman. She also teaches Maxine to understand the conflicting world, the paradoxes existing in her family, as Maxine admits, "I learn to make my mind large, as the universe is large, so that there is room for paradoxes" (WW 29). In some sense, this androgynous old woman in the fantasy world becomes Maxine's surrogate mother during the whole process of her coming of age and influences her a lot when her mother Brave Orchid sometimes is too oppressive to her in the immigrant family.

Lastly, after portraying a series of warrior women, Kingston creates a woman warrior by synthesizing all the women's virtues as well as male's into the character of the narrator Maxine: the rebelling spirit of No Name Woman, the powerful and fearlessness Shaman – Brave Orchid, the brave and skillful Fa Mu Lan endowed with civil and martial virtues, the poet and musician Ts'ai Yan, the independent female martial arts instructor, and the masculinity of national hero Yueh Fei. The merits or traits of the other characters are just like the separate pearls, and the female subjecthood is the thread to string the pearls together and to become a beautiful necklace – Maxine, who is the concentrated dazzling and strong woman warrior. In this autobiographical work, Kingston traces the narrator's growth to her internal conflicts and struggle with the paradoxes around her and establishes her female selfhood. She begins the narrator's journey starting from the tragedy of No Name Woman and Moon Orchid, who had no voice and were erased, all the way to the negotiation and integration of the two conflicting cultures, and finally finds her voice and becomes a strong

and powerful woman warrior fighting racial and sexual discrimination in America as a Chinese American woman writer.

In the creation of the series androgynous woman warriors and the aggregation Maxine, Kingston explores the possibilities of dispelling the binary oppositions of gender and culture and of constructing Chinese American female subjectivity. Meanwhile, Kingston also creates two harmonious couples of androgynous gender aggregation – the old couple who teach Maxine martial arts and Maxine and her husband – to exemplify the solution to the binary oppositions of genders. The first couple is the old woman and man who are so harmonious and equal in their relationship. Kingston depicts the old couple:

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

The beautiful, harmonious, and dynamic picture of the old couple's dancing looks like an integral whole from a distance, whose actions are in perfect harmony; and to see in close distance, the whole is formed by two independent individuals who are interdependent, like brother and sister, friends and lovers. The dancing picture also reveals that there is no subject and no object, no superior and inferior, but coexistence in the dancers' position. Through the image of the old couple, Kingston demonstrates her ideal of a co-existing androgynous gender relationship between husband and wife, between any two men and women, which deconstructs the traditional binary opposites.

Kingston also depicts this harmony in the relationship between Maxine and her husband in the following aspects. Firstly, different from describing the old couple to whom Kingston applies less words on their detail life, she adds romance to Maxine and her husband's love: "And there in the sunlight stood my husband with arms full of wildflowers for me. 'You are beautiful,' he said, and meant that" (WW 39), which shows that they are telesthesia. Secondly, they are the partners fighting for their

common ideals shoulder to shoulder: “We rode side by side into battle” (ibid), which reveals that they are like-minded and have a common goal to fight to. In addition, they support each other in career and can freely change their gender roles when in need. For example, after their son was born, her husband brings the baby back home so that Maxine can lead the army to fight without concerning for her son. They love and support each other and become a harmonious unit in which each part is equal, independent, and indispensable.

It is quite clear, to Kingston, that the male and female are both independent and interdependent, mutually subjective and objective, and in a permanent mutual movement; their harmonious relationship brings about a coordinated development in society. Kingston wishes to construct a society in which the binary opposition of genders does not go to extremes, which would destroy the harmony of the society and hinder its development. She asserts for the harmony of the sexes and tries to construct an androgynous gender structure that would exemplify the solution to broader gender issues.

Kingston’s creation of androgynous woman warriors and two harmonious couples of androgynous gender aggregation is a contribution to feminism to free from the oppressed and ethnic women in the world. Her construction of Chinese American daughter Maxine’s androgynous identity and of the harmonious couples in her work is realistic and significant because it supplies a valid solution to the issues of binary oppositions of conflicting genders and cultures; Maxine and the couples are the examples of identification for other women.

Kingston’s writing highlights the subjecthood of Chinese and Chinese American women, which stands in contrast to the male writings that justify the subjectivity of male characters and objectivity of female characters, and in this regard many Asian American male critics condemn Kingston for manifesting and upholding Chinese American female subjectivity and attacking traditional Chinese patriarchal ideology. It is ironic that Chin and other male critics have been desperately trying to restore the Asian/Chinese American manhood castrated by white American culture and to restore the erased history of Asian/Chinese Americans, yet they attack Kingston’s articulation of the marginalized and silenced Chinese American women’s voice and her construction of the female subjectivity. From the vantage point of male chauvinism, patriarchal ideology, and nationalism, Frank Chin and other male critics ignore women’s inferior circumstances, cannot see the frustration in their experiences as women or Chinese American women, cannot hear their further and deeper “Aiiieeee,” and cannot understand Kingston’s feminist voice or her exploration of a subjective female identity. Thus, Kingston’s work has been attacked by critics such as Frank Chin for “distorting” Chinese myths and

“devaluing” Chinese American manhood:

With Kingston’s autobiographical [*The*] *Woman Warrior*, we have given up even the pretence of reporting from the real world. Chinese culture is so cruel and she is so helpless against its overwhelming cruelty that she lives entirely in her imagination. It is an imagination informed only by the stereotype communicated to her through the Christian Chinese American autobiography.... All that is left is the sensibility they produced, the racist mind from which comes the voice of Maxine Hong Kingston.... [N]othing is Chinese, nothing is real. (“Come All Ye” 26, 50)

Likewise, Stephen Sumida reproaches Kingston for attacking only sexism but not racism, with the remark that she concerns herself only with “male chauvinism in Chinese America, and not the chauvinism and xenophobia of the America that created the bachelor society by excluding Chinese women” (220). Benjamin Tong indicts Kingston as well for catering to a white readership, insisting that *The Woman Warrior* is “a fashionably feminist work written for white acceptance in mind” (6). Sheng-mei Ma condemns Kingston’s Orientalist stance that estranges itself from China and Chinese culture to assimilate into mainstream white culture: Kingston “actively Orientalizes Chinese to establish Chinese Americans as a people apart and distinct from alien immigrants” (34).

Echoing the Asian American male critics, some scholars in China also criticize Kingston for condemning traditional Chinese patriarchal culture. Guanglin Wang accuses Kingston of neglecting the patriarchal oppression in America and enforcing the western Orientalist stereotypes of China constructed and perpetuated for centuries (139). Wei Lu, following Sumida, argues that Kingston’s writing does not resist racism and addresses itself only to sexism (*Chinese American Literature* 121). Pingping Shi endorsing the male critics, perceives that Kingston sacrifices Chinese culture to achieve her feminism: “Although guilty of pushing their androcentric Asian American nationalist agenda at the sacrifice of Asian American feminist concerns, the Chinese American male critics are certainly right in condemning the condescension of cultural colonialism implicit in white feminists’ critical acclaim of Kingston’s work” (58).

Deeply rooted in nationalist ideology, Ruoqian Pu asserts that Kingston’s anger “conceals racial self-hatred” and that her feminist representation “becomes the opposite of Chinese American ethnic politics” (198). Juxtaposing Maxine Hong Kingston and other Chinese American women writers in her analysis, Ruoqian Pu further asserts:

Because they have been receiving the dominant education of American strong culture, Chinese American women writers involuntarily copy the

Orientalist stare of American strong culture to examine China and Chinese culture; therefore, when they strive perseveringly for feminism, they distort or betray their ethnicity; consequently, they have not completed their Chinese American women's construction of independent and free subjective identities. (199)

In short, the critics abroad and at home are either gender blind or hold to a narrow nationalist stance. They fail to appreciate Kingston's representation of gender inequality in both Chinese and American society, fail to hear her articulation of the voices of the silenced women, and fail to see Kingston's unique way of constructing Chinese American women's female subjectivity by "distorting and betraying" Chinese culture.

The critique above is clearly invalid. Kingston only denies the part of traditional Chinese patriarchal culture oppressing women and valorizes the essence of the Chinese philosophy of harmony in her creation of an androgynous warrior woman and harmonious gender relationship. Kingston's creation of the harmonious couples interprets, carries forward, and broadens the essence of the Chinese Daoist philosophy of harmony between individuals, community, and society. Chinese culture upholds harmony and moderation and emphasizes the harmony of the entirety. In the ethics of Daoism, everything coexists with its opposite. The solitary Yin (female) cannot exist without Yang (male), and the solitary Yang cannot grow without Yin because Yin and Yang keep their internal balance; they grow and develop together without harming one another. Harmony might well be explained by Chinese Tai Chi symbol of Taoism:



Chinese Yin and Yang Tai Chi Symbol²¹

²¹For further information, see "Chinese Yin and Yang Tai Chi Symbol." 26 Feb. 2011<[http://images. search.yahoo. com/search/images?_adv_prop=image&fr=yfp-t-701&va=tai+chi+symbol](http://images.search.yahoo.com/search/images?_adv_prop=image&fr=yfp-t-701&va=tai+chi+symbol)>.

Thus Tai Chi is conceived as the highest principle from which existence flows. In the symbol, Yin is black and Yang is white, and the two inner dots represent Yin within Yang and Yang within Yin. The Tai Chi symbol is the simplest and most beautiful and harmonious picture, the epitome of the contents of the cosmos, life, energy, and movement. The harmonious relationship is resembled by the double fish linked together in the Tai Chi symbol. Furthermore, the Tai Chi symbol also represents the mystery of the universe's composition. The s-curve between them dynamically symbolizes that the divided parts are mutually dependent, waxing and waning, and transforming. Yin and Yang, divided by this curve, are complementary and in symbiosis. In addition, Tai Chi also reflects the Confucious philosophy of the "golden mean," or "happy medium," which is the desirable middle between two extremes. Confucius was the first to put forward clearly the golden mean concept and to regard it as the highest ethic. The golden mean is the philosophy underlying objective and unbiased justice. Confucius used to say that all living creatures grow together without harming one another; ways run parallel without interfering with one another. Balance is the quintessence of the golden mean philosophy, and it embodies the rational spirit that "going too far is as bad as not going far enough."

Accordingly, Kingston's creation of the two harmonious couples originates from the philosophies of Chinese Confucianism and Daoism. Kingston, as a Chinese American who has been educated and influenced by her parents since she was born, interweaves Chinese cultural elements in not only *The Woman Warrior*, but also in her *China Men* (1981), *Tripmaster Monkey: His Fake Book* (1989), and *The Fifth Book of Peace* (2003), and Particularly in *The Fifth Book of Peace*, she either explores the theme of peace and harmony or the form of the book by naming the chapters with "Fire," "Paper," "Wood," and "Earth." She herself claims that she uses the thoughts of the traditional Chinese ideology. In an interview with Te-hsing Shan, a Chinese American critic from Taiwan, answering Shan's question of whether the chapter names in her *The Fifth Book of Peace* are related with Buddhist cosmology, or the Theory of Five Elements (gold, wood, water, fire, and earth) in Daoist cosmology, Kingston asserts, "Yes, I thought of those elements when I was writing" (133). She further emphasizes that peace is her greatest concern which can be a better communicating way and can establish a "beautiful community" (ibid). Furthermore, Leslie W. Rabine clearly points out that the old couple in *The Woman Warrior* reminds people of the "Yin" and "Yang" in the Daoist Tai Chi Symbol who are in the permanent movement, and the movement will causes other series movement, and the Yin and Yang "resemble two fishes seeming like one, one fish's tail fusing into the other one's head and thus the two fishes sharing an equal footing" (89). Also,

Chinese scholar Qiong Zhang insists that Maxine Hong Kingston as well as Amy Tan mainly represent Chinese culture and civilization both in the themes and contents of their works (275). Lastly, Yingguo Xu also asserts that in Kingston's writing "she puts into use of Daoism, Confucianism, and Buddhism" (99). Therefore, Kingston's writing does not distort and devalue Chinese culture; on the contrary, she transmits and propagates the philosophy of harmony, the essence of Chinese culture. Most importantly, Kingston establishes a harmonious relationship between male and female in the family as well as in the society by adapting Fa Mu Lan's story, which reflects, values, and propagates the Chinese Daoist philosophy of harmony. As the "Chinese Yin and Yang Tai Chi Symbol" illustrated, under the influence of Daoist harmony, Kingston constructs a harmonious gender relationship in which male and female can interdependently coexist and promote mutual development. It can be concluded that Kingston does not falsify Chinese myth; instead, she makes the past serve the present, propagates Chinese culture to America as well as the world, and contributes to the solution of gender issues.

