ABSTRACT

The writer of this thesis attempts to explore Kingston’s autobiography as a weapon to fight for self-identity. The autobiography analyzed in this study is a representation of Chinese parents’ efforts to preserve their own tradition by imposing it on their daughters. As a result, most ABC women experience a dilemma of choosing between the two contradictory values, the traditional Chinese and the American. This study also reveals that in the family, the Chinese daughters are discriminated badly.

The interdisciplinary approach, which involves the history, culture, sociology, and literature, is applied in this study. By using this approach, the writer of this thesis discovers that discrimination toward daughters in Chinese family also means that individualism is also absent in traditional Chinese society.

The result of the study shows that the autobiography acted as a liberating weapon to fight for the bondage of old tradition and community’s domination and a vehicle for a Chinese-American woman to exist as an individual with a new identity.

Keywords: contradictory values, dilemma, autobiography, self-identity.

INTRODUCTION

The United States is a country where immigrants have given a tremendous contribution to its development to be a mature pluralistic cosmopolitan nation through its willingness and eagerness to accept other cultures, which in turn allow it to enrich itself greatly. In this context, it is interesting to examine—not the final fruits—but the formative process,

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which is colored with numerous periods of intense and bitter racial discriminations, including one against the Chinese. Anti-Chinese sentiment used to be very strong in the country before the passing of Immigration Act of 1965. Before the Post-Accord Era, the Chinese was the only race in the world which was not allowed to enter the country. The Chinese already in America were seen as "heathens," "robbers," and "outsiders," who were denied the typically American "equal opportunity to pursue happiness" (and, of course, success).

It is not easy for the Americans to accept another race or another culture. They are indeed generous, but not in a Platonic sense. Nothing is free in the great land of freedom. To be accepted, the other culture or race must first prove itself to be an asset to the new country—not a liability. It must prove its worth not only to itself, but also to the new country. But once the Americans accept the newcomer, they will not only embrace him as a blood brother, but also show it for all the world to see. The other, however, cannot simply let himself be Americanized, because Americans hate slavish people and "chameleons." Americans are free and proud, so they also want their brothers to be free and proud. So a "take and give" with the American people must first take place before the other may expect to be accepted in the American world.

It is very easy for the Chinese to be successful and powerful abroad, partly because education and self-improvement has for a long time been central values for them, as taught by Confucianism. A father in China may tell his son, "Go to Indonesia, make yourself rich, befriend the President, and the whole world will be yours." But the same advice will not work in America. The biggest problem for a Chinese to succeed in America is not to make money, but to remain a Chinese and yet at the same time also an American. In other words, he has to remain a Chinese but do away a number of Chinese values which the Americans cannot accept, and adopt the American ones. This is the biggest problem, because for the Chinese to deviate from tradition is the biggest sin of all, whereas to Americanize himself completely will be abhorred by the Americans themselves.

So, as reflected in Kingston's Woman Warrior, the bitterest thing that the American-born Chinese faces in America is the fact that they have to wage a war on two different theatres: outside and inside the family. Outside the family they have to fight for acceptance by the Americans; inside the family they have to fight the encroaching ghosts of the forefathers and their mighty tradition. It's the dilemma of their struggle to be an American by becoming a new and different Chinese—a rebirth.
METHODOLOGY OF STUDY

This thesis is the result of a qualitative approach that drew upon a variety of sources. I employed an interdisciplinary approach involving history, literature, and psychology. I gathered data from history books, especially those written by the Chinese in the United States, and literary works that explore the Chinese-American experience. Beside that, the writer also gains information from interviews with a diverse group of people. From the data gathered, the writer was able to draw conclusions that are presented in the final result of the study.

RESULT OF STUDY

Chinese-American Mother’s efforts to Impose Traditional Values and Chinese Female-Identity on the Daughters

Apparent, many parents and the Chinese-American community in the United States do not automatically adopt American values. On the contrary, many parents find that they have to preserve their ancestors’ values and traditions even though the latter have been living in the United States for decades. What Chinese parents do is in line with what Robert Rex and Wen Fa revealed as “the superiority of Chinese civilization over cultures beyond her borders; the irreconcilability of the different ways of life... and above all, the Confucian concept of loyalty to one’s ancestral family and state” (Rahne, 200; 157). Such a custom of ancestral worship in such a way makes it difficult for Chinese parents to work hard to preserve the superior ancestors’ values and ensure their children from being contaminated by Western or American values, “a byproduct for all that was bad about modern society, associated with individualism and the counter-culture, hippyism, permissiveness, student radicalism, ideologies of the welfare state and anti-establishment, anti-metropolitan company attitudes” (Hau, 1981; 262). They guard their children from being “infected” by the values that are not in line with their belief. The Chinese parents’ pride in their own culture and tradition is typical. As a result, they force their children to respect and preserve the Chinese values and reject American values. Such effort is especially addressed to the daughters. The Chinese parents work hard to protect them from the influence of the “barbarian” (Kingston, 1983; 9).
METHOD OF STUDY

