

## Controversial Enactments of Gender-Crossing in Maxine Hong Kingston's Writings

**Dr. Sihem Arfaoui**

Department of English

ISSHJ, Jendouba University, Tunisia

and

FSATuraif, Northern Border University, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

### Abstract

*The gender journeys of certain male and female characters in *The Woman Warrior* (1975) and *China Men* (1982), by Maxine Hong Kingston, mirror contentious instances of gender interruption in breaking down the hierarchy between genders. By negating exclusive sex and gender paradigms, the considered texts partake in debunking a sex / gender system based on sexism and misogyny. They adopt strategies which include the cross-over from femininity to masculinity and vice versa. Kingston not only dismantles the dichotomous thinking that requires and imposes the superiority of masculinity over femininity, but also provides a counter-reading of femininity as “a sex which is not one” (Irigaray 254). At the same time, in neither text does Kingston perfectly overcome a certain degree of adhering to and affirming gender binarism. In certain respects, her works follow in the footsteps of phallogocentric denotations of sex / gender differences by giving utter validity to the word and male realm. Thus, despite the fact of belying biological readings of natural castration and its attributes and grounding them in cultural apparatuses, Kingston's gender accounts do not consistently depart from the conviction to interpret a feminine identity as failure. Beyond the psychological effects of those disruptions, Kingston's two texts amount to a catalogue of relative resistance to the androcentric misogynist bases of every binary gender figuration.*

### 1. Introduction

The purpose of this essay is to scrutinize the gender journeys of certain male and female characters in *The Woman Warrior* (1975) and *China Men* (1982), by Maxine Hong Kingston, as contentious instances of gender interruption.<sup>1</sup> Its approach to the manifestations and implications of negating exclusive sex and gender paradigms, in these two texts, aligns itself with critic Leslie W. Rabine's suggestion that neither title maintains traditional gender essences and that “neither sex possesses essential qualities” (88). Noticing that “gender oppositions do play a determining role in organizing Kingston's textual world”, Rabine also points out that gender disruption emerges out as the major objective correlative of the considered texts (88). With this background in view, *The Woman Warrior* and *China Men* seem enamoured with inverting time-honoured gender identities.

By examining the sex and gender representations along Kingston's two texts, this essay uses gender disruption and gender interruption interchangeably, that is, in the spirit of registering the strategies through which these narratives debunk a sex / gender system based on sexism and misogyny. It applies the concept of disruption to the cross-over from femininity to masculinity, via the image of the phallic woman, as much as it makes reference to the feminized representation of manhood.

At the same time, this discussion tries to demonstrate that each of Kingston's narratives is not only strongly engaged to dismantle the dichotomous thinking that requires and imposes the superiority of masculinity over femininity. In part, its aim is to show that the counter-reading of femininity as “a sex which is not one” in both novels remains contaminated by a troubling masculinist background (Irigaray 254). Indeed, neither of these titles can overcome a certain degree of adhering to and affirming gender binarism, although both belie biological readings of natural castration and its attributes, by grounding them in cultural apparatuses.

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<sup>1</sup> From here on, all parenthetical references to these two novels will be abbreviated as *TWW* (*The Woman Warrior*) and *CM* (*China Men*).

This aspect points out the conceptual limitations of such literary works that follow in the footsteps of phallogocentric --giving utter validity to the word and male realm-- denotations of sex / gender differences in certain respects of gender matters and relations ("Phallogocentric"). Thus, through her accounts of disrupted femininity as opposed to interrupted masculinity, Kingston does not consistently depart from the conviction to interpret a feminine identity as failure.

The first part of this article places emphasis on the exemplary inversion of sex favouritism through *The Woman Warrior* and its link with the writer's feminist thrust to set up a more equitable system of signification. It also scrutinizes the protagonist's subversion of gender dichotomies in connection with "women's masculine self-fashioning", that is, as a polemical search for registering resistance to the gender system in power (Schoene 286). Second, this paper investigates the symmetrical concern of Kingston's second text with interrupting rather the male gender roles by examining the contribution of the opening tale in breaking down the hierarchy between genders, i.e. through Tang Ao's enforced femininity in the queen's harem. In a further endeavor to foreground the intrinsic connection between emasculation and the disruption of the male gender identity, this section looks at the variegated ways in which Kingston represents the disturbed masculine identity of early Chinese male immigrants, via their relegation to invisibility, powerlessness, silence and autoeroticism.<sup>2</sup> In both works, there emerges a primary concern, not with the psychological effects of those disruptions, but rather with their potentiality for cataloguing Kingston's relative resistance to the androcentric misogynist bases of every binary gender figuration.<sup>3</sup>