Actually, Kingston's feminist construction of Chinese/Asian American female subjecthood parallels the efforts of Chin and the other male writers to reconstruct Chinese/Asian manhood and masculinity. Their respective writings constitute a Chinese/Asian American literature that can focus the forces of resistance against white racial discrimination. More importantly, all their writings contribute to the multiplicity and development of American literature. Cheung asserts:

Utlawed" groups that use what Foucault calls " 'reverse' discourse" need to exercise caution when they demand legitimacy "in the same vocabulary, using the same categories by which [they were] disqualified" (1976/1980, 101). For instance, men of color have been accused—and sometimes been guilty—of refuting effeminate stereotypes by embracing machismo, of reclaiming "manhood" by muffling women. Those who have suffered "emasculatation" should know the frustration of women who have long been denied male perquisites. They could learn to dismantle white supremacy and male supremacy simultaneously. (171-2)

Moreover, Kingston not only criticizes the sexists but also portrays the men who treat women equally by depicting two positive male characters. One is her surrogate father who trains her and teaches her martial arts together with his female partner in the "White Tigers." The gentle male forms an equal and harmonious

relationship with his partner in which he is not the dominant master, but an equal and independent partner. He constructs a harmonious community in his family in where he and his partner are interdependent and mutually respect and love each other. Another ideal male portrayed by Kingston is Maxine's husband who is either her devoted lover or a battle companion fighting side by side with her. He is her childhood playmate and follows her to the army in where they fall in love and get married. He is a person who knows where his loyalty belongs. After their son was born, he takes the boy away from Maxine to make her devotedly in command of her army to fight against enemies and then return to the battle to support and fight with her. They are equal lovers in life and the strong supporters in cause. The image of him shows Kingston's pursuit of an ideal gender relationship between a husband and wife in marriage.

Relating to the critique from Frank Chin and other male critics for "distorting" Chinese myths of Fa Mu Lan, Ts'ai Yen, and Ngok Fei, I would argue that Kingston's revision not only creates a new androgynous role model for all the oppressed women but also promotes Chinese culture to the West. Firstly, Kingston creates a new image of woman warrior to fight against sexism and racism. Fa Mu Lan in the original legend is a heroine who serves the country by disguising herself as a male soldier to take her father's place in the army to fulfill her filial duty. She goes to help prevent national calamity from the foreign invasion, and fights to strengthen the rule of the emperor; therefore, she is a guardian and defender of her country. Although she crosses the boundary of male and female and breaks the order of genders, she gains special permission and approval by His Majesty and patriarchal culture, and becomes a national heroine. Different from the original Fa Mu Lan in the legend, Kingston's new Fa Mu Lan becomes the gravedigger and undertaker of the patriarchal system and the fighter for the rights of the repressed women. Kingston reveals her purpose of avenging for women by curving "revenge" and writing out "oaths and names" (WW 34) on Maxine's back instead of the words of "repaying the country with supreme loyalty" that the national hero and patriot Ngok Fei's mother curves on his back. She kills the emperor and barons who devalue and oppress women, releases the imprisoned women and slave girls, and organizes the disowned women in her army to fight against the women oppressors. The purpose of her fighting is to equalize and liberate the repressed women. Thus, Kingston has to revise the original Chinese legend into an American one to serve her purpose of constructing the protagonist

Maxine's female identity in America.

In addition, by revising the legends of Fa Mu Lan and Ts'ai Yen, Kingston creates a powerful androgynous warrior woman who is both endowed with civil and martial virtues and can freely cross over the public and private spheres. First of all, she combines Fa Mu Lan's powerful spirit of sword warrior with Ts'ai Yen's literary quality of pen warrior. To Kingston, if a woman wants to be an independent female self, she must become refined internally and externally, such as Maxine who goes to the "White Tigers" to learn the martial arts; meanwhile, she has to become a person combining both masculinity and femininity. Secondly, Kingston also revises Ts'ai Yen's story to make the poet and musician into an androgynous warrior like Fa Mu Lan. The original Ts'ai Yen can only write poems and play musical instruments. However, Kingston also makes the new Ts'ai Yen into a fighter in the battle: "Ts'ai Yen fought desultorily when the fighting was at a distance, and she cut down anyone in her path during the madness of close combat" (WW 208). In so doing, Ts'ai Yen becomes an androgynous warrior woman. Thirdly, in the newly created Fa Mu Lan – Maxine is a warrior woman who breaks the gender structure defined by patriarchal culture. After she finishes her public duty as a general in the army, she returns to home to play her female gender role as an ordinary woman, "I went home to my parents-in-law and husband and son.... Wearing my black embroidered wedding coat, I knelt at my parents-in-law's feet, as I would have done as a bride. 'Now my public duties are finished,' I said. 'I will stay with you, doing farmwork and housework, and giving you more sons'" (WW 45). By crossing over the gender line, Kingston demonstrates her insightful thought on the gender issue: to dispel the binary opposition of genders instead of strengthening it. Therefore, Kingston's creation of androgynous warrior woman subverts the patriarchal order and dispels the perpetuated gender structure.

Thirdly, by adapting Ts'ai Yen's story, Kingston dispels the culture binary opposites between China and America. To begin with, although both Ts'ai Yen and Maxine live in the "barbarian" land, Ts'ai Yen returns to China and Maxine cannot. Ts'ai Yen was ransomed to the central China and finished her exile, and she became a Chinese again; whereas Maxine, as a diasporan, has to locate herself in America. She can only live in the adopted country – America where she was born and where her family is. Although she feels isolated and repressed, she has no alternative, and she has to become stronger so that she can fight against sexism and racism. In this

dilemma, as a Chinese American woman, Maxine has to defuse the conflicting cultures and integrate them just as what the new Ts'ai Yen does – singing a high song together with the barbarian's flute through which she forms her cultural identity by integrating Chinese and American cultures within her.

Lastly, Kingston's adaption of traditional Chinese legends does not falsify the traditional Chinese culture but exactly propagates Chinese culture. The adaption of the myths of Fa Mu Lan and Ts'ai Yen shows that the great and profound ancient Chinese civilization not only has contributed the four major inventions – the compass, gunpowder, paper-making, and movable-type printing – to the rest of the world, but also has bred the sword woman warrior Fa Mu Lan in the Southern and Northern Dynasties (420-589) who fought bravely and skillfully in battle, and the pen woman warrior Ts'ai Yen in the end of the Eastern Han Dynasty (25-220) and the Three Kingdoms Period (220-280) who was a poet and gifted at music.

Then next criticism is that Kingston condemns only sexual discrimination but neglects resisting against racial discrimination. Indeed, in *The Woman Warrior*, Kingston represents more patriarchal oppression to women than the racial discrimination from the white American society. Since it is the stories of women, it is very understandable that the gender issue is the crucial concern for Kingston, and what Kingston cares about most is how to change women's subordinate position and to find a way to live equally, independently, and respectfully. Nonetheless, as an ethnic female writer, Kingston also concerns the racial issue. For example, when Maxine works in an art supply house, the boss calls her "nigger yellow" and she fights back: "I don't like that word" (WW 48); when she works at a land developer's association, in order to support the activities organized by CORE and NAACP, she refuses the work assigned by the white boss: "I refuse to type these invitations" (WW 49), and she loses her job because of it. Although she raises gender issues much more in *The Woman Warrior*, Kingston brings forth racial issues in *China Men* (1980), four years after the publication of *The Woman Warrior*, in which she expresses her anger against racial discrimination from the American government and white Americans to Chinese immigrants. In this work, the racial issue is the most important concern and she describes Chinese American men's life experiences, their social status in the white dominant society, and their contribution to the development of American society from the history. Thus, as an ethnic female writer, Kingston concerns the issues of both gender and race.

Kingston's feminist representation presents the reality of women in China in the 1920s and 1930s and the situation of Chinese American women in America at present, and reveals the necessity for a woman to have her own name and voice and to acquire the power of existing independently as an equal human living in the world. Through the stories of Maxine, No Name Woman and Moon Orchid, Kingston brings home the fact that Chinese women as well as Chinese American women suffer double oppression – sexual and racial – and live at the bottom or the margin of the society. They are what Gayatri C. Spivak calls the “subalterns,” marked out by the “epistemic violence” – the discrimination of both patriarchal culture and the dominant white culture – in her analysis of the subjective sovereignty of imperialism. She stresses that “in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow” (28), and she thus asks the question “Can the subaltern speak?” Kingston's writing, by making women the “subject[s] of insurgency” (ibid) and “reporting” women's sufferings and grievances, breaks the imposed silences and makes the “subalterns” speak!

Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* is a female bildungsroman in which the narrator Maxine explores her female subjectivity, comes of age, finds her voice, and establishes her identity as a Chinese American woman by sorting out and transcending the multiple paradoxes of her Chinese American family. Kingston herself also asserts that her creative work “is a new autobiography form that truly tells the inner life of women and I do think it's especially important for minority people, because we're always on the brink of disappearing” (Kingston, “Interview” 786). Kingston creates a series of warrior women to defy the traditional Chinese patriarchal culture and American racial prejudice by interpreting and translating Chinese myth. Michael M. J. Fischer notes that Kingston's reinvention of the woman warrior explores the “paradoxical sense that ethnicity is something reinvented and reinterpreted in each generation by each individual and that is often something quite puzzling to the individual... there is no role model for becoming Chinese American. It is a matter of finding a voice or style that does not violate one's several components of identity” (195-6). In deed, *The Woman Warrior* is a journey of a Chinese American girl Maxine defines her selfhood, explores her voice, and establishes her subjective identity as a Chinese American writer intertwined with double oppression of race and gender, as Collins notes in the discussion of African American women's journey of finding their identity:

This journey toward self-definition has political significance.... Identity is not the goal but rather the point of departure in the process of self-definition. In this process Black women journey toward an

understanding of how our personal lives have been fundamentally shaped by interlocking systems of race, gender, and class oppression. (106)

In conclusion, in *The Woman Warrior* explores Kingston represents that Chinese immigrant family is a space of oppression, in which family and clan function as agents of monitoring and punishing women who violate the patriarchal norm. At the same time, through the stories of Maxine and her forerunner No Name Woman, Kingston also expresses that family is a site of resistance to the oppression. Furthermore, by the mother's talking-stories Kingston underscores family's role as a locus of empowerment. Last of all, family is a site of transcending paradoxes and of forming the subjecthood of Chinese American warrior women.

III. Amy Tan: Expectation, Exploration, Empowerment, and Formation of Female Subjecthood

Maxine Hong Kingston finds inspiration in Jade Snow Wong's *Fifth Chinese Daughter* and develops her story of a Chinese American woman into a journey of finding her voice and exploring her female subjectivity. Amy Tan, in turn, draws inspiration from Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* and creates *The Joy Luck Club* (1989), which depicts the stories of four pairs of mothers and daughters who form their female subjectivity: "A friend gave me *The Woman Warrior* and I devoured it in one sitting I felt amazed and proud that somebody could have written this" (qtd. in Ho 44). Tan's work is thus viewed as a continuation of the rich traditions of both Wong and Kingston in Chinese American women's literature.

Historically, the literary world has been dominated by male writers, and women occupied a relatively limited space. In male writings, the protagonists have typically been male; stories of fathers and sons have been well represented, in which masculinity and power are fully revealed. In contrast, women have been cast as supporting, secondary characters, as objects, and often depicted either as obedient angels, dutiful wives and good loving mothers, or cruel witches, ugly, evil, and deceiving. Women characters have been devalued and rendered unimportant and docile figures in the hands of male writers; they are almost never represented as the subjects of the stories, not to mention the stories that center on women as protagonists. Observing the writings written by both male and female writers in Asian American literature, Elaine H. Kim asserts:

Women, both white and Asian, are objectified in Asian American men's writings, which are concerned with defining Asian men as subjects and recuperating their identity as Americans. In the women's work, it is the female characters who strive, and sometimes they win. Their heroic reconstruction is accomplished without or despite the men. The placement of men in secondary roles except insofar as they obstruct the pursuit of a self-determined identity for the women is in keeping with the modern feminist call for the examination of female self and subjectivity. ("Such Opposite Creatures" 70)

In this regard, Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* offers a thorough subversion of male narration by creating a chorus with eight female protagonists.