This thesis is the result of a qualitative research. The data are mostly taken from novels, biographies, films, song lyrics, TV shows, and other sources. Using an interdisciplinary approach which involves sociology, history, literature, and psychology, this study is conducted. The data are gathered from history books especially concerning Chinese immigrants in the United States, books on literary theories and approaches, sociology books about Chinese, Chinese-American, and about American experience. Beside that, the writer also gains data from films such as Mulan, Roots, and many more. From the data gathered the writer tries to relate their relevance with the subject and analyze them. A conclusion was finally drawn and the whole result of this study was presented.

RESULT OF STUDY

Chinese-American Mother’s efforts to Impose Traditional Values and Chinese Female-Identity on the Daughters

Apparently, centuries of racial discrimination and segregation experienced by the Chinese in the United States does not automatically make them willing to adopt American values. On the contrary, many parents find that they have to preserve their ancestor’s values and traditions even though they have stayed in the United States for decades. What Chinese parents do is in line with what Robert Rotex and Wen Fong revealed as “the superiority of Chinese civilization over cultures beyond her borders; the irreconcilability of the different ways of life... and above all, the Confucian concept of loyalty to one’s ancestral family and state” (Rabine, 200: 157). Such a custom of ancestral worship in such a way makes Chinese parents work hard to preserve the superior ancestor’s values and prevent their children from being contaminated by Western or American values. “a prop for all that was bad about modern society, associated with individualism and the counter-culture, hippyism, permissiveness, student radicalism, ideologies of the welfare state and anti-establishment, anti-multinational company attitudes” (Hsu, 1981: 262). They guard the children intensely so they will not be “infected” by the epidemic American values and make them understand that they are they and we are ourselves” (Huang, 1976: 76). The Chinese’s pride of their own culture and tradition is typical. As a result, they force their children to keep the Chinese values and reject the American. Such effort is especially addressed to the daughters. The Chinese parents work hard to protect them from the influence of the “Barbarian” (Kingston, 1981: 9).
Chapman (1972) reveals, "Knowledge of one's culture is passed on through oral and written tradition. Asian-American children, on the average, have the resources of multi-generational families in which stories and accounts of elders and ancestors are passed on from one generation to another. This is especially the case among Chinese families. This set of values from one generation to another is widespread feature of the perpetuation of culture" (92). Maxine Hong Kingston's mother proves to be one of Asian-American parents who does such effort. She tries to teach her children Chinese values and beliefs by telling them Chinese folklores and family history.

In The Woman Warrior readers can see Brave Orchid as a Chinese-American who educates the daughters to be obedient and dutiful Chinese women. Though Brave Orchid is an educated person and has stayed in the United States for decades, yet she remains a woman with a traditional outlook. In Chinese society, right after a girl enters puberty, a mother will intensely warn the daughter not to do "forbidden things" such as premarital sex. In the autobiography, Kingston, the main narrator, describes how she also experienced being indoctrinated intensely by her mother. When she had her first menstruation, for instance, her mother told her a horrifying family tragedy concerning her father's sister disgraceful conduct. The incident in the talk-story actually took place in 1924, when their native village in China had just celebrated "seventeen hurry-up weddings" between men who were leaving for the United States, called "The Gold Mountains," and women of the village. The marriages took place to ensure the men's eventual return to the village. Brave Orchid, living with her husband's family as was customary for Chinese wives to do, noticed that her sister-in-law was pregnant even though it had been years since her husband had departed the village. The family remained silent about the fact, but the people of the village had noticed it, too. One night just before the due date of the baby's birth, the villagers, wearing masks, raided the house of the nameless woman as a punishment. They destroyed the family's crop, slaughtered their livestock, broke their household goods, and ruined their supplies. During the raid the family could only stand and stare in disbelief. The woman gave birth in the pigsty the same night. The next day Brave Orchid found her sister-in-law and the baby in the family well.

From that moment on, Brave Orchid always strongly warns Maxine not to do the same thing by frequently repeating the same story again and again with a tone of anger and disgust:

"I remember looking at your aunt one day when she and I were dressing. I had not noticed before that she had such a protruding melon of a stomach."
But I did not think, and the white tops of her black pants showing. She could not have been pregnant, you see, because her husband had been gone for years. No one said anything. We did not discuss it. In easy summer, she was ready to have the child, long after the time when it could have been possible” (Kingston, 1981: 17).