## 2. *Crossing over to Masculinity:*

The reference to gender interruption in this section of the essay is closely linked to Jacques Lacan's psychoanalysis of the phallic woman and her compulsion to emulate masculine positionings.<sup>4</sup> It lends itself to Lacan's suggestion that "it is in order to be the phallus [...] the signifier of the desire of the Other, that the woman will reject an essential part of her femininity, notably all its attributes through masquerade. It is for what she is not that she expects to be desired as well as loved" (278). In this statement, Lacan's consolidation of Sigmund Freud's thesis of penis envy is evident; he places more emphasis on the phallus as a cultural emblem of power.<sup>5</sup> Lacan's view equally provides momentum for the adherence of Kingston's texts to gender disruptions as a controversial medium of cultural resistance.

As a narrative that resists a definitive generic classification either as fiction or non-fiction, *The Woman Warrior* consists of five short prose narratives, subsequently entitled "No Name Woman," "White Tigers," "Shaman," "At the Western Palace" and "A Song for a Barbarian Reed Pipe." Thematically, this cluster of short stories revolves around female oppression and heroism and locates the effaced first-person narrator "in a long line of women, mythical and historical, strong and weak, slave and warrior, old and young" (Huntley 79). Amid these different stories, "White Tigers", the third story in Kingston's book, remains the most prominent for upsetting the gender dichotomy that elevates masculinity above femininity.

As a matter of fact, "White Tigers" gives voice to a well-known Amazon of Chinese legend, Fa Mu Lan, who challenges not only the traditional gender system but also sex difference as a liability. In being represented as "an antidote to the submissive maiden archetype", Fa Mu Lan features an indestructible woman warrior who abides by the creed of filial piety to the extent of fighting an oppressive sovereign in her father's place (Huntley 77). Her unprecedented heroic achievements as a female fighter seem to offer the first person girl-narrator a model of female triumph to imitate.

<sup>2</sup> The term emasculation, also known as effeminization, emerges as a form of gender essentialization that informs the history of ethnic Americans without exception (Wong 112-13).

<sup>3</sup> The reference to androcentrism is based on a general designation of what is "dominated by or emphasizing masculine interests of a masculine point of view" (Androcentric).

<sup>4</sup> Lacan's essay "The Meaning of the Phallus" is an illustrative example of his theory on femininity where he recuperates the Freudian concept of feminine lack, yet on the basis of a Saussurean binarist distinction between the signifier and the signified.

<sup>5</sup> Rephrasing Freud's concept of penis-envy, Irigaray comments that every girl seeks "to appropriate [the penis] for herself, by all the means at her disposal: by her somewhat servile love of the father-husband capable of giving it to her; by her desire of a penis-child, preferably male; by gaining access to those cultural values which are still 'by right' reserved for males alone" (254).

In this vein, the young protagonist studiously works on achieving some kind of exceptional accomplishment, just like the legendary swordswoman, attempting to prove that she is worthy of her community's faith. Both journeys reject gender discrimination, because they fight heroically and abide by the creed of filial piety. This way, they are interrelated at the level of depicting gender interruption at its best. Essentially, it is the predominance of a particular frame of reference starkly contemptuous of womanhood that gives the narrator-protagonist valid excuses for oscillating between harboring an irresistible hatred towards the other sex (*TWW* 47) and adopting gestures of gender crossing. It also fosters her to be inspired by the fabulous story about the unprecedented glories of Fa Mu Lan as a legendary woman warrior who perfectly combines marital and martial accomplishments (*TWW* 20). Its stress on the potential for imitating the patriarch, albeit mythically-embedded, emerges as a prerequisite of fashioning the protagonist's coming-of-age. Its heroic account refers to a legend that used to be chanted by Maxine and Brave Orchid, the daughter and her mother, together as they are working around the house.<sup>6</sup> It is the account of a seven-year-old swordswoman summoned by a magical bird to lead her people in a fight against a despotic baron. In a carving episode, before Fa Mu Lan sets out on her mission, her parents inscribe the wrongs done to their clan on her buttocks to make her stronger during the battle and loyal to her national duties. The heroine's initiation to warrior-hood takes fifteen years during which she learns how to be quiet and then how to master her body (*TWW* 30-35). This version of Fa Mu Lan's tale, it should be mentioned, is Maxine's transformative retelling of the mother's initial narrative.<sup>7</sup>