Amy Tan was born in Oakland, California in 1952, the second of three children

born to Chinese immigrant parents: Daisy, who was the daughter of an upper-class family in Shanghai, was forced to leave behind her three daughters from a previous marriage in Shanghai and John Tan, an electrical engineer and Baptist minister. Throughout her childhood, Tan struggled to reconcile her parents' desire to hold onto Chinese traditions and her own longings to become Americanized. Her parents wanted Tan to become a neurosurgeon, but she wanted to become a fiction writer. When Tan was 15 years old, her older brother Peter and father died from brain tumors within a year of each other. Daisy moved Amy Tan and her younger brother to Switzerland, where she finished high school. She went to San Jose State University, where she earned bachelor's and master's degrees in English and Linguistics, and later did doctoral studies in linguistics at UC Santa Cruz and UC Berkeley. She resides in Sausalito, California with her husband Louis DeMattei, a tax attorney whom she met on a blind date and married in 1974.²²

Tan is a prolific writer. She published her debut work *The Joy Luck Club* in 1989, which caused a great sensation in the American literary world and laid the foundation for her successful writing career. Subsequent works include *The Kitchen God's Wife* (1991), *The Hundred Secret Senses* (1995), *The Bonesetter's Daughter* (2001), *Saving Fish from Drowning* (2005), and *The Valley of Amazement* (2013). Tan also wrote two children's books: *The Moon Lady* (1992) and *Sagwa, the Chinese Siamese Cat* (1994). She has also contributed to the non-fiction genre: *The Opposite of Fate: A Book of Musings* (2003), *Mid-Life Confidential: The Rock Bottom Remainers Tour America With Three Cords and an Attitude* (1994), *Mother* (1996), and *The Best American Short Stories 1999* (1999).

In *The Joy Luck Club*, Amy Tan tells the stories of four Chinese American immigrant families in San Francisco who start a club called The Joy Luck Club playing the Chinese game Mahjong while feasting delicious food in turn in each family. Focusing on the four pairs of Chinese American mothers and daughters, the stories begin with conflicts and end in reconciliation, which represent the complicated mother-daughter relationship. As a continuation and expansion of Kingston's feminist representation on the mother-daughter plot, *The Joy Luck Club* depicts the stories of Chinese-born mothers who try to imbue their daughters with the "Chinese character" and hold high expectations for their daughters to become someones who achieve great success in "American circumstances." While the American-born daughters reject their mothers' expectations and fight for their autonomy, the daughters finally form their female subjectivities empowered by their mothers' talking-stories in the site of the family. The four mothers become bridges

²² The personal information on Amy Tan is derived from E. D. Huntley's "The Life of Amy Tan" in her *Amy Tan: A Critical Companion*.

that connect the past with the present, China with America, and their own mothers in China with their American-born daughters in America.

The Joy Luck Club consists of four parts and sixteen sub-stories, with four stories in each part, respectively narrated by four pairs of mothers and daughters from the Woo, Hsu, Jong, and St. Clair families. To highlight the importance of each female character, Tan makes each of the eight women the protagonist of her story. Just as in playing mahjong, each of the four players takes turns as dealer, and they all tell their stories in the first person “I,” giving the work the shape of an autobiography but also revealing the author’s emphasis on women’s subjectivity; hence, the work is “in parts an echo and a response and in parts a continuation and expansion of Kingston’s book” (Ling, *Between Worlds* 130). More importantly, in talking “my” story, each of the eight women has her voice to speak for herself, particularly the mothers, to awaken and inspire the lost daughters in dilemma, break the silence to reveal their own sorrow past taking place in China to the daughters, and it is through the talking-stories that the daughters understand their mothers and their good intention, reconcile with their mothers, and finally identify themselves. In doing so, both the mothers and daughters become the vocal subjects, as Hirsch notes, “Through the voices of daughters, speaking for the mothers, through the voices of mothers speaking for themselves and their daughters, and, eventually perhaps, through the voices of mothers and daughters speaking to each other ... the plots of mothers and daughters do not remain unspeakable” (*Mother/Daughter Plot* 8).

The work achieved both commercial and literary success as soon as it was published. According to Wendy Ho, *The Joy Luck Club* “was the longest running hardcover on *The New York Times* bestseller list (34 weeks), and was on the paperback list for another nine months” (44). It won the 1989 Bay Area Book Review Award for new fiction, the Commonwealth Club Gold Award for fiction, the Best Book for Young Adults Award from the American Library Association, and was nominated for the National Book Critics Circle Award for best fiction and for a Los Angeles Times Book Award. In 1993, Tan coauthored the screenplay for *The Joy Luck Club* which was made into a critically acclaimed film. The book has been translated into more than twenty languages.

The Joy Luck Club has received diverse criticism from both America and China, focusing on the following aspects: narration, the mother-daughter relationships, and cultural identity construction, etc.. E. D. Huntley contributes a thorough survey of the work to discuss Tan’s narration, exploring the “critical issues by presenting multiple perspectives in parallel and intersecting narratives” (32). Ben Xu, in “Memory and the Ethnic Self: Reading Amy Tan’s *The Joy Luck Club*,” discusses the role of memory in the construction of the Chinese American women’s ethnic identity

by examining the conflict between the two generations and the existential unrepeatability that separates them, the complexity of the operations of memory, and the recollection and narration of the past related to a present sense of ethnic identity (3). Gloria Shen also studies the connection between the narrative strategy and the relationship between the mothers and daughters (233).

In China, there are two scholars studying Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* from the same perspective. Guichang Li examines the narrative structure and cultural identification, and perceives that it is a family narrative in which Tan locates the generation gap and resistance in the context of two cultures (225). Similarly, Qiong Zhang also probes the family narration and argues that cultural characteristics can be read from kinship relations (205). She claims that the narration is of "women singing around; although each different part has its different melody, it has different characteristic; although the difference is apparent and subtle, the harmony is strong, and it keeps harmony in difference" (55).

Lisa Lowe discusses the mother-daughter relationships within the framework of class and gender, and reads the fiction "as commenting on the national public's aestheticizing of mother-daughter relationships in its discourse about Asian Americans, by placing this construction within the context of the differences – of class and culturally specific definitions of gender – that are rendered invisible by the privileging of this trope" (79-80). Amy Ling also believes that Tan represents the conflicts between the Chinese immigrant mothers and the American-born daughters and the different cultures China and America. Ling asserts that following Kingston Tan

continues to probe the problematic Chinese mother-American daughter relationship in four separate stories of two generations of women.... though the eight characters are divided into four families and given different names, the book itself is concerned more with a simple bifurcation along generational lines: mothers, whose stories all took place in China, and daughters, whose stories are being lived in America; mothers who are possessively trying to hold fast and daughters who are battling for autonomy. (*Between Worlds* 130-1)

In her "Sugar Sisterhood: Situating the Amy Tan Phenomenon," Sau-ling Cynthia Wong views Tan's writing establishes "a matrilineal Asian American tradition," and her work is of great value to "racial politics within feminism" (179). Following Wong comes Wendy Ho's review, which further analyzes the representations of mother-daughter relationships and sees the interactions between mothers and daughters as complicated by broader circumstances, in which Tan "constructs fictional narratives of self that are deconstructed and reconstructed as

each mother and daughter attempts to find spaces to negotiate stronger friendships and alliances as women” (150).

In China, scholarship on the mother-daughter relationships follows that of the US. Pingping Shi argues that “Tan calls attention to and puts emphasis on the multiplicity and diversity of mother-daughter bonds within the Chinese American community” (119). Wei Lu explores the silence in *The Joy Luck Club*, asserting that the silence is not only the women’s silence in language, but also the silence of women’s thought and subjectivity, which leads to the erasure of female discourse. She further points out that Tan’s mothers and daughters work together to break the silence and to establish their Chinese American identity, in turn reconstructing Chinese American women’s discourse (141).

Construction of cultural identity is another important issue in the critics’ discussions. Patricia P. Chu asserts that Tan’s narrative of the mother-daughter relationship is a “contribution to the problem of narrating Asian American subject formation lies in her elaboration of an established form, the mother-daughter plot, in which the immigrant mother’s desire for America becomes focused on her American-born daughter” (142).

Likewise, Ruoqian Pu discusses the cultural and psychological factors in the maternal genealogy in Chinese American literature, but she asserts that because Tan betrays and estranges herself from her Chinese ancestry, her Chinese American daughters fail to establish their complete subjectivity (199). Moreover, Guanglin Wang insists that Tan forms her female characters’ subjectivity by “othering” China and its culture:

In Tan’s creation, mothers are portrayed as fixated and stuck in their memories of the past, unable to assimilate to American culture. It is obvious from the novel that mothers belong to the mythical time of the past and are full of backward superstitions. This othering of China is what drives Tan to reinvent female subjectivity. (143)

Some scholars, in home and abroad, take negative views of Tan’s feminist pursuit of female subjectivity. Frank Chin and other Asian American critics attack Tan, as they do Kingston and Wong, for distorting Chinese culture, catering to the white American mainstream society, and depicting the women as the victims of Chinese patriarchy. Sau-ling Cynthia Wong takes Tan to task for misplacing time and space to otherize China and Chinese culture: “The contrast between some such binary states – traditional versus modern, superstitious versus secular, elemental versus materialistic, communal enmeshment versus anomie – is, we may note, precisely what *The Joy Luck Club* and *The Kitchen God’s Wife* are engaged in exploring” (“Sugar Sisterhood” 185). She argues that the purpose of such writing is to appeal to

white readers, for it is “rather a convergence of ethnic group-specific literary tradition and ideological needs by the white-dominated readership – including the feminist readership – for the Other’s presence as both mirror and differentiator” (ibid. 177).

For Tan’s feminist exploration, Chinese scholar Wenshu Zhao in his thesis “Feminist Orientalism in Chinese American Literature” asserts that Tan’s feminist writings (as well as Kingston’s) avoid the conflicts with mainstream society, and through literary means she converts the sexual discrimination into a “China problem” that the mainstream readers easily accept. In other words, she juxtaposes historical China with modern America to strengthen the advantageous position of the United States; therefore, such feminist writing is actually a kind of feminist orientalism (“Feminist Orientalism” 49). Sharing Zhao’s opinion, Xinlian Liu argues that Tan does not resist the racial discrimination in America; instead she attacks only sexual discrimination as a product of Chinese society and culture, and Tan’s representation of the double oppression of sex and colonial war (the Japanese invasion) that women suffered before their remove to America misplaces Chinese women’s experiences with American modernity (45).

Although the critique has examined *The Joy Luck Club* from diverse perspectives, it is still insufficient to understand Amy Tan’s profound writing. My discussion, focusing on different types of family in *The Joy Luck Club*, probes into the families as spaces of oppression, resistance, empowerment, and the construction of their subjecthood in the stories of the four pairs of Chinese immigrant mothers and their Americanized daughters.

A. Oppression with Great Expectations

While Jade Snow Wong is oppressed with the severe disciplines of traditional Chinese values and Kingston’s Maxine is oppressed by misogyny and traditional moral ethics, Tan’s daughters experience the oppression in the Chinese American immigrant family with the immigrant mothers’ great expectations for their American born daughters to achieve their autonomy and freedom.

Before discussing the mothers’ familial oppression of their daughters, it is necessary to examine the reasons that cause the mothers to have such high expectations for their daughters. First of all, the mothers’ imposed expectations originate from their own suffering in traditional Chinese culture. Lindo Jong’s marriage was arranged by her parents and the good offices of a go-between. Her mother betrothed her to Tyan-yu Huang, a spoiled son, through a matchmaker when she was two years old. She was taken into the Huang family as a daughter-in-law-to-be when she was twelve, and got married at sixteen. In the Huang

family, even though she behaved as a typical filial and obedient daughter-in-law, her mother-in-law was not satisfied with her because she did not bear any descendents for the Huangs after the wedding. In China, according to Mencius, there are three forms of unfilial conduct, of which the worst is to have no descendants. Thus, her mother-in-law expressed her anger at Lindo by ill-treating her. In reality, it was her husband who should be responsible for Lindo's infertility, but it was Lindo who was blamed and had to suffer her mother-in-law's cruelty.

