



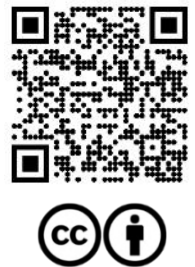
# The Rewriting and Spreading of Chinese Culture in Chinese-American Literature— Taking Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* as an Example

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**Abstract**— Maxine Hong Kingston is an American novelist of Chinese descent. Her masterpiece *The Woman Warrior* (1976) has attracted the attention of many critics, and there are a lot of relevant researches. There are various research directions, including cultural conflict, narrative perspective, feminism and archetypal interpretation. However, there are few studies on the rewriting of the two historical stories of Hua Mulan and Ts' ai Yen in the works. Starting from two historical stories, this article will study the adaptation and meaning of the novel by the method of intensive reading and analysis of the text. In the rewriting of Mulan's story, the protagonist who grew up under the background of dual culture and life imagined a female image who pursued freedom, equality and realized her own value, which is the rewritten image of Mulan. The rewriting of Ts' ai Yen's story is used to show the dilemma experienced by the protagonist and the final solution of the problem. In rewriting the stories of historical figures, the work shows the struggle and exploration of Chinese Americans who try to establish their cultural identity between Chinese and American dual cultures.



**Keywords**— *The Woman Warrior*; rewrite; Chinese culture

## I. INTRODUCTION

*The Woman Warrior* is a representative work of the Chinese-American writer Kingston, in which many traditional Chinese cultures are involved, and Kingston rewrites the Chinese culture. This paper mainly studies the content, strategy and meaning of rewriting the female images of Hua Mulan and Ts' ai Yen in Chinese traditional culture in *The Woman Warrior*. It deals with the phenomenon of aphasia faced by Chinese Americans and the culture shock they suffer when they seek cultural identity. The combination of Kingston's special cultural dual identity with the Chinese female image and the Chinese

cultural adaptation in the book is of great significance for the integration of Chinese and American cultures and the promotion of Chinese cultural communication.

Chinese-American writer Maxine Hong Kingston(1940--) quotes female images in two Chinese traditional stories in *The Woman Warrior* and rewrites them.

After reading the relevant literature of Mulan rewritten by Kingston, we can analyze the tendency of blending and merging in the process of identity seeking in the works of Chinese American female writers. This article attempts to explore the meaning of being Chinese-American through her personal experience as a descendant of Chinese

immigrants born and raised in the United States. (Guan Hefeng 11) Through rewriting, she created a series of Chinese women and Chinese-American women images with distinct characteristics but more in line with American aesthetic values, such as Hua Mulan, making the Woman Warrior a great success in the United States. (Zhong Yi 143) In the original Ts'ai Yen story, the Han Dynasty people's sense of cultural superiority and the authority of the patriarchal society are included, "and these negative factors are replaced by positive feelings in Kingston's rewriting".

(Shang Yunying 10) Kingston projects her own experience to the protagonist, "What she wants to show is how a living minority child breaks through the thick wall of ethnic family education and realizes the life breakthrough process of independent cultural integration." (Gao Fen 32) "But what she sings are stories about her family and her own sadness and anger." (Bobby Fong 122) "In Kingston's opinion, Ts'ai Yen has done a successful translation by combining Hu music with Han lyrics to compose songs that both Hu and Han Chinese can enjoy." (Wei Jingyi 101)

## II. THE REWRITE OF MULAN'S STORY

### 2.1 The rewrite:

*The Woman Warrior* is one of the representative works of Chinese-American female writer Kingston. Most of her works are innovations and rewrites of traditional Chinese culture and myth. In *The Woman Warrior*, the article "White Tiger", Kingston tells the story of Fua Mulan, a heroine in the Chinese folk song "The Mulan Ballad" from the Southern and Northern Dynasties. Kingston made innovations and rewrites on its basis. In the novel, "I" is combined with the image of Mulan, and through rewriting, the difficulties "I" encounter in a foreign country are expressed. The whole novel has a strong autobiographical color and contains rich and gorgeous oriental elements. Kingston became famous in the 1970s with the book *The Woman Warrior*. In the book, she borrowed Fua Mulan to express her hope for a fair and equal identity, and expressed her dissatisfaction with sexism and racial discrimination to American society, which had an impact on American society.

Kingston's rewriting of Mulan lies in the following aspects: the experience of practicing martial arts, Mulan's family, and Yue Fei's mother tattooed on Yue Fei.

