

**Desire for the Other in Maxine Hong Kingston's
*The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts***

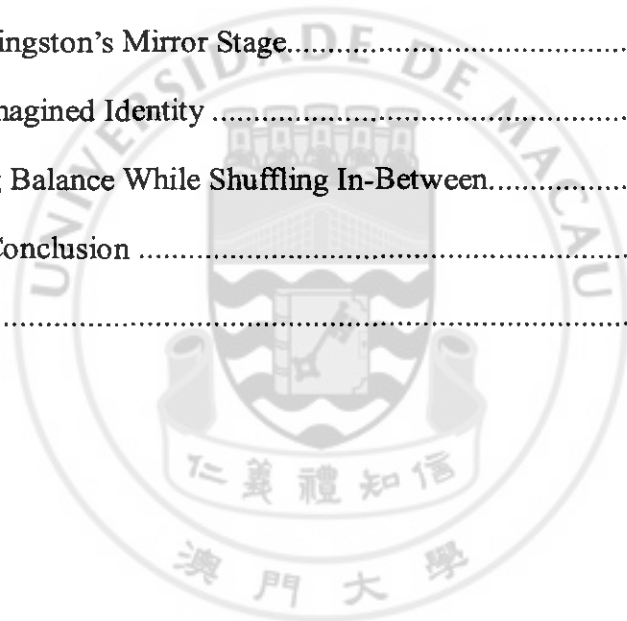


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Abstract of the Thesis

Maxine Hong Kingston's first book *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood among Ghosts* is among the most widely circulated and taught literary works by a living American writer. Since its publication in 1976, *The Woman Warrior* has been frequently discussed among both mainstream American literary circle and Asian American writers. One of the most discussed issues in *The Woman Warrior* is the problem of the identity of the narrator/the autobiographer in terms of both gender and ethnicity. Deborah L. Madsen considers her as a feminist and a Chinese American who "is the most prominent Asian American author of her generation", and who "leads the renaissance of Asian American women's writing that began in the late 1970s".¹ However, this book has also been criticized for its author's distortion of Chinese elements by some Asian American writers, such as writer Frank Chin. Most criticism on the book has identified the narrator/autobiographer Kingston as a representative of the general Chinese American community. The critics somehow skipped the process of Kingston's formation of identity and directly assumed her to be a Chinese American without acknowledging her struggle between the two cultures.

In this thesis, I will examine the process of Kingston's formation of her various individual identities by applying Jacques Lacan's theory of mirror stage and desire. In Lacan's theory, the subject at the mirror stage starts to recognize that his identity is incomplete; there is a lack which only exists in the Other. With the desire for a complete selfhood, the subject initiates his desire for the Other. However, what exists in the Other remains within the Other. The lack will stay unfulfilled. Hence, the desire for a complete selfhood is insatiable. The completion of a selfhood can only

¹ Deborah L. Madsen, *Literary Masters: Maxine Hong Kingston* (Detroit: Gale Group, 2000), p. 98.

be realized in one's imagination. In this way, as a postmodern subject, Kingston is involved in the turbulent confusion and pain resulting from the insatiable desire for the Other. Her desire originates from the lack of an ethnic identity in American society, as well as that of a voice as a woman in Chinese patriarchal society. As a girl living in between two different cultures, Kingston has to struggle against both ethnic rootlessness and sexist discrimination. Kingston, therefore, realizes that her selfhood is incomplete. In this thesis, I will discuss the way in which Kingston solves her confusion and pain through recognizing herself with the Other in her vivid imagination and reconstruction of the life stories of her alter egos. Moreover, I will examine how Kingston otherizes both Chinese and American cultures in order to achieve a balance when seeking a complete selfhood.