Next, the tragic suffering of An-mei Hsu's mother makes An-mei to have high expectation to her daughter Rose. An-mei's father died at an early age and her mother became a widow. She was entrapped and raped by Wu Tsing and forced to become his fourth concubine, giving birth to a son. Because she failed to remain loyal to her deceased husband, she was then rejected by her kinship; thus, she is a disgraced victim just like No Name Woman in Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*. Her own mother, brother, and sister-in-law called her a "ghost" and "[n]ot an honored widow" with "[n]o face" (*JLC* 46). Persecuted by both her own family and Wu Tsing's, An-mei's mother was eventually forced to commit suicide like No Name Woman. Wendy Ho observes: "Like Kingston, Tan paints a painfully problematic picture of women's complicity, not only in another woman's oppression, but in their own continuing oppression in, and maintenance of, a particular culture" (152).

Ying-ying St. Clair also suffered greatly in her unhappy marriage in China. Born into a rich family in Ningbo, Ying-ying grew up under strict discipline. When young, she was taught to be an obedient girl and to believe that "it is wrong to think of your own needs" and "[a] girl can never ask, only listen" (*JLC* 70). At sixteen, she entered an arranged marriage in which she devoted her sincere love to her husband, but her husband was a womanizer who had an adulterous affair with an opera singer. Bitterly hurt and disappointed with the man and marriage, Ying-ying aborted her baby and shook off the unfortunate marriage.

Suyuan Woo, in contrast to the other mothers who were oppressed by their families, suffered greatly during the Japanese invasion in which she lost her husband and twin daughters. Fleeing Japanese bombing from Guilin to Chungking, she was seriously sick and had to leave her two baby daughters beside the road, hoping someone would save them; otherwise, they would die with her. The Japanese invasion deprived her of family and happiness. The loss of the two daughters and the death of her husband caused a long lasting trauma, and a sense of guilty contributed to her early death.

The second reason of the mothers' imposed expectation is that all the mothers who suffer from their women's destination awaken from their trauma, gain their female consciousness, resist the oppression, fight to obtain their dignity, and finally

establish their subjectivity. The awakening and resistance of the mothers echo the May 4th Movement that took place in Beijing in 1919 led by intellectuals such as Duxiu Chen and Dazhao Li. The protests were fuelled by anti-imperialism and anti-feudalism, as well as resentment towards the Chinese government's weak response to the humiliating Treaty of Versailles, especially the Shandong Problem.

The demonstrations not only led to an upsurge of nationalistic sentiments, but also gave rise to the Women's Liberation Movement in China. Although the movement was initiated by male thinkers, it awakened the consciousness of Chinese female intellectuals and led them to reconsider women's status in both society and culture. The mothers in *The Joy Luck Club* were born in the 1910's and 1920's, and their stories took place in the 1930's and 1940's. Thus, they were inevitably influenced by the movement.

Lindo's awakened consciousness and subjectivity arose from her arranged marriage. As a daughter, she had to obey her parents who sent her to her future husband's family to live, which could "cut an eating mouth" when the family was in difficulty, with the mother's warning, "Obey your family. Do not disgrace us" (*JLC* 54). She had to live with the Huang family when she only was twelve years old and served her future husband and mother-in-law. On her wedding day, the sixteen-year-old Lindo reflected upon the relationship between her parents' arrangement and her destiny as a woman. She wondered why she could not control her own fate: "I began to cry and thought bitterly about my parents' promise. I wondered why my destiny had been decided. Why I should have an unhappy life so someone else could have a happy one" (*JLC* 58). The query eventually allowed her to discover her self-worth: "I was strong. I was pure. I had genuine thoughts inside that no one could see, that no one could ever take away from me" (*ibid*). Indeed, after this realization, Lindo found a way to release herself from the predicament and asserted her subjectivity. First of all, she was determined that she would never yield to the fate and keep her personality and subjectivity: "On the day of the Festival of Pure Brightness, I take off all my bracelets. I remember the day when I finally knew a genuine thought and could follow where it went. That was the day I was a young girl with my face under a red marriage scarf. I promised not to forget myself" (*JLC* 66). Next, Lindo broke away from the unhappy marriage by manipulating a poor servant girl, pregnant by a man refusing to take the responsibility, into marriage with Tyan-yu. In this way, Lindo not only saved herself from the unhappy marriage but also saved the servant girl from the fate of being persecuted like Kingston's No Name Woman, and managed to come to America to start a new life.

An-mei's mother was both a passive victim of patriarchal culture and an active avenger and agent. To gain back her dignity as a woman, and to empower An-mei,

she chose to commit suicide. Fearful of her revenging spirit, Wu Tsing promised “that he would raise Syaudi [younger brother] and me as his honored children. And he promised to revere her as if she had been First Wife, his only wife” (*JLC* 240). Upon her mother’s death, An-mei became strong and determined: “I can see the truth, too. I am strong, too” (*ibid*); it was also on that day that An-mei “learned to shout” (*ibid*). Although the mother died, a new strong and powerful daughter was born, and the mother-daughter bond was strengthened. As Marianne Hirsch observes, “[E]ven within patriarchy, women can be powerful if connected with each other” (*Mother/Daughter Plot* 44).

Ying-ying gained her female consciousness when her illusion of a happy marriage was broken. Her discovery that her husband was a philanderer shattered her romantic dream of having a happy marriage. The husband’s betrayal with “[d]ancers and American ladies. Prostitutes. A girl cousin younger even than I was” (*JLC* 247) brings Ying-ying to the point of despair: “I came to hate this man so much,” she says, that “I took this baby from my womb before it could be born” (*JLC* 248). She left her husband and the family, a very brave step for a young woman to take at the time, went to live with her relatives for years, and finally came to Shanghai to work. Years later, she chose to remarry with Clifford St. Claire, and went to America to start a new life, too. Ying-ying’s abortion is a crucial matter for her to transcend the confinement of the patriarchal culture, to revenge her husband, to cut off the dependent connection with her husband, to become independent, and to start her new life. First of all, killing the baby boy is a serious blow to her husband and his family because in patriarchal society, a boy is the hope of the family, the one is expected to perpetuate the family line and bring glory to one’s ancestors. Killing the baby boy symbolizes a diminution of the patriarchal power. Moreover, it finalizes the complete breakup of the relationship between Ying-ying and her husband’s family. Thirdly, it announces the “death” of the weak, dependent, and docile Ying Ying, for she is no longer submissive to the man and no longer accepts the fate defined for women. The rebirth marks her transcendence of the limits of gender and becomes a subject who decides her own destiny.

Suyuan Woo was a wise, broad-minded woman who never submits to plight. Although she suffered the brutality of the Japanese invasion – the exile and displacement, the separation from her family, the death of her husband, and the loss of her twin baby daughters – she never lost hope. Fleeing the advance of the Japanese, Suyuan’s husband, a Kuomintang army officer, first took her and the babies from Shanghai to Kweilin, where she organized the Joy Luck Club with the other four women to play mahjong and to alleviate their miseries. When the Japanese marched into Kweilin, she fled again: “I packed my things and my two babies into this

wheelbarrow and began pushing to Chungking” (*JLC* 26). On the way, Suyuan became delirious with pain and fever, Jing-mei’s father retells Suyuan’s story after her death: “Finally, there was not one more step left in her body. She didn’t have the strength to carry these babies any farther. She slumped to the ground. She knew she would die of her sickness, or perhaps from thirst, from starvation, or from the Japanese, who she was sure were marching right behind her” (*JLC* 282). Unwilling to watch her babies die with her, Suyuan reluctantly left them on the road, hoping that some kind people would save them. When she arrived in Chungking, she learned that her husband had died two weeks before: “To come so far, to lose so much and to find nothing” (*JLC* 283). Although she lost her kinship, she did not lose her hope for life. Thus, she organized the Joy Luck Club to play mahjong so that she would forget the pain and to maintain the hope of life during her life of fleeing from the calamity of Japanese invasion:

It’s not that we had no heart or eyes for pain. We were all afraid. We all had our miseries. But to despair was to wish back for something already lost. Or to prolong what was already unbearable.... So we decided to hold parties and pretend each week had become the New Year. Each week we could forget past wrongs done to us. We weren’t allowed to think a bad thought. We feasted, we laughed, we played games, lost and won, we told the best stories. And each week we could hope to be lucky. That hope was our only joy. And that’s how we came to call our little parties Joy Luck. (*JLC* 24-5)

It is Suyuan’s wisdom to establish such a source of consolation. Also, if she had not abandoned her two daughters, all three of them would have died. With her bold decision, all of them survived, although she could not find her daughters until her death.

The above discussion shows that all the mothers, although they had respective tragic lives in China, they overcame the difficulties and became, like the rising phoenix, the self-determined and subjective women before their immigration. Therefore, arriving in America, the strong-willed mothers wanted to shape their daughters into whole and self-actualizing persons so that the daughters would not encounter the sorrow that they themselves suffered in China and become beautiful and free “swans.” Suyuan expresses all the mothers’ aspirations:

In America I will have a daughter just like me. But over there nobody will say her worth is measured by her husband’s belch. Over there nobody will look down on her, because I will make her speak only perfect American English. And over there she will always be too full to swallow any sorrow! She will know my meaning, because I will give her this swan – a creature

that became more than what was hoped for. (*JLC* 17)

The immigrant mothers regard their daughters as a continuum of themselves, much as Simone de Beauvoir describes: “[T]he daughter is for the mother at once her double and another person, the mother is at once overweeningly affectionate and hostile toward her daughter; she saddles her child with her own destiny: a way of proudly laying claim to her own femininity and also a way of revenging herself for it” (281). Accordingly, the mothers desperately impose their “good intentions” (*JLC* 17) – the obedience and the surviving skills – on their American born daughters to make them become their other persons. However, the daughters do not understand the mothers’ aspiration and consider it as oppression, which makes them suffer in the family.

The immigrant mothers desperately imbue their daughters with their “good intentions” to make the daughters become beautiful and free “swans,” that is the “Chinese character” under “American circumstances,” which they mean that their daughters, born and growing up in America, the Promised Land, should be full of freedom and have many opportunities integrated with the Chinese cultural heritage. The “Chinese character” consists of at least two elements, the first of which is the cultural heritage, concretely speaking, it is the obedience of the female femininity to the parents, as Lindo describes it, “How to obey parents and listen to your mother’s mind” (*JLC* 254). Suyuan also requires Jing-mei to become an “obedient daughter” (*JLC* 142). Obviously, although they emphasize the obedience of the girls, what they mean is different from the traditional Chinese patriarchal doctrine “three obedience” and “four virtues.” Their intention it is to protect their daughters from following their same old disastrous road and to make their daughters take the path they designed for them to follow so that they would become smart and happy “swans” in the adopted America.

Another “Chinese character” imposed to the daughters is the mothers’ heritage – wisdom, power, fortitude, and “Phoenix spirit.” The mothers want to pass on these qualities to their daughters and hope them to realize their self-worth and to have the capability of judging and making wise decisions, and they also wish the daughters to have the power, especially the invisible power to hold the initiative in hands and control their own destiny so that they can survive the sexual and racial oppression. Lindo warns, “How not to show your own thoughts, to put your feelings behind your face so you can take advantage of hidden opportunities. Why easy things are not worth pursuing. How to know your own worth and polish it, never flashing it around like a cheap ring. Why Chinese thinking is best” (*JLC* 254). The mothers fell on hard times, struggled for their autonomy, and obtained their subjective subjectivity before they came to America. Therefore, they are determined to pass down their spirit and

wisdom, the “best Chinese thinking,” to their daughters so that they would become strong and powerful. With these Chinese characteristics, the mothers expect their daughters to become more self-assured and to have their subjectivity.

After inculcating the “Chinese character” to their daughters, the Joy Luck Club mothers expect their American-born daughters to grow up under the “American circumstances” – freedom, democracy, and opportunity. Lindo’s narration verifies it:

If you are born poor here, it’s no lasting shame. You are first in line for a scholarship. If the roof crashes on your head, no need to cry over this bad luck. You can sue anybody, make the landlord fix it. You do not have to sit like a Buddha under a tree letting pigeons drop their dirty business on your head. You can buy an umbrella. Or go inside a Catholic church. In America, nobody says you have to keep the circumstances somebody else gives you. (JLC 254)

To the mothers, “American circumstances” are the indispensable soils for the daughters to come of age, where they can thrive with the “Chinese character” and become the kind of female they expect.