In the original *The Mulan Ballad*, Mulan's martial arts experience is not explicitly described, but it is a direct description of her heroic killing of enemies on the battlefield. On the contrary, in *The Woman Warrior*, Mulan went to the mountains to practice martial arts since she was a child. Under the guidance of an old couple, she studied martial arts hard and stayed away from home for more than ten years in Baihu Mountain. When she was good enough to go to war, the old couple allowed her to go down the mountain and return to her family. "When I could point at the sky and make a sword appear, a silver bolt in the sunlight, and control its slashing with my mind, the old people said I was ready to leave." (Kingston, 33)

Yue Fei's mother tattooed on Yue Fei: This plot is an innovative adaptation by Kingston and does not appear in the original text. After Mulan came down from the mountain, her parents took her to the ancestral hall. In front of the ancestor's shrine, Mulan took off her clothes and carved an oath and the name of her enemy with a knife on my back. This is actually the author rewriting Yue Fei's story into Fua Mulan, which fully embodies the concept of "filial piety".

Mulan's Family: In the original "The Mulan Ballad", Mulan did not get married and have children. She went to the battlefield alone, and returned to her family after the war. When Mulan in *The Woman Warrior* was practicing martial arts in the mountains, her family helped her get married with her childhood playmate. After she came down from the mountain, she rode on the battlefield with her husband. Fighting the enemy side by side; during the long war, she got pregnant, but while she was pregnant, she did not slack off. Later, when the child was born, Mulan carried him behind her back and continued to fight on the battlefield. After the war, Mulan's husband and she returned to their hometown and lived a happy life with plenty of food and clothing. "My mother and father and the entire clan would be living happily on the money I had sent them. My parents had bought their coffins. They would sacrifice a pig to the gods that I had returned. From the words on my back, and how they were fulfilled. The villagers would make a legend about my perfect filiality." (Kingston, 45)

## 2.2 The Significance of rewriting:

First of all, looking at society as a whole, all Chinese-American women live in a world dominated by men of two races. It is difficult for them to find their own place. They need to eliminate all kinds of contradictions and establish their own identity. Kingston has lived in a society dominated by white men since she was a child, and at the same time endured the old Chinese concept of favoring boys over girls at home, which forced her to pay great attention to issues such as gender equality and gender discrimination.

Secondly, from the perspective of identity, the author, as a Chinese-American, has a special dual identity. As an ethnic Chinese, Kingston has been influenced by traditional Chinese culture and concepts since childhood, but at the same time she grew up in an American environment and was influenced by American education and local society, leaving the author trapped in the dilemma of dual identities. In the fierce collision between Chinese culture and American culture, the author cannot truly integrate into society. In order to find himself in the collision of two cultures, the author created a new image by rewriting traditional Chinese stories. The image of Mulan in *The Woman Warrior* not only has the traditional Chinese culture of respecting elders, caring for husbands and raising children, but also has the characteristics of realizing self-worth and promoting women's rights advocated by the United States. (Zhong Yi, 144)

“First of all, identity crisis occurs when a person grows up in an environment that is unfamiliar to him or her, has different values, culture, and ways of thinking, and is unable to gain a sense of belonging, and thus cannot realize self-awareness.” (Chen Yanqiong 60)

Most of the writers of Chinese-American literature are second-generation immigrants.

Life in the United States is undoubtedly a new experience for them, which will inevitably make them feel "culture shock." Most Chinese-American female literary writers focus on the identification and pursuit of ethnic and gender identities. Under the influence of their dual identities, they spoke for themselves through writing. Kingston, who is studied in this area, uses bold innovation and rewriting to integrate Chinese mythology into literature, and builds a

bridge between Eastern and Western cultures through storytelling. It not only retains the mysterious color of Chinese literature, but also shows the diverse American social atmosphere; it combines the mysterious past with the ordinary reality and pave the way for the American Asian Literature. (Guan Hefeng, 4)

## III. THE REWRITE OF TS'AI YEN'S STORY

In addition to the reference to the historical figure of Mulan, the author also tells the story of Ts'ai Yen in the chapter "A Song for a Barbarian Reed Pipe". Ts'ai Yen was the daughter of Ts'ai Yong, a writer in the Eastern Han Dynasty. At the age of 16, she married a talented man named Wei Zhong Dao. However, less than a year after the marriage, Wei Zhong Dao died of illness. At the same time, his father Ts'ai Yong was also wrongly framed and died in prison. Beautiful and talented, she was kidnapped by the Huns during the war and forced to marry the leader. She lived in Xiongnu for 12 years and gave birth to two children. Cao Cao, Ts'ai Yong's former friend, sent an emissary to ransom Ts'ai Yen for a large sum of money in order to let the talented woman edit history books. The expectation of returning home and the conflict between mother and son made her suffer. But Cao Cao reminded her that her father's mausoleum had not been visited and his legacy had not yet been completed. This made Ts'ai Yen resolutely decide to return to the Central Plains. On the way home, the Huns experience and emotional surge led Ts'ai Yen to create the famous *Eighteen Stanzas of the Reed Pipe*.