The protagonist's quest for exceptional heroism goes deeper than the mere action of re-telling Fa Mu Lan's heroic tale, while inventing myriad adjustments, in order to enfold a range of overloaded phallic symbols. For one thing, the litany of revenge inscribed on the heroine's backplays on the word, either spoken or written, as a symbol of the sword through (*TWW* 53). For another thing, Kingston's recreated translation of the original folktale highlights the umbilical cord which is disconnected from Fa Mu Lan after her child birth and tied to her flagpole (*TWW* 40). This additional figure shifts the emphasis to such attributes as individuality, freedom and autonomy; the three of which can be termed as conventional manly pursuits. In this same context, critic Patricia P. Chu suggests that once the umbilical cord is cut it is likely to render not only the liberties that Maxine takes with the original of Fa Mu Lan, but more importantly Maxine's training in talk-story which traditionally represents a male achievement (107).

In parallel with this, the Amazonian woman --who avenges the wrongs committed against her family-- looms large for Maxine to the extent that the latter retells her story in the form of "an extended reverie or daydream", that is, with herself cast as the woman warrior trained by surrogate parents (Eakin 259). At its best, the fusion seems to be only one stage in the protagonist's way to achieving a phallic status of power and violence. Indeed, her appropriation of phallic superiority is even structurally noticeable at the level of the narrative voice and has much to do with the impossibility of distinguishing Maxine the listener and, then, teller from Maxine the swordswoman: "I would be a little girl of seven the day I followed the bird away into the mountains" (emphasis mine, *TWW* 20). Affirming and responding to a latent complex of penis-envy, Maxine conveys a strong connection with the witch amazons as wild intractable women who challenge patriarchal order to the extent that all these different subjects become one (Smith 1063). She is plainly infatuated with the female heroine to such a point that the I-Maxine merges into the I-Fa Mu Lan until the reader ends up not seeing the dividing-line between narrator's own story and that of the swordswoman.

The tale inculcates the protagonist's hunger for the privileges of the phallic masquerade via its carving episode which registers a patent feminist action. Amalgamated in the original legend, the inscription on the heroine's back gives Maxine a vision of her similarity to the mythical woman warrior. "What we have in common are the words at our backs. The ideographs 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*" (*TWW* 53). The embodied reminder is less a rhetorical claim by Maxine of her artistic bond with the legendary swordswoman than a poetic license to contest the misogynistic and, by far, the racist sides in Chinese and American cultures.

<sup>6</sup>Considering Kingston's complete refusal to connect herself to what she calls "the narrator girl", this paper uses Kingston to refer to the author and Maxine to refer to the narrator / protagonist ("This is the Story I Heard" 6).

<sup>7</sup>Kingston's version renews the original tale in different ways. For an ample comparison of the source text and the recreated adaptation and a review of the resulting critical chasm, see Frank Chin, "Come All Ye Asian American Writers of the Real and the Fake," in *iiiiiiii! An Anthology of Asian American Writers*, ed. Paul Jeffery Chan et al. (New York: Meridian, 1991): 1-92, among other studies.

Such a two-fold struggle begets Maxine's emerging realization that she failed if she grew up to be but a wife or a slave: "We could be heroines, swordswomen" (TWW 19). Although this quest remains entrenched in binarism -- where the female does not just take on male characteristics but also tries to excel and outshine, it remains a stimulus sufficient enough for the protagonist to take further steps in her project of gender disruption.

Maxine takes her scheme of subversion further as to enact disruptive performances on her feminine identity. The latter category serves as an attribution to the protagonist's anti-misogynist struggle and its status of being enshrined in a system of phallic signification. Indeed, as an adolescent, Maxine grounds the mimicry of a mythical female fighter's public skills in the female rebellion against domestic chores. For instance, she no longer participates in such traditional female occupations as preparing food for her family. She is determined not to take up these duties, because it occurs to her that a bad girl is almost a boy (TWW 47). Further, Maxine is intent on bringing home straight "A"s grades and advertising her strong intention to become a lumberjack in Oregon (TWW 48-49). Through such an outstanding desire to attain and re-generate the phallic woman which is chiefly incarnated by Fa Mu Lan, Maxine resists sticking to conventional womanly domains.