Suyuan wishes her daughter either to be an obedient daughter or to become a child prodigy, a genius pianist, and a “Chinese Shirley Temple” (JLC 132). To bring her expectation into force, Suyuan hopes that her daughter is tractable to her and follows her instructions so that her dream on her daughter will be realized. Thus, Suyuan firstly instills in the femininity of obedience by warning her daughter, “Only one kind of daughter can live in this house. Obedient daughter!” (JLC 142) On the other hand, America is where Suyuan’s hope lies. She captures the essence of all the other hopeful mothers in *The Joy Luck Club* wishing her daughter to become somebody. She believes “you could be anything you wanted to be in America. You could open a restaurant. You could work for the government and get good retirement. You could buy a house with almost no money down. You could become rich. You could become instantly famous,” and even “you can be prodigy, too. You can be best anything” (JLC 132). To fulfill her destination, Suyuan trades her housecleaning service for lessons with the piano teacher Mr. Jong ignoring her daughter’s unwillingness.

Lindo Jong also oppresses her daughter Waverly in various ways with her enforcement. She also wishes her daughter Waverly to be a chess prodigy and to come to the fore. Waverly has a gift for chess, “By my ninth birthday, I was a national chess champion. I was still some 429 points away from grand-master status, but I was touted as the Great American Hope, a child prodigy and a girl to boot” (JLC97). Each time she wins, Lindo would say: “Next time win more, lose less” (ibid). She only gives the pressure, no encouragement. Even though she does not

know the rule of chess, Lindo insists on asking Waverly to lose fewer pieces which causes Waverly's disagreement: "Ma, it's not how many pieces you lose," Waverly explains to her mother. "Sometimes you need to lose pieces to go ahead." Lindo argues: "Better to lose less, see if you really need" (ibid). At the next tournament, Waverly wins again, but it is Lindo who wears the triumphant grin and comments: "Lost eight pieces this time. Last time was eleven. What I tell you? Better off lose less" (ibid).

Although Lindo is a layman of chess, she is anxious to hope her daughter have a bright future; thus, she enjoys supervising Waverly's chess plot and sharing her daughter's success, which pose a big pressure on Waverly. Whenever Waverly practices new chess moves at home, Lindo always stands over her to watch, Waverly complains: "I found it difficult to concentrate at home. My mother had a habit of standing over me while I plotted out my games. I think she thought of herself as my protective ally. Her lips would be sealed tight, and after each move I made, a soft 'Hmmmph' would escape from her nose." When Waverly protests, "Ma, I cannot practice when you stand there like that," Lindo reluctantly "retreated to the kitchen and made loud noises with pots and pans. When the crashing stopped, I could see out of the corner of my eye that she was standing in the doorway. 'Hmmmph!' Only this one came out of her tight throat" (*JLC* 98).

Meanwhile, when her daughter becomes a chess champion, Lindo feels glorious and shows off her daughter, which makes Waverly oppressed. When they go shopping together in Chinatown, Lindo flaunts her daughter, as Waverly satirizes: "My mother would proudly walk with me, visiting many shops, buying very little. 'This is my daughter Waver-ly Jong,' she said to whoever looked her way" (*JLC* 99). The parade makes Waverly embarrassed and oppressive. Furthermore, when Waverly protests and asks Lindo not to show off, she stirs up a hornet's nest and receives Lindo's invisible power: "We not concerning this girl. This girl not have concerning for us" (ibid). Lindo is no longer concerned with Waverly's chess playing. It becomes a cold war between the mother with her invisible power and the daughter with rebellious spirit. Waverly confesses, "In my head, I saw a chessboard with sixty-four black and white squares. Opposite me was my opponent, two angry black slits. She wore a triumphant smile. 'Strongest wind cannot be seen,' she said" (*JLC* 100). Fearful and resentful to her mother, Waverly feels much oppressed, "In her hands, I always became the pawn. I could only run away. And she was the queen, able to move in all directions, relentless in her pursuit, always able to find my weakest spots" (*JLC* 180). Distraught by the continuous pressure from her mother, Waverly loses her power at chess-playing and fails to win the championship – a consequence of what Huntley describes as "the mothers' desire for their daughters to be successful by American

measures while remaining culturally Chinese” (62).

Different from Jing-mei and Waverly who are oppressed by their mothers’ high expectations and the “Chinese character,” Tan also describes the other two daughters – Lena St. Clair and Rose Hsu Jordan – who suffer the sexual and racial oppression in their inter-ethnic marriages and families. Lena is subjected to the double oppression from her husband under the disguise of “equality” in her inter-racial family. Lena and Harold are the partners both in work and life, and it seems that they are living in an absolutely equal life. The most obvious mark of their equality is they go Dutch everything in life. However, under the surface of the “equality” are Lena’s unconditional submission to Harold and Harold’s superiority in ethnicity and gender. Lena confesses how blindly she had fallen in love:

All I can remember is how *awfully lucky* I felt, and consequently how worried I was that all this *undeserved* good fortune would slip away. When I fantasized about moving in with him, I also dredged up my deepest fears: that he would tell me I smelled bad, that I had terrible bathroom habits, that my taste in music and television was appalling. I worried that Harold would someday get a new prescription for his glasses and he’d put them on one morning, look me up and down, and say, “Why, gosh, you aren’t the girl I thought you were, are you?” (*JLC* 156, emphasis mine)

With ethnic and gender humility and a conviction of her own inferiority in the dominant white culture, Lena totally submits herself to Harold.

The various financial arrangements they make as a couple seem at first to put them on equal footing, but in fact they are unfair because they are rooted in racial and sexual discrimination. To Lena, paying half of the expenses without haggling over what she should or should not pay demonstrates her generous personality and her unconditional love for Harold: “Sometimes I insisted on paying for the whole thing: meal, drinks, and tip. And it really didn’t bother me” (*JLC* 155). In contrast, Harold is mean about money and takes full use of Lena’s love. Before they get married, Harold asks Lena to move in with him mainly to get five hundred dollars of the rent from her. The “equality” between them is unfair and false, and it is actually an exploitation of Lena’s sacrifice and subordination.

In addition, it is with Lena’s encouragement and help that Harold starts his own firm; however, Harold repudiates Lena’s contribution and efforts in the work and exploits her economically in the firm. At the beginning, it is Lena who often gives Harold creative ideas. She is a good designer and works very hard for the sake of the firm, but she does not get what she deserves either in position or salary:

Harold is the concept man, the chief architect, the designer, and the person who makes the final sales presentation to a new client. I work under the

interior designer, because, as Harold explains, it would not seem fair to the other employees if he promoted me just because we are now married.... Harold makes about seven times more than what I make. (*JLC* 159)

Harold knows clearly what Lena has contributed, but he feels free to ignore it because he has the stereotypical image of eastern women found in Giacomo Puccini's *Madam Butterfly*: submissive, docile, and dedicatory. Indeed, Lena has now become the victim of her fantasy love to the white man. Although she is aware of the inequality, Lena cannot help loving Harold: "And for some reason, seeing all these little domestic signs of familiarity, our daily ritual, made me swoon inside. But it was as if I were seeing Harold the first time we made love, this feeling of surrendering everything to him, with abandon, without caring what I got in return" (*JLC* 159-60). Apparently, Harold is the master who controls everything in the family: the money and Lena's mind.

Lena, the doubly marginalized Chinese American woman, belittles herself and becomes excessively humble before Harold. Deceiving herself, she continues to live in a fantasy of assimilation. The love between them is a misplaced one: Lena loves Harold because he is a strong, dominant, and arrogant white man; Harold loves Lena because she is a weak, submissive, and obedient Chinese American woman. Both of them take what they want, yet there is no lasting basis for love between them; their so-called love is as fragile as the end table in their house: "It is heavy white marble on skinny black legs. A person must always think not to put a heavy bag on this table or it will break. The only thing that can sit on the table is a tall black vase. The vase is like a spider leg, so thin only one flower can be put in. If you shake the table, the vase and flower will fall down" (*JLC* 243). Lena loses herself to Harold in the fantasy of love, and she sustains the oppression silently.

Likewise, An-mei's daughter Rose Hsu also suffers the double oppression by losing herself completely in her inter-racial marriage and family. She marries the white doctor Ted Jordan over the objections of Ted's mother: "Ted was going to be in one of those professions where he would be judged by a different standard, by patients and other doctors who might not be as understanding as the Jordans were" (*JLC* 118). To Ted's mother who is used to the Orientalist paradigm, Rose is unqualified to be the wife of a white man. Yet, Rose, who has grown up in the white dominant society and has been influenced with the culture of white supremacy, worships her Mr. Right who is a white elite: "I was victim to his hero" (*ibid*). The worst of it is that she submits herself completely to him: she not only reveres Ted as her master, but also loses herself as a house wife totally depending on him to make every decision for her:

Over the years, Ted decided where we went on vacation. He decided what

new furniture we should buy. He decided we should wait until we moved into a better neighborhood before having children. We used to discuss some of these matters, but we both knew the question would boil down to my saying, “Ted, you decide.” After a while, there were no more discussions. Ted simply decided. And I never thought of objecting. (*JLC* 119)

To Rose, asking Ted to make decisions shows her reverence and humility both in ethnicity and gender. On the one hand, Rose falls into the trap of white supremacy. In the white dominant America, white supremacy has been the myth in the ideology of it, which makes the other minority groups eager to become white: white is beautiful, honorable, civilized, creative, and so forth, just like Pecola who desires for the bluest eyes in Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye*. If a colored girl marries a white man, it means that she has successfully blended into the mainstream society. On the other hand, Rose loses her female consciousness. She performs her gender role according to the norm of gendered culture and believes Ted will be pleased with it. Ted believes, however, that when a person makes decisions, he or she must take responsibility for them. Therefore, when Rose asks him to take charge, he thinks she is shirking her responsibility. Tired of making decisions, he says: “No, *you* decide. You can’t have it both ways, none of the responsibility, none of the blame” (*JLC* 120). Ultimately, Ted seeks a divorce.

Both Lena and Rose are oppressed in their inter-ethnic families. On account of the impact of sexual and racial discrimination, they improperly belittle themselves and lose themselves by adoring their white husbands without reserve, as Rose says to Lena: “At first I thought it was because I was raised with all this Chinese humility.... Or that maybe it was because when you’re Chinese you’re supposed to accept everything, flow with the Tao and not make waves” (*JLC* 156).

Amy Tan highlights the oppression in Chinese American families by depicting Suyuan and Lindo’s imposing their high expectations on their daughters, which exemplifies the other mothers in *The Joy Luck Club*. The oppression forces the American-born daughters into resistance.

B. Resistance and Exploration of Individual Autonomy in the Space of the Chinese American Family

Like Jade Snow Wong and Maxine Hong Kingston, Amy Tan also locates her American-born daughters’ rebellion in the familial space. The daughters, living in modern America and witnessing the civil rights movement, the women’s liberation movement, and the multiculturalist movement, resist their oppressive mothers and seek autonomy in different ways. In their young years, they resist their mothers’

indoctrination in their efforts to blend into mainstream American society. In their adulthood, all the daughters except Jing-mei (who is still single) marry white American men. To the daughters, this is probably the most direct and effective way to resist their mothers and the primacy of “Chinese character” and to escape from the oppressive mothers. As Helen Bannan puts it: “Immigrant women fought to survive, to preserve what they considered to be the essence of their cultural origins, and to pass on both survival skills and cultural tradition to their daughters. When the women of the second-generation chose American survival over ethnic tradition, they sometimes brought the war home” (165). Tan’s Chinese American daughters do exactly the same: resist their mothers to get rid of their control in different ways.

Jing-mei, born and educated in America, has her own idea of selfhood and refuses to become a prodigy as her mother wishes. She denies her mother and voices herself: “I had new thoughts, willful thoughts, or rather thoughts filled with lot of won’ts. I won’t let her change me, I promised myself. I won’t be what I’m not.... I didn’t have to do what my mother said anymore. I wasn’t her slave. This wasn’t China” (*JLC* 134, 141). Therefore, when Suyuan asks Jing-mei to play the piano, Jing-mei replies in determination: “Why don’t you like me the way I am? I’m *not* a genius! I can’t play the piano. And even if I could, I won’t go on TV if you paid me a million dollars!” (*JLC* 136) Then she declares to her mother, “I’m not going to play anymore.... Why should I? I’m not a genius.... I’ll never be the kind of daughter you want me to be!” (*JLC* 141, 142). By loudly saying “No” to her mother, Jing-mei finds her subjectivity: “I now felt stronger, as if my true self had finally emerged. So this was what had been inside me all long” (*JLC* 141). When Suyuan demands that Jing-mei have to be an obedient daughter, the stubborn daughter counterattacks, which makes the conflict perfervid: “Then I wish I wasn’t your daughter. I wish you weren’t my mother.... Then I wish I’d never been born! I wish I were dead! Like them” (*JLC* 142). Moreover, Jing-mei believes she cannot be anything she wants to be, and she only wants to be herself; therefore, she has been running counter to her mother all the time: “It [playing piano] was not the only disappointment my mother felt in me. In the years that followed, I failed her so many times, each time asserting my own will, my right to fall short of expectations. I didn’t get straight As. I didn’t become class president. I didn’t get into Stanford. I dropped out of college” (*ibid.*). In addition, being oppressed by her mother, Jing-mei puts all the blame on China where her mother comes from, she denies anything of China as well: “I had vigorously denied that I had any Chinese whatsoever below my skin” (*JLC* 267). The goal of the rebellious Jing-mei is to deny her mother’s enforcement with her high expectations and to gain her selfhood and autonomy.