### 3.1 The rewriting

What we see in the Ts'ai Yen story circulating in China is her unfortunate experience -- being captured, separated from her mother and her son, returning to her hometown and remarrying. Shang Yunying (2011) concluded from the textual analysis of *Eighteen Stanzas of the Reed Pipe* that the story of Ts'ai Yen circulated in China contains her dissatisfaction with her own fate and her feelings mixed with helplessness. Ts'ai Yen resisted the cultural mores of the barbarian tribes. She abides by filial piety and puts the father-daughter relationship above the mother-son relationship and the husband-wife relationship. This expressed the Han people's sense of cultural superiority, and also indirectly consolidated the authority of the patriarchal

society of Chinese culture. However, these negative factors are replaced by positive feelings in Kingston's rewrite.

Kingston's story is rewritten in two main ways. First of all, in the original edition Ts 'ai Yen is not proficient in martial arts, and she does not kill enemies on the battlefield, as Kingston portrays her to do, "Like other captive soldiers until the time of Mao, whose soldiers volunteered, 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." (Kingston,209) The rewritten Ts 'ai Yen's image with efficient in both brainy and brawny activities echoes the Mulan mentioned in the first half of the novel. As the final part of the final chapter, this rewrite makes the "woman warrior" manifest once again.

Kingston's second rewrite is about Ts'ai Yen's acceptance of the Xiongnu as a foreign culture. Exposed to a foreign culture, Ts'ai Yen was deeply distressed. She tried to speak Chinese to the children, but the children who grew up in the Xiongnu culture did not understand and even laughed at her. She detested the sound of the reed pipes, but gradually fell into them:

"The music disturbed Ts'ai Yen; its sharpness and its cold made her ache. It disturbed her so that she could not concentrate on her own thoughts. Night after night the songs filled the desert no matter how many dunes away she walked. She hid in her tent but could not sleep through the sound."(Kingston, 209)

In the rewritten version, Ts 'ai Yen resonates with the sound of the pipe, and she writes the lyrics to accompany it. This was the moment when the Han culture she carried and the barbarian Hungarian culture moved from conflict to integration:

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 seemed 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.(Kingston, 209)

### 3.2 The Significance of Rewrite

To some extent, Kingston sees his own experience in Ts 'ai Yen's story. "A Song for a Barbarian Reed Pipe" tells the story of a Chinese child's difficult growth from silence to talk from a first-person perspective. In order to speak English better, her mother cut out her tongue tendons. However, the huge difference between Chinese family and American school education made her struggle with inferiority and incomprehension, so she remained silent in school. The silence made her so angry that she forced the other Chinese girl to speak out. The situation is just like Ts 'ai Yen's state of aphasia in Xiongnu - she cannot communicate with her children in Chinese and has nowhere to talk about her distress. Kingston uses Ts 'ai Yen as a metaphor for herself to illustrate her spiritual journey of adjusting to Chinese-American identity.

In addition, the author rewrites herself into the ending of Ts 'ai Yen's story to show her understanding of her dual cultural identity as a Chinese-American. As Gao Fen (2017) consider that what Kingston want to express is, how an ethnic minority child breaks through the thick wall of ethnic family education and realizes the life breakthrough process of independent cultural integration. Ts 'ai Yen, who had been silent for 12 years, sang out her inner distress to the accompaniment of the Xiongnu flute, which shows that she created a product in her own language that could be understood by both the Xiongnu and Han cultures. It also shows the reality of Kingston's role as narrator: Kingston sings with a barbarian instrument, English, but what she sings are stories about her family and her own sadness and anger.(Bobby Fong, 1989) Ts 'ai Yen sings in the Han language, but the emotions expressed are also recognizable to the Hu people. This represents a Chinese American creating his own identity amid the clash of two cultures and that's what Kingston craves.

Ts 'ai Yen combines "Hu music" with "Han Ci" to compose songs that both Hu and Han can enjoy. In Kingston's view, Ts 'ai Yen made a successful "translation." Kingston is clearly aware here that her writing is also a kind of translation. She likened her writing to the practice of communicating between two cultures and the standard is to translate well. (Wei Jingyi, 101)

Using Ts 'ai Yen's story, the author expresses her determination to establish a connection between traditional

Chinese ethnicity and real life in the United States through her writing. This is why Kingston rewrites Ts' ai Yen story at the end of the novel: try to be compatible with both Chinese and American cultures and accept the identity of Chinese-American women, resolve conflicts through equal communication, and promote the integration of the two cultures.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

This paper makes a detailed analysis of the rewriting of the female images of Hua Mulan and Ts' ai Yen in Chinese traditional culture in the book *The Woman Warrior*. The author integrates the cultural shock she encountered in a foreign country. By rewriting the traditional story and using the revised Mulan, Ts' ai Yen's female image tells the story of her seeking for a just and equal female identity in a special environment. As a Chinese-American, the author has a special dual identity, faces identity crisis, suffers from culture shock, and suffers oppression in a male-dominated world. By rewriting the stories of Ts' ai Yen and Hua Mulan, she integrates Chinese and American cultures to better seek cultural identity, seek more equal status for women, promote women's rights, and promote the spread of Chinese culture. Promote the integration of the two cultures.

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