What gives special meaning to the disruptive enactments at the core of *The Woman Warrior* is Maxine's gradual maturation into a feminist mouthpiece increasingly pre-occupied with the use of interruption as a medium of expressing her discontent with a prevalent gender favoritism. Indeed, while in Berkeley Maxine refuses to be passive and marches for political causes in the sixties (TWW 47). To counter the litany of sayings about herself as a bad girl and, thus, draw near the mother's model of the swordswoman, Maxine also muses about storming across China to reclaim the family lands --taken over by the Communists-- and to rage across the American continent to take back the laundry in New York and the laundry in California which are confiscated from the Hong family by American authorities (TWW 49).

Nothing better evinces the impulse to upset the gender boundaries than the episode wherein Maxine, fired by her racist boss, thinks to herself "[i]f I took the sword, which my hate must surely have forged out of the air, and gutted him, I would put color and wrinkles into his shirt" (TWW 49). In this sense, if Maxine emulates the woman warrior to take vengeance both on the Communists in China and the racist rivals in America, that is, the way the vindictive Chinese heroine strives to eliminate the greedy baron, then, she becomes a trespasser. This way, the model of womanhood she wants to embrace makes a sharp break with the codes and prerequisites of feminine demeanor, hence, crossing over into the masculine realm as a reverential gender category.

Inferentially, the features of gender disruption in "White Tigers" and *The Woman Warrior* make deeper sense if they are placed in their appropriate context. In fact, the concept of interruption is not gratuitous or without reason but, instead has everything to do with the very gender system which is in power. In fact, it originates in the narrator's conscious and unconscious striking sense of gender inequality which is explicitly embedded in a burdensome patriarchal culture. Founded on sexism, the latter emerges as an outstanding cause of alienation for Maxine, especially that, even linguistically, its Chinese version does not acknowledge humanity in womanhood, since there "is a Chinese word for the female 'I'—which is slave. Break the women with their own tongues" (TWW 47). This way, none can miss the sexist gibes that run through *The Woman Warrior* as a whole, given their dominant register replete with sayings largely chauvinist (46, 52). Repudiating the female sex, the narrator's male relatives even feel intimidated and disgusted at their female procreation and do not seem to recover their face only until Brave Orchid, the narrator's mother, eventually delivers a son (TWW 46, 191). All this provides an incentive for developing the protagonist's growing consciousness of her misogynistic environment and its detrimental impact on her view of herself, her understanding of womanhood and her relationships to the other sex and the larger world.

### 3. *Crossing over to Femininity:*

In the same context of disrupted gender roles, it is of crucial meaning to the current paper that the different shapes of emasculation in Kingston's second text best embody interrupted gender performances while remaining inseparable from the writer's feminist impulse.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Commenting on the significance of emasculation as a thematic leitmotif in *China Men*, writer and critic Shirley Geok-lin Lim states that "this theme of political, social, and sexual emasculation underlies most of Kingston's depictions of China Men in New York, California, Hawaii, and Alaska" (246). In a similar way, critic King-KokCheung describes how *China Men*

The allusion to emasculation stresses how the gender crossing from masculinity to femininity amounts to a downfall for the Chinese immigrant man. In this vein, critic King-Kok Cheung states that “*China Men* is devoted almost exclusively to historical and communal portraits of men, yet, the ‘feminist’ in Kingston is not mute” (100). Thus, in the transformation myth --wherein Tang Ao is contemptuously coerced to enter the realm of women--gender disruption denounces not just racial discrimination but, in parallel, all forms of oppression against women. The section entitled “On Discovery” allows the question of gender disruption to rise to the status of one of the foundational strategies of the entire book. It plays on the story of a man who is called Tang Ao and made to suffer a series of subjugations that dismantle his sexual identity as a male. This character has his ears pierced, his feet bound, his hair plucked out, his eyebrows, cheeks, and lips painted. Even more, he is forced to wash his used bandages and serve at the queen’s table like a courtesan (CM 4-5). To the extent that feminization constitutes “a negative quality in the scheme of patriarchal binary oppositions”, we can state that Tang Ao has undergone humiliation in its worst form (Cheung10). As a triggering example, it is related that his female detainees “locked him in a canopied apartment equipped with pots of makeup, mirrors, and a woman's clothes” (CM 3).