Likewise, Waverly also resists her oppressive mother’s control and struggles for

her freedom. For example, she denies Lindo in public when she shows her off in Chinatown: “It’s just so embarrassing.... Why do you have to use me to show off? If you want to show off, then why don’t you learn to play chess” (*JLC* 99). Beauvoir characterizes this sort of opposition thus:

Real conflicts arise when the girl grows older; as we have seen, she wishes to establish her independence from her mother. This seems to the mother a mark of hateful ingratitude; she tries obstinately to checkmate the girl’s will to escape; she cannot bear to have her double become *an other*. The pleasure of feeling absolutely superior – which men feel in regard to women – can be enjoyed by woman only in regard to her children, especially her daughters; she feels frustrated if she has to renounce her privilege, her authority. Whether a loving or a hostile mother, the independence of her child dashes her hopes. (519)

Amy Tan mainly depicts Jing-mei and Waverly’s resistance against their Chinese immigrant mothers’ oppression face-to-face. In both scenarios, the resistance becomes an episode in their exploration of their Chinese American female subjective subjectivity. It is an inevitable step for the daughters, both at their childhood and adulthood, to break up the bond with their mothers so that they can survey both Chinese and American cultures, their mothers, and themselves to identify themselves, as Luce Irigaray points out:

The bond between mother and daughter, daughter and mother, must be broken so that the daughter can become woman. Female genealogy must be suppressed, in favor of the relation son-Father, of the idealization of the father and husband as patriarchs. But without verticality...the ethical order of love cannot take place among women (qtd. in Hirsch 43)

C. Empowerment and the Construction of Female Subjecthood

Like Wong and Kingston, Tan presents the stories of Chinese American daughters who are also empowered by their mothers’ talking-story just in the site of Chinese American family, and through which the daughters complete their journey of discovering their female subjectivity. The Chinese American immigrant family turns from a site of oppression and resistance to that of empowerment and construction of Chinese American female subjecthood.

Discussing the troubling dilemma that the black American mothers and daughters encounter, Collins stresses:

Black mothers of daughters face a troubling dilemma. On one hand, to ensure their daughters’ physical survival, mothers must teach them to fit

into systems of oppression.... On the other hand, Black daughters with strong self-definitions and self-valuations who offer serious challenges to oppressive situations may not physically survive. (123-4)

It is the same to the situations of Chinese American mothers and daughters: the immigrant mothers have to teach their American-born daughters surviving skill to fit into the white dominated American society and system, who are rejected by the Americanized self-determined daughters; however, the congenitally deficient daughters who have been staying away from their mothers and Chinese culture cannot find the balance and locate themselves appropriately with the mothers' absence. Trapped in the dilemma, the daughters need their mothers' rescue and empowerment.

In *The Joy Luck Club*, Tan, like Kingston, champions talking-story as an effective way both for the mothers to voice themselves and the daughters to be empowered, and through which the conflicting mothers and daughter come to their reconciliation. In the first place, by talking their stories happened in China in their own words, the mothers articulate their voices and break their silences; in addition, speaking their unspeakable past restores their hidden histories; most importantly, by revealing their past to the daughters, they wake up their lost daughters and empower them, which help them establish their Chinese American female subjective identity. Thereby talking-story is a significant narrative form that

allows them to privilege the voices of individuals for whom the more familiar Western narrative structures would be inappropriate and inadequate. As a narrative form, talk story provides the mothers in *The Joy Luck Club* with the structural and linguistic apparatus to tell their stories in their own words without having to resort to translation to fit the demands of the traditional Western narrative, which requires clear patterns of conflict, crisis, and denouement. (Huntley 70)

Ying-ying makes her daughter Lena empowered and become strong by talking her story in China and passing down her "tiger spirit." Coming to visit Lena and Harold, Ying-ying has a insight into the truth of the marriage as soon as she enters their new home. From the end table in the guest room to everything in the house, Ying-ying sees signs of the fragility: "All around this house I see the signs. My daughter looks but does not see. This is a house that will break into pieces" (*JLC* 243). She sees through the nature of the crippled relationship between the couple

with her sharp eyes – there is no equal and true love in them: “They say words that mean nothing. They sit in a room with no life in it” (*JLC* 252). Ying-ying decides to save her lost daughter who is living in such a dishonored life by passing down her tiger spirit to Lena by telling her own story of getting rid of the tragic marriage and to be herself in China: “And now I must tell her everything about my past. It is the only way to penetrate her skin and pull her to where she can be saved” (*JLC* 242):

So this is what I will do. I will gather together my past and look. I will see a thing that has already happened. The pain that cut my spirit loose. I will hold that pain in my hand until it becomes hard and shiny, more clear. And then my fierceness can come back, my golden side, my black side. I will use this sharp pain to penetrate my daughter’s tough skin and cut her tiger spirit loose. She will fight me, because this is the nature of two tigers. But I will win and give her my spirit, because this is the way a mother loves her daughter. (*JLC* 252)

Ying-ying tells her story happened in China to empower Lena. She came from a rich family in Wuxi and married with a rich handsome young man, but he betrayed and ill-treated her soon after they got married. Ying-ying firstly aborted and then broke the marriage. Years later, she worked as a salesclerk in Shanghai and started an independent new life. Clifford St. Clair fell in love with her, and they got married. Later she immigrated to America with Clifford St. Clair. Ying-ying’s story awakens Lena from her illusion, and Ying-ying’s spirit empowers her. Lena divorces Harold with her own firm determination, and regains her independence, dignity, and personality as a female. More importantly, Lena starts to cherish her mother, assumes her “Chinese character” – the “tiger spirit,” and becomes a subjective Chinese American woman to start a different new life.

An-mei also empowers her daughter Rose by revealing her mother’s tragic story. Witnessing her daughter Rose who loses herself and is trapped in the relationship with her white husband Ted, especially her “marriage is falling apart” (*JLC* 215), An-mei decides to tell her mother’s story to teach Rose to become strong. An-mei’s father died at a young age, surviving the wife, a daughter, and a son. Her mother was raped by Wu Tsing, a rich merchant from Tiensin, conspired by Wu Tsing and his second wife who was “anxious to quiet Wu Tsing’s outside appetite” (*JLC* 236) when her mother visited her father’s grave on Tomb-sweeping Day and became pregnant. Having no place to go, she had to become the fourth concubine of Wu

Tsing, which disgraced her family, and she was certainly chased out of her own mother's house and abandoned by her own family, "[H]er brother kicked her, and her own mother banned her from the family house forever" (*JLC* 237). Additionally, her mother's name was not allowed to mention, just like what No Name Woman's family does in *The Woman Warrior*. Popo warned An-mei, "Never say her name.... To say her name is to spit on your father's grave" (*JLC* 43), and she also disciplined An-mei, "When you lose your face, An-mei, it is like dropping your necklace down a well. The only way you can get it back is to fall in after it" (*JLC* 44). Suffering the injustice in the families of both Wu Tsing and her own, An-mei's mother became desperate and finally committed suicide. However, the unyielding woman manipulated her death two days before the lunar new year because "on the third day after someone dies, the soul comes back to settle scores. In my mother's case, this would be the first day of the lunar new year. And because it is the new year, all debts must be paid, or disaster and misfortune will follow" (*JLC* 240), and thus her mother becomes a vengeful spirit and her death became a weapon: Wu Tsing promised to raise An-mei and her brother as his "honored children" and to revere her mother "as if she had been First Wife, his only wife.... And on that day, Second Wife's hair began to turn white" (*JLC* 240). Her mother's death also empowers An-mei, "When the poison broke into her body, she whispered to me that she would rather kill her own weak spirit so she could give me a stronger one" (*JLC* 240). And her mother's death becomes the source of power for young An-mei to be strong and articulate her voice, "I am strong, too.... And on that day, I learn to shout.... Enough of this suffering and silence!" (*JLC* 240, 241) The weak and miserable mother died; nevertheless, the spite woman, like Kingston's No Name Woman, becomes "vengeful spirit" to make An-mei become strong and powerful. An-mei finally becomes a determined self-assured woman.

An-mei breaks the circle of passivity of women aggregated in her daughter Rose by talking the story of her mother to empower Rose. For the women who are unconscious of their female selfhood, they usually have a kind of passivity to accept their destination shaped by patriarchal culture. An-mei confides before her awakening, "I know this, because I was raised the Chinese way: I was taught to desire nothing, to swallow other people's misery, to eat my own bitterness" (*ibid.*). Since she was empowered by her mother and became strong, she has been intentionally to get rid of the passivity from her daughter, but she fails: "[E]ven

though I taught my daughter the opposite, still she came out the same way! Maybe it is because she was born to me and she was born a girl. And I was born to my mother and I was born a girl. All of us are like stairs, one step after another, going up and down, but all going the same way” (ibid.). The reason of her failure is the disseminated existence of patriarchal culture in both China and America, and women unconsciously accept it and follow it. Therefore, to awaken Rose, to make her powerful and independent, to encourage her to rescue herself, and to confront the reality, An-mei has to tear the scar in her heart for decades by telling Rose the story of her mother. It works. The story makes Rose understand that a woman must maintain her self-respect, personality, determination, and independence, and she must be strong enough to solve the problems resolutely. Thus, when Ted claims the house in the divorce proceedings, Rose defies him and articulates her voice for the first time: “I am staying here.... You can’t just pull me out of your life and throw me away” (*JLC* 196). Rose’s words surprise and frighten Ted: “I saw what I wanted: his eyes, confused, then scared. He was *hulihudu*.²³ The power of my words was that strong” (ibid). With her strong articulation, Rose wins back her dignity, gains the house, and probably Ted’s love again as well. The most important thing is that with her mother’s talking story Rose is no longer the submissive, undetermined, and dependent woman; instead, she becomes a totally new strong, determined, and independent woman who has found her voice power and whole subjective female selfhood. Rose’s story illustrates that if a Chinese American woman falls at her white husband’s feet submissively and gives up her subjecthood, she cannot achieve happy, harmonious marriages or equality. On the contrary, blindly bowing down only brings her humiliation and loss of subjectivity.

Lindo also talks her story to pass Waverly the strategy – the “invisible power” of surviving in the racist and sexist American society to make Waverly strong and independent. As a young girl in China, Lindo was betrothed to an impotent husband. She managed to escape her husband and her mother-in-law with manipulation and came to America, where she married Tin Jong and had three children. Different from the other daughters in *The Joy Luck Club*, the determined Lindo teaches her daughter to hold the “invisible power,” the ability of staying calm and countenance and of keeping one’s thoughts hidden to wait for the right opportunity and powerfully to strike one’s opponent with speed and accuracy since Waverly was young, and it is

²³ Confused, bewildered.

also the ability to take advantage of every possibility and situation without consuming much of one's own energy, just like what she did in escaping from her arranged suffering marriage in China. Consequently, this power makes Waverly determined and powerful and control her own way of living. For example, Lindo teaches Waverly the tricks of confusing the opponent and attacking him at unawares. She confides, "You don't have to be so smart to win chess. It is just tricks. You blow from the North, South, East, and West. The other person becomes confused. They don't know which way to run" (*JLC* 170). Lindo also teaches the surviving way of avoiding the brunt and adapting to the terrain to win, "Wise guy, he not go against wind. In Chinese we say, Come from South, blow with the wind – poom! – North will follow. Strongest wind cannot be seen" (*JLC* 89). Learning and also inheriting this "invisible power" from her mother, Waverly uses it in chess and wins her chess champions all the way, "I could see things on the chessboard that other people could not. I could create barriers to protect myself that were invisible to my opponents. And this gift gave me supreme confidence. I knew what my opponent would do, move for move" (*JLC* 170). It is with this power, Waverly becomes invincible, "I won all games, in all divisions.... By my ninth birthday, I was a national chess champion. I was still some 429 points away from grand-master status, but I was touted as the Great American Hope, a child prodigy and a girl boot" (*JLC* 97). Also with this power, Waverly wins her position in her career – a successful tax attorney and in her two marriages – a successful controller who decides to marry or divorce a man. Wendy Ho calls this "invisible power" as "guerrilla warfare":

Waverly Jong is taught to move like the powerful and invisible wind – just like her mother. It is not a direct force but one which hides its face in a racist, sexist society and bides its time in getting freedom in a clever fashion – through minimal energy and force. She learns the art of guerrilla warfare in enemy territory. She must be swift and decisive under pressure. (176)

Empowered by her mother's "invisible power" in the process of coming to age, Waverly establishes her construction of subjective womanhood. Her identification with her mother and China completes her journey of self-exploration. Waverly now "wants to be Chinese" (*JLC* 253) and has decided to go to China to spend her honeymoon with Rich, bringing her mother with them.

Different from the other daughters whose mothers tell their stories in person to

empower them, Jing-mei gets to know her mother's story from her father after her mother's death, from which she learns her mother's the positive and optimistic mentality of never surrendering to predicaments and the reason her mother has high expectation to her. At the young age, misunderstanding her mother's love and good intentions, she did her utmost to deny her mother's expectations. "Unlike my mother," she said, "I did not believe I could be anything I wanted to be. I could only be me.... In the years that followed, I failed her so many times, each time asserting my own will, my right to fall short of expectations" (*JLC* 142). Just because she does not understand her own mother and her hope and denies her mother all the time, she fails both her mother and herself: "I didn't get straight A's. I didn't become class president. I didn't get into Stanford. I dropped out of college" (*JLC* 142). As a result, she is a mediocrity in both her career and personal life. The failures make Jing-mei reexamine her deceased mother's high expectations and understand her: she had lost everything precious in her life before she came to America, "America was where all my mother's hope lay. She had come here in 1949 after losing everything in China: her mother and father, her family home, her first husband, and two daughters, twin baby girls. But she never looked back with regret. There were so many ways for things to get better" (*JLC* 132). The introspection makes Jing-mei not only appreciate her mother and her hope but also views the piano-playing in another light: playing piano is not difficult and hateful; moreover, she discovers that the two pieces of music she used to play are complementary:

And for the first time, or so it seemed, I noticed the piece on the right-hand side. It was called "Perfectly Contented." I tried to play this one as well. It had a lighter melody but the same flowing rhythm and turned out to be quite easy. "Pleading Child" was shorter but slower; "Perfectly Contented" was longer, but faster. And after I played them both a few times, I realized they were two halves of the same song. (*JLC* 144)

Jing-mei's discovery conveys three layers of significance. The first one is Jing-mei and her mother come to reconciliation and through which Jing-mei has found her complete self from the split two halves. She used to split herself into a colliding two parts: the American one and the Chinese one, which makes her confused and lost with it. However, the realization unites her divisive selves into an integrated one: "Pleading Child" indicates her rebellious self in her childhood, and

“Perfectly Contented” implies her mature self in her adulthood; and the whole song signifies her integrated self from the split halves. In this way, Jing-mei completes her journey of seeking for her Chinese American female subjectivity.

The second significance of Jing-mei’s discovering is that mothers and daughters are inseparable parts of a whole. The mothers are the source of their life, and the daughters are the continuation of their mothers, although they sometimes try to turn away: “All of us are like stairs, one step after another, going up and down, but all going the same way” (*JLC* 215). Tan’s mother-daughter relationship resembles that of the story-tellers of Maxine and her mother as a continuum in Kingston’s *The Woman Warrior*: “Here is a story my mother told me, not when I was young, but recently, when I told her I also talking-story. The beginning is hers, the ending, mine” (*WW* 240).

The last significance is that Chinese Americans and China are inseparable. Although Chinese Americans have left China, they could never cut off the connection with her because she and her culture have already deeply rooted in their mind, their bones. If a mother is the source of one’s life, then China is the source of Chinese American’s cultural root. Tan symbolizes Jing-mei’s journey back China as one of searching for cultural roots:

The minute our train leaves the Hong Kong border and enters Shenzhen, China, I feel different. I can feel the skin on my forehead tingling, my blood rushing through a new course, my bones aching with a familiar old pain. And I think, my mother was right. I am becoming Chinese.... Once you are born Chinese, you cannot help but feel and think Chinese.... And now I also see what part of me is Chinese. It is so obvious. It is my family. It is in our blood. After all these years, it can finally be let go. (*JLC* 267, 288)

The trip not only strengthens the mother-daughter maternal bond and the cultural bond between Chinese Americans and China but also marks the fulfillment of Jing-mei’s formation of subjectivity.

In *The Joy Luck Club*, the journeys undertaken by Tan’s daughters to explore their Chinese American female identity reflect Gilbert and Gubar’s view that matriarchal heritage enables the heroines to find her own “distinctive female power” (59). Indeed, realizing that their mothers are in their bones as the source of their power, the daughters come of age by inheriting their mothers’ spirit and power and

accepting and cherishing their mothers' cultural heritage. As Kim observes:

Among many other things, *The Joy Luck Club* is the story of how women's lives flow through each other.... In *The Joy Luck Club*, the daughters discover that their mothers' visions of 'truth and hope' are grounded not in Chinese convention but in fierce love, which makes them desire their daughters' freedom and subjectivity as well as their own. The fathers are distant and silent. Mothers, not fathers, are the daughters' source of strength. ("Such Opposite Creatures" 83)

Indeed, it is the immigrant mothers, who suffered the patriarchal cultural oppression, fought against it, and finally obtained their female subjecthood in China, help and empower their American-born daughters to construct their Chinese American female identity by talking back their struggling stories in the past. Doubtless, the mothers' stories make the daughters understand their mothers and their high expectations, which brings the reconciliation between the conflicting mothers and daughters. Most importantly, talking back becomes a way of speaking up defiantly for the silent mothers to articulate their voices as women. Moreover, the stories empower the confused daughters and become the source of their articulation and construction of Chinese American female subjecthood. In addition, the mothers' stories also become a bridge of the China and America as well as the two cultures, from which the daughters get to know China and its culture and identify with them. As bell hooks states that talking-story is

not solely an expression of creative power, it is an act of resistance, a political gesture that challenges politics of domination that would render us nameless and voiceless. As such it is a courageous act---as such, it represents a threat. To those who wield oppressive power, that which is threatening must necessarily be wiped out, annihilated, silenced. ("Black is a woman's color" 8)

In brief, in *The Joy Luck Club*, Tan establishes the daughters' female subjecthood through the exploration of their female subjectivity respectively. The daughters at first deny their mothers' indoctrination of traditional Chinese culture and the imposed expectations, and some of them get lost by becoming the passive and obedient women and fall in the trap encountering racial and sexual discrimination; nevertheless, they finally come to reconciliation with their mothers and establish their female subjecthood empowered by their mothers with their stories. The Chinese

American mothers, previously rejected and looked down upon by the daughters, now become the redeemers, helping their trapped daughters by connecting the broken bonds and giving them strength. Thus, family becomes a site of empowerment, as Wendy Ho notes that “the home is often constructed by women of color as a major space in which to nurture skills of survival and political activism. Although home is not free of internal physical and psychic struggle and violence, or free from the racism and sexism either, ‘home’ has been identified as a source of individual and community strength” (106).

Like Kingston and Wong, Tan has been attacked by critics from both America and China for her unique feminist representation. Frank Chin and other Asian American critics fault her for distorting Chinese culture, catering to the white Americans, and making Chinese women the victims of Chinese patriarchy. Sau-ling Cynthia Wong also criticizes Tan for her manipulation of times and spaces to Otherize China and Chinese culture and for portraying it exotically for white readers (“Sugar Sisterhood” 185, 177). Following Wong, Xinlian Liu insists that Tan’s representation misplaces Chinese women’s experiences in China’s past with American modernity (45). Likewise, Guanglin Wang insists that Tan forms her characters’ subjectivity by Othering China and its culture (143). In his thesis “Feminist Orientalism in Chinese American Literature,” Wenshu Zhao asserts that Tan’s writing neglects racial discrimination in America but only reveals sexual discrimination in China from an Orientalist perspective (49). Ruoqian Pu believes that because Tan, Kingston, and Wong estrange themselves from their own mothers and betray their Chinese ancestral culture, they in fact fail to establish their characters’ subjectivity (199). Guichang Li argues that Tan’s immigrant mothers gradually gain their subjective consciousness and form their subjectivity not in China, but in America (233).

Regarding to the denouncement to Amy Tan from Frank Chin and other Asian American male critics, I would say this is a gender issue in nature. Generally speaking, people from different gender have different acknowledge and stance to read women’s writings; hence, the male critics influenced by the patriarchal culture and benefited from their male gender neither understand female writers’ articulation nor allow them to hold a part of the position occupied by male writers since history. In fact, the male critics fear female writers to obtain the equal discourse, which

threatens the perpetuated gender structure.²⁴ It is pity that the male critics only focus on Tan's criticism on patriarchal oppression but neglect her positive portraying of male image. Jing-mei's father functions as bridge of the understanding between Jing-mei and her passed away mother by telling the her mother's story in China.²⁵ Unlike the other mothers in *The Joy Luck Club* who tell stories to their American-born daughters and make the daughters understand the mothers, Jing-mei's father tells her the story of her mother, which makes her comprehend her mother as a woman with outstanding wisdom. It is the father's story that makes Jing-mei not only reconcile with her mother but also empowered. Most importantly, it is her father who inspires her to go back to China to meet her long-lost sisters and helps her complete her journey of exploring her subjectivity. Thus, the men that the writer condemns are only those who repress women, and the men the writer endorses are those who respect and support women.

Concerning to the criticism from Sau-ling Cynthia Wong and Xinlian Liu that Tan misplaces times and spaces of the stories, a closer examination of Tan's work reveals her at least two meanings. Firstly, Tan represents the bond relationship between the mothers and daughters at different times and spaces, which expresses a causality. The mothers lived and came of age in China at a time of both domestic grief and foreign aggression in the 1930s and 1940s, and they suffered patriarchal oppression and the Japanese invasion war, from which they awakened and gained their female consciousness and subjective selfhood. Thus, when their American-born daughters, who grew up and came of age in the 1950s to 1980s, encounter the problems of culture, gender and race, the mothers first become the bridge of Chinese and American cultures to help the daughters to identify with Chinese culture; then they empower their trapped daughters to establish their Chinese American female subjectivity. The mothers are the most influential factors in the process of the daughters' formation of their female identity. As Amy Tan states:

I really was writing *The Joy Luck Club* for my mother. And I thought, here's this intelligent person, and I want to write for her in a way that the emotions come through and the story comes through and the words are

²⁴ See further countering discussion of Frank Chin's criticism in the previous chapters.

²⁵ Jing-mei deemed that the joy luck mahjong club organized by her mother was just like Ku Klux Klan in America and her mother abandoned her two daughters in China. Now that with her father's story-telling, she gets to know that it was her mother's great wisdom to organize the club to overcome the fear of the cruel war, to forget the adversity, and to wish for a better future. She also understands that her mother did not discard her two daughters, and it was because she was too seriously ill to take them together. If she did not give away the two baby girls, all of them would die sooner or later.

never important than the story. I wanted to convey images through the language, and I believe that you can do this in a way that is very clear and accessible to the reader. (“The Booklist Interview” 256)

In addition, it is by describing the stories happened at different times and spaces that Amy Tan indicates that patriarchal culture and oppression exist both in old China and modern America, historically and universally. Women, both in China and America, have been Otherized and marginalized, and this is the key problem that Tan intends to express.

Relating to the issue of Otherize China and its culture put forward by Sau-ling Cynthia Wong and Guanglin Wang, I believe Tan depicts the journey of Chinese American daughters’ exploration of their identity from denying their mothers – China and its culture to accepting them. In the initial stages of the Chinese American daughters’ coming of age, due to the influence of Orientalist values in mainstream American society, the daughters indeed regard their mothers as backward and take them as “Others.” After they enter inter-ethnic marriages (except Jing-mei who is a single), however, they realize that the values of democracy, freedom, and equality advocated by mainstream American society are never constantly present and that there are true inequalities of both race and gender under the surface. The daughters come to know that Othering their mothers, China, and Chinese culture does not help them to be accepted by the mainstream, rather, makes them more confused with their identity and values. Finally, they come to accept their mothers and construct their subjective identities by combining the cultures of both China and America.