Despite Shostack’s affirmation that “[t]he conventional icons of Chinese femininity --silencing, crippling, grooming-- stand for Kingston less as a critique of Chinese conceptions of womanhood and more as metaphors for the experience of Chinese male emigrating to America, where they were often effectively emasculated by Caucasian-American culture” (61), the enactments on Tang Ao’s body and spirit also stand out more in conjunction with the feminist thrust of the Chinese source. Indeed, the feminist contract making up Li’s *The Romance of Flowers in the Mirror*, from which Kingston’s adaptation is inspired, is not that peripheral to the adapted account subject of “On Discovery”. Kingston’s reinvention has been more or less faithful to Li’s original aim of exposing the absurd cruelty of conventional Chinese practices relating to femininity.

While alluding to a stark critique of the constrictions degrading women’s status as second-class citizens, along with lamenting *China Men*’s disgrace at the hands of white Americans, Kingston carries the strategy of gender disruption further as to enfold BaBa’s story. First, she mentions his earlier exchange with a neighbor’s newly born baby girl (CM 19, 20) --something which reinforces the probability that this humiliating spot in BaBa’s life is what makes him determine not only never to go back to China, but also to erase the memory of the privileged sister (TWW 11). Second, she depicts more challenging features of disruption with regard to the conspicuous resemblance she generates between BaBa’s long awaited journey to the Land of Opportunities (the New World) and the trajectory that women have to go through in Confucian China (CM 19-20). Also, BaBa has to change his identity not just by taking on the Christian name of Ed, but also by embodying the illegal immigrant’s ritual of inventing a new name each time he is arrested in police raids. As one critic comments, “because of the discriminatory American laws, prospective sojourners to the Gold Mountain had to change their parentage [...] just as a girl had to give up her own family and become part of her husband’s when she married” (Goellnicht 199). Upsetting BaBa’s identity as a man in this way could be an invitation for male readers to empathize with women and their plight through such ritual passages as menstruation, marriage and childbirth.

Furthermore, the connection between BaBa as a would-be immigrant and a self-effaced Chinese bride runs even deeper than that, especially if we postulate that “[t]o be a woman, whose birth is not recognized by the family, is to be a permanent exile, without any home, without a place. To be a man who loses one’s home is to cross over into the feminine gender” (Rabine 92). In this context, BaBa’s passage to New York and the uneasiness he has gone through are, in turn, analogous to the sentiments of anxiety and apprehension a prospective wife in Old China is likely to experience. “Various futures raced through his mind: walking the plank, drowning, growing old in jail, being thrown overboard in chains, flogged to tell where others were hiding, hung by the neck, returned to China” (CM 49). *China Men* living in the New World have been forced into being exiled selves --a situation that patriarchal cultures have imposed on women for centuries, especially in their evolution from maidenhood to womanhood.

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has been discussed in the light of three main forms of emasculation, i.e., personal degradation espoused by society, collective slavery instigated by a collective interest group, and sexual deprivation sanctioned by law (104). Donald C. Goellnicht is equally persuaded that Chinese immigrants had been emasculated as well as forced into ‘feminine’ subject position of powerlessness and silence, into ‘bachelor’ Chinatowns devoid of women, and into ‘feminized’ jobs that could not be filled with women, due to the restrictive and exclusionary laws instituted by the dominant white culture (192).

In another version of BaBa's journey to the New World, the father --who once passed the Imperial examinations in China-- happens to be locked in the San Francisco Barracks. This particular confinement is more or less faced by Chinese women whom the foot-binding ritual, for example, ties to a very restricted space.<sup>9</sup> Incarcerated, the father feels further mistreated when "a white demon physically examined him, poked him in the ass and genitals" (CM 53). It is outstanding not just as a humiliating end of BaBa's career as a schoolmaster, but also as a reversal of "some form of evolutionary chain" (Chiu 194). It can signal an intentional challenge of one's physical and psychological dignity as a man, let alone a human being, and even an insulting defamation if viewed from the angle of fathers in China who "are revered, treated with great respect, and approached with awe" (Huntley 149). Every single attribute of masculinity falls apart for BaBa, now that he has been jailed on the ground floor, that is, below the arrested women: "'The women are up there,' the father was told. Diabolical, inauspicious beginning to be trodden over by women. 'Living under women's legs,' said the superstitious old-fashioned men from the backward villages. 'Climbed over by women.' It was bad luck even to walk under women's pants or clothes-lines" (CM 55). The detainees' anger at such a calculated humiliation is an obvious reaction, given their being schooled in Confucianism as much as it alludes to a sense of superiority that a feminist such as Kingston would not let pass without infusing an intentional disruption.