With respect to Wenshu Zhao’ view that Tan attacks only China not America and her writing represents a kind of feminist Orientalism, I deem that this is a misreading of Tan’s true message. First of all, Tan actually not only criticizes the patriarchal oppression of women in Chinese society but also condemns the sexual and racial discrimination in American society. Through the description of the the mothers’ stories happened in China, Tan reveals the sexual oppression and attacks traditional Chinese patriarchal culture, and through the depiction of the daughters’ stories in their inter-ethnic family life, where the white men are dominant part and Chinese American daughters are the submissive “Others,” Tan surely discloses the double oppression of sexism and racism existing in white American society. With the stories of both the mothers and daughters, Tan conveys that sexual

discrimination exists not only in Chinese and Chinese American families, but also in inter-ethnic families, which there are double discrimination. Thus, by expressing the experiences of all oppressed women, Tan demonstrates in fact women in all cultures are oppressed objects, and her intention is to transform them from the oppressed submissive objects into independent subjects. Furthermore, by representing the inter-ethnic marriage life of Lena and Rose, Tan attacks the falsity of American values, and the so called American democracy and equality are nothing but gobbledygook. Lastly, Tan criticizes the Orientalism by representing the influence of it in Chinese American daughter at first, which is a process of sublation. When Tan's Chinese American daughters rebel against their mothers at early stage, they indeed express the kind of Orientalist ideology because the daughters were born in America, received American education, and accepted mainstream American Orientalist values since childhood; therefore, their behavior is an honest reflection of how they have learned to see the world from the mainstream American society. However, it is through the representation of the daughters' Orientalist ideas that Tan reveals and interrogates the deep-rooted Orientalist paradigm in the mainstream society and culture, represents their introspection towards both the Chinese and American cultures and their identification with Chinese culture, and at last constructs their Chinese American female subjective identity.

As for Ruoqian Pu's view that Tan's Chinese American daughters betray their Chinese ancestral culture, Pu sees only one side of that estrangement. In fact, the betrayals foreshadow a later return. In the early stage of the daughters' socialization because of the impact of white American ideology, they indeed intend to distance themselves from their mothers and Chinese culture; however, the cruel reality makes them eventually realize that their desire of assimilation is illusive and unrealistic. For instance, when Lena and Rose encounter problems in their marriages, they come to realize that it is not reasonable only blame their Chinese culture and ethnicity and their complete surrender to their white husbands cannot save their crippled relationships and subordinate position, which brings them only a loss of dignity and personality. They subsequently realize the power of their mothers and re-identify with Chinese culture – the reposition symbolized by Jing-mei's return to visit China and her mother's lost daughters. The stories of Lena and Rose make the point that when Chinese American daughters enter the white American mainstream society through marriage, they meet not only gender but also racial oppression. It is through this process that they come to realize that their assimilation is an illusion. They subsequently re-identify with their mothers and their ancestral cultural heritage

which are indispensable to their identities. Through their stories, Tan demonstrates that living in multicultural American society, constructing Chinese American female subjectivity is never simple or immediately successful. Instead, it is a complicated, winding, and long discovery.

In counter to Guichang Li's perspective that Tan's immigrant mothers did not establish their subjectivity until they came to America, I would argue that the Chinese immigrant mothers in fact had obtained their subjectivity in China before they came to America. Although when in China, the mothers were oppressed by traditional Chinese patriarchal culture in the society and their families, they did not passively surrender to their fate. They resisted it in various ways, succeeded in emerging from the adversity. For example, Lindo awakened from her suffering marriage, gained her female selfhood, and finally escaped from the Huang family. Ying-ying also obtained her spiritual and economical independence and got rid of the oppressing position. Likewise, Suyuan and An-mei gained their subjectivity in their different lives respectively. All of the mothers established their female subjectivity in China; otherwise, they would continue to live in their life shaped by patriarchal culture and to suffer the sexual oppression in China. It was in China, in their adversity, that they awakened from their oppressed positions, achieve their consciousness, and struggled against the gender inequality enforced to them. Most importantly, after they immigrate to America, the strong and powerful mothers continue to fight against racism and sexism, nurture and empower their American-born daughters, and help them to form their female subjecthood. Hence, both the mothers and daughters become the subjects. Wendy Ho asserts: "Tan's stories do not represent passive, suffering women as the ideal form of femininity; rather, the stories portray women who struggle to survive and challenge inequitable and often oppressive relationships and structures in diverse ways and social locations" (177).

In conclusion, in *The Joy Luck Club*, Amy Tan represents a variety of families – family in China, immigrant family and the inter-ethnic family in America – as a site of oppression for both the mothers and their American-born daughters from the traditional Chinese patriarchal culture, the mothers' high expectations, and racial discrimination, a site of resistance from the mothers and daughters against the oppression imposed by the traditional culture, the determined immigrant mothers, and their race-prejudiced white husband, the site of the mothers' empowerment to the

lost daughters by disclosing their life stories of struggling against their diverse female fate and gaining their personality in China, and finally the site of formation of their Chinese American female subjecthood by combining both the Chinese and American cultures and thus integrating their split selves.

Conclusion

The autobiographical writings of *Fifth Chinese Daughter*, *The Woman Warrior*, and *The Joy Luck Club* by the renowned Chinese American female writers Jade Snow Wong, Maxine Hong Kingston, and Amy Tan represent the self-exploring journey of Chinese immigrant mothers and their American-born daughters who have often been erased, silenced, distorted, and devalued in both Chinese and American society. This work, focusing on the three works, adopting feminist perspective, has examined the feminist aesthetics of the works based on close in-text reading and recorded the Chinese American women's journey inward to find their silenced voice and Chinese American female subjective identity. Taking the argument that family is a site of oppression, resistance, empowerment, and formation of Chinese American women's subjective subjectivity as my theoretical framework, this discussion has illustrated that the Chinese American immigrant family is the site of oppression for the second-generation Chinese American daughters, of resistance of the daughters to their immigrant parents' oppression, of empowerment mainly from the immigrant mothers to their American-born daughters, and of construction of the daughters' Chinese American female subjecthood.

In *Fifth Chinese Daughter*, the father, including the mother, oppresses Jade Snow with his traditional Chinese culture in the family. The point of the conflicts between the father and daughter is the father's traditional concept of "son preference" and the Jade Snow's ideology of equality and individualism from mainstream American values. The reconciliation between them comes when Jade Snow achieves her female personal success. It is very ironical that it is the daughter Jade Snow who glorifies her family, rather the son whom the father has been expecting to bring glory on his ancestors. Jade Snow proves herself with her personal strivings and success, which gives the father a lesson and changes his traditional concept. In addition, in her formation of Chinese American woman's individualist subjectivity, Jade Snow is influenced either by the continuum of the talking-stories from her maternal line – her grandmother and her mother – with the enlightenment of

female consciousness, power, and capacity or with her father's nurture with Chinese culture from which she accepts and draws the essence of it. In addition to that, she absorbs the values of equality and individualism from American education and finally establishes her subjective subjectivity as an independent Chinese American woman.

The familial oppression in Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* mainly comes from the mother who has internalized traditional Chinese culture. The paradoxical mother Brave Orchid, on the one hand, instills her American-born daughter with the traditional Chinese culture to nurture her daughter Maxine into a pure and chaste girl to prevent Maxine from the tragedy of No Name Woman, which causes her daughter's resistance. On the other hand, she also tells Maxine the stories of historical heroines such as Fa Mu Lan and Ts'ai Yen to empower Maxine to become a warrior woman adept with both the pen and the sword, which helps Maxine complete her journey from having no name and no voice to that of finding the voice and forming her Chinese American woman subjectivity. To achieve her feminist intention, Kingston adapts the stories of the national heroes Fa Mu Lan and Ngok Fei who used to guard the country and serve the emperors – the representatives of the symbolic order – into one woman warrior who fights against patriarchal oppression, kills the emperors, and frees the imprisoned women; she also rewrites the experience of Ts'ai Yen who exiled in a foreign land and returned to central China to the one who fights bravely with the "barbarians," has to blend with them and to live in that land. Kingston's adaptation dispels the dichotomy of eastern and western cultures and gender oppositions.

Different from Jade Snow Wong and Maxine Hong Kingston whose stories focus on a single family, Amy Tan, in her *The Joy Luck Club*, develops a full-scale familial drama between the four pairs of Chinese immigrant mother and second-generation Chinese American daughter. The familial oppression from their mothers is the great expectations brought from China for the daughters to realize in the Promised Land – to be distinguished women who are independent with their own autonomy. The Americanized daughters do not understand their mothers' dream and deny the mothers. The reconciliation between the two generations comes when the mothers talk their stories happened in China and from which the daughters understand and accept their mothers as well as Chinese culture. They get to know that their mothers are not weak and humble women, but the determined and independent

women who fought against the patriarchal oppression and survived from the hardships in China and started their new life in America. Moreover, the stories empower the daughters, adjust their imbalanced cultural identification, negotiate the conflicting cultures into an integrated new culture, and finally construct their subjective Chinese American subjectivity.

The Chinese American immigrant family is the aggregate of the dual cultures. Because family is the carrier of culture, Chinese American immigrant family is not only the carrier of its home Chinese culture, but also the acceptor of the adopted American culture. It functions as the tie that connects the old home culture and the new adopted culture. However, it is, simultaneously, not only the site that the two cultures encounter and conflict with each other, but also the site of cultural integration; thus, it is in the site of family that Chinese American daughters come of age by experiencing the cultural conflict and integration and construct their women subjective subjectivity. At the beginning of their socialization, the daughters deny their mothers and Chinese culture as the “Others” and objects even though they themselves are also denied as the “Others” and objects of the white dominant society. When they gradually accept their mothers and the culture that they represent, the daughters adjust their imbalanced positions with the preoccupied dominant American culture and make themselves balanced in their cultural identification. It is through the internal journey of experiencing the oppression from their parents/mothers, their resistance to it, the empowerment from the mothers’ telling-stories, Chinese American daughters complete their journey of exploring themselves, finding voice, and finally forming their subjective Chinese American women subjectivity in the site of family.

In their feminist writings, the three Chinese American feminist writers take gender issue as the most crucial and political one that they give priority to. For them it is the matter of “to be or not to be.” King-Kok Cheung asserts it:

Feminist critics such as Elaine Kim, Shirley Lim, Sau-ling Wong, and myself have taken the *Aiiiiieee!* editors to task for their preoccupation with reasserting Asian American manhood, their classification of desirable attributes as masculine, and Chin’s blistering attack on Kingston (Chung 1990, Kim 1990, S. G. Lim 1990, S. C. Wong 1992). We have further pointed out the reality of sexism in both Asian and American cultures and the imperative for Asian American women to engage in

gender politics. (*An Interethnic Companion* 10-11)

In their feminist writings, Jade Snow Wong, Maxine Hong Kingston, and Amy Tan have created a feminist discourse in which they develop women's stories, seek for Chinese American women's voice, and construct Chinese American female subjectivity, and this discourse defines female selfhood, which "is found in the context of family and community" (Collins105). Moreover, they also have created a chorus of women, which is high and clear, as Marianne Hirsch's notes:

The story of female development, both in fiction and theory, needs to be written in the voice of mothers as well as in that of daughters. It needs to cease mystifying maternal stories, to cease making them the objects of a "sustained quest." Only in combining both voices, in finding a double voice that would yield multiple female consciousness, can we begin to envision ways to "live afresh." Only thus can feminists begin to imagine a form of consciousness and of subjectivity creating, and created by, the social and ideological revolution that feminism has only begun to effect. (*Mother/Daughter Plot* 161)

This work, starting from the feminist perspective and examining the autobiographical writings by Jade Snow Wong, Maxine Hong Kingston, and Amy Tan, probes into the representation of their exploration of Chinese American daughters' voice and the construction of their female subjectivity and proves that the three writers have justified in their feminist writings against both sexism and racism, found Chinese American women's erased name and silenced voice, and formed their Chinese American female subjecthood in Chinese American immigrant family that is the space of oppression, resistance, empowerment, and formation of their Chinese American women subjective identity.

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