Taking up traditional women's activities, BaBa also manifests another kind of feminization. On the one hand, the absence of his wife during the first years of his immigration has conditioned him to assume the responsibilities of a house cleaner (CM 61). On the other hand, he is forced by the hostility in the fields, mines, and factories to do menial jobs such as laundry work which almost turns analogous to an insult as a male occupation (Huntley 2). "The laundry business is low, you say / Washing out blood that stinks like brass / Only a China man can debase himself so" (CM 63). It is its association with the washing of menstrual rags, in particular, which constitutes ignominy in itself and subverts men's decisive position in the world. From the perspective that this is usually a time when women are most shunned, so to have to wash out their menses blood becomes doubly degrading for a man.

Another salient pattern of representing the enforced crossover from masculinity to femininity is evinced through BaBa's dispossession of the breadwinner's power. Knowing that being able to provide adequate provisions for his household is what essentially defines his manhood, BaBa falls into the feminine realm when the police shut down the gambling house in Stockton, destroying his source of income. He becomes confined to the domestic sphere and coerced into allowing his wife to ridicule him and take up the male privilege of family maintenance --by working at menial tasks and picking tomatoes in the fields. Even when BaBa gathers up his energy and spirits to recover his status he is faced with one more stumbling block, upon finding out that whatever he does his earnings are very minimal as a livelihood (CM 12-14).

The father's fall into the feminine trajectory becomes most visible with respect to his silence, being one essential character of femininity. Taking refuge in speechlessness, the father ends up in passivity. Apart from his voluntary quietness for weeks and months after the gypsies' incident which resulted in the closure of his laundry, BaBa revels in withholding his life story from his children which denies the latter any verbal interaction with their cultural heritage (CM 13) and leads to their estrangement from China (Huntley 141). He gives his elder daughter no helpful clue to spin his own story, stirring her up to rely on her own imagination and her mother's talk story in order to relate his proper narrative (CM 15).<sup>10</sup> However, BaBa's silence is by no means comparable to that of his daughter in kindergarten as long as it "is not a positive silence but the silence of resignation that signals withdrawal and humiliation, the inability to articulate his own subject position so that he is doomed to the one -- that of inscrutable passive 'Chinaman'" (Goellnicht 201). To a large degree, the father's deficiency and impotence in acting as an agent and mastering his life stand for his growing sense of emasculation by which the daughter seems starkly moved that she takes over her father's past in an attempt to break his silence.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup>An indicator of the confined roles ascribed to Chinese women, foot-binding is discussed in such titles as Ronald Takaki, *A Different Mirror: A History of Multicultural America* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1993).

<sup>10</sup>Maxine's father is largely redolent of Tom Hong who is said to have broken the wall of silence only ten years before his death, supposedly, while reading a pirated Chinese translation of *China Men* defying him to object to any accurate rendering (Huntley 18-19).

<sup>11</sup>Puzzled over her father's continual silence, but also wanting to learn his immigrant life, Maxine's only alternative is to invent a father as fiction, giving three versions of his voyage to the Gold Mountain: as a stowaway in an illegal journey, as a

Through his fall in silence as an attribute of femininity, BaBa retrieves the impotent image of the early immigrant characters in *China Men*. For instance, tamed by the rule of silence, the narrator's Great Grandfather of the Sandalwood Mountains complains "'we've taken a vow of chastity too. Nothing but roosters in this flock'" (CM 100). In a similar way, her Grandfather of the Sierra Nevada Mountains demonstrates the implication of the notion of enforced chastity in disrupting his masculine identity. In an indirect reference to the laws prohibiting miscegenation, the grandfather's sexual urges resurface as he is forging railway passages through the Sierra Nevada Mountains. Seized by sexual desire, the grandfather desperately tries to curl himself up but eventually, is unable to control himself and exuberantly imagines he is having sexual intercourse with the world and air around him (CM 133). From then on, he would masturbate into the air and, at other times, look at his sexual organs, wondering "what a man was for, what he had to have a penis for" (CM 133), a habit which can be termed as a uselessness "in a procreative arena" (Chiu 198). From the standpoint of critic Tomo Hattori, this autoerotic act also marks an alienation from the gratifying objects --the flesh and blood women-- possessed and enjoyed by the masters.<sup>12</sup>

#### 4. Conclusion:

In view of the abundant instances where Kingston varies her disruptions of the gender male roles and representations, it would be misleading to emerge with the inference on femininity as a thoroughly resented gender identity. In fact, it should be indicated that *China Men* significantly reinforces the crossing from masculinity to femininity as an option and, not always, as an imposition. The grandfather's feminine side is a case in point. Indeed, after this character's return to China where he is given a chance to procreate more male progeny, he develops a softer, more feminine side (Huntley 151). Ironically, after his wife bears their fourth son, he tries to exchange his own son for a neighbor's newly born baby girl (CM 18-9). Critic E.D. Huntley makes an interesting point upon linking this character's unusual demeanor to Kingston's imagination of a new Asian American man, one who reveals "a latent nurturing talent" (151). In her point of view, the writer aspires through this figure to redefine heroism as having feminine traits: "the ability to nurture [...] to show compassion and empathy, and most important, to talk-story" (152).

What seems, at first glance, to convey the anguish of emasculation of Chinese Americans bears as well on the ordeal of the other sex, so that the same story could speak for or on behalf of both genders (Nisheme). It is for this reason that Cheung's "*The Woman Warrior Versus Chinaman Pacific*" foregrounds the writer's binary commitment of pointing both to the degraded status of Chinese men in the New World and to the subjugation of women both in old China and America (120). In the same respect, women's confiscated communication and men's abducted masculinity amount to parallel concerns in *China Men* (Huntley 140-41). In spite of Kingston's heavy focus upon the doubly *de-jurede-facto* oppressions --that have targeted the first generation Chinese male immigrants, we should always be aware that she never gives up a feminist allegiance to exposing and undermining structures of misogyny. Consequently, neither impulse eclipses the other.

We emerge with the awareness of a conceptual ideological development from *The Woman Warrior* to *China Men*. The development lends itself to the move from idealizing the masculine traits in a feminine sphere and denigrating femininity in the masculine sphere to the necessity of accepting gender difference, instead of rejecting it as a failure. As a consequence, the conception of gender disruption in *The Woman Warrior* becomes more problematic and controversial than that in *China Men*. On the one hand, Kingston is keenly aware that, in a "son-obsessed culture", neither the yearning for female progeny nor even the close bonding to children is indicative of sanity, rationality and manliness (Huntley 152). On the other hand, her acts of disrupting the conventional male standards entail that being sexually and genderly different is in no way deficient as much as she does not seem to side with the advocacy that masculinity is much preferable to femininity, at least in *China Men*.

In *The Woman Warrior*, by contrast, Kingston's paradigmatic idea of subjecting male favoritism to subversion carries within it certain perpetuation of binary ideologies and oppositions. Indeed, Kingston expresses an overtly disputable wish for achieving masculinity via her protagonist's myriad endeavors to usurp "the power to 'embody' the Phallus" (Butler 44).

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legal immigrant through Angel Island, and finally as an American-born.

<sup>12</sup>An eroticized extension of planting explosives into the rocks, masturbation could stand for sexual deprivation and convey a highly imaginative counteraction to a racist milieu (Cheung104-5).

Accordingly, the masculinist recasting of femininity epitomizes that women's "mimicry of masculine behaviour in the name of equality [...] significantly thwarts the possibility of any enduring manifestation of female distinctiveness", albeit Kingston emphasizes both femininity and masculinity as mere constructs (Schoene 286). In the process of exploring the ways in which the feminine identity could cross over to the masculine and vice versa, Kingston is borrowing her conceptual frame from the predominant theoretical models. Her first title affirms but also adds volatility to the conventional complex of the "garçon manqué" and, at times, amounts to a mere complicit variation on the inseparable trio of natural castration, phallic masquerade and penis envy (Beauvoir 296).<sup>13</sup> Both in the denunciation of hegemonic structures and parody of androcentric fantasies, Kingston's subversion of the gender paradigm reads with what Irigaray calls "a sex which is not one" (254). Thus, by stressing gender binarism, it also features the vulnerabilities of adopting creative writings to psychoanalytical and feminist literature reviews.

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<sup>13</sup> Beauvoir's own translation of "garçonsmanqués" is "children who lack something of being boys", which implies that Beauvoir, in her turn, seems to take at face value the Freudian mythology of female lack or invisibility (296).



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