It is clear that Brave Orchid completely condemns her sister-in-law. The tone and the diction she chose when delivering the shameful experience such as “a portending melon of stomach,” and “long after the time when it could have been possible,” for example, indicate her cynical attitude toward the event. She apparently symbolizes women in the society who do not defend their honor but even take a part in the condemnation. This can be clearly seen in the ways she describes the raid:

“The villagers had also been counting. One night the baby was to be born, the villagers raised the house. Some were crying. Like a great saw, teeth strung with lights, files of people walked zigzag across our land, tearing the rice. Their lanterns dangled in the disturbed black water, which drained away through the broken bunds. As the villagers closed in, we could see that some of them, probably men and women we know well, wore white masks. The people with long hair hung it over their faces. Women with short hair made it stand up on end. Some had tied white bands around their foreheads, arms, and legs” (Ibid. 18).

From the tragedy told by her mother in the talk-story, the daughter learns that a Chinese girl has to be submissive, subservient, and obedient. The mother frequently warns her daughter.

“Don’t let your father know that I told you. Now that you have 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 watching” (Ibid. 3).

The warning is a proof that the tragedy which happened in the past in the homeland, China, survives and is treated as a part of the here and the now, the present-day America. By doing that the mother declares that even though they are not in China, the story is relevant and they still have to hold the Chinese values strongly. Realizing the children would certainly prefer adopting American values, the parents intentionally make the talk-stories horrifying and threatening. From this attitude it can clearly be seen that in educating the children, Chinese parents tend to threaten them. It also happens when they try to communicate family pride to the young generation. This can be seen in the way Brave Orchid frequently warn her daughter by referring to the tragedy of the aunt: “Don’t humiliate us. You wouldn’t like to be forgotten as if you had never been born” (Kingston, 1981: 8). It is clear that in Chinese family system, a
Chinese culture is a rare thing. Nobody writes about himself. This is because the Chinese people are greatly influenced by Confucianism teaching, whereas, in the teaching, individual has no place. In their research, Sue and Sue (1996) found, "In Chinese culture, family governs individual. The Chinese are community-oriented. The strong institutionalization of the family in traditional China would seem to have made individualism even more central in that society than in most" (56). Maxine Hong Kingston has been influenced by Chinese and American identities, two radically different identities that often put her into conflicts. At first, being confused, she acquiesces to them, but later discovers that these identities are trying to dominate her life and destroy her individuality. She learns to resist and rebel. The woman warrior in the mother’s talk-story which represents ultimate rebellion and defiance in social norms, is not only the author’s self-projection as a fighter for individual identity and voice, but also a symbol of the ongoing battle against the imposition of collective identities. The talk-story of the “No Name Aunt” is a powerful representation of Chinese identity that Maxine has to conform. The Chinese female identity which Maxine was forced to conform is repressive and very different from the liberal American identity. The Chinese female identity asserted by her mother brings her into inner-conflict. She does not understand the values her mother imposes and questions them intensely rather than obeying blindly. She has been influenced by American values and the values are colliding with her mother's. Kingston mergers the image of Fa Mulan in the “White Tiger” folklore with her own individual identity as a female avenger who protects her “villagers.” Her identification with Fa Mulan, is a kind of celebration that she is but a female avenger who uses words as a weapon fights battle against the imposition of collective identities through her autobiography. It is a battle to rescue her individual identity and her unique voice from the grip of powerful and domineering collective identity.

The issue of identity that is explored in The Woman Warrior represents American-born Chinese women’s experience in the United States as they have been marginalized and silenced by the domineering Chinese society. Individualism is but one of basic American values, but Chinese-American reject the value because they consider it negative or bad. In the Chinese culture, an individual must not have a private life because he is a part of a big family system. Everything has been decided by the family system. By writing an autobiography, Kingston intentionally rejects the idea that someone does not have any right to conduct his own private life. She tries to show that an individual is the one responsible for his own life and he is the captain of the ship, the one who has the right to decide where to go and what to do. He is the one who judges whether his
life is meaningful or not. In the autobiography, she shows how in the Chinese culture one does not have the right to conduct a private life and pursue his own happiness. The chapter of “No Name Woman” in the initial part of the autobiography tells readers that in the Chinese community, an individual just has duties, not right. Whereas in her opinion, individual’s existence is very significant and that everybody has to be himself, her family rejects such notion. In the Chinese family, individuality is absent. Thus, the autobiography is a means to assert that anti-individualism in Chinese-American families is really unamerican. She even sees that anti-individualism is against human nature and human right. Therefore, she refused to accept it. However, it is hard for her to abruptly leave the values she has been holding ever since she was a child. She has lived in them for years. She has to struggle to free herself from the bondage of traditional Chinese values which “bound” her. She has to find a substitute for the old values with the most suitable ones. It seems that Kingston wants to keep the American ones. It is obvious in her decision to choose an autobiography to express herself. By writing an autobiography Kingston convinces her Chinese community that she has been influenced by America and is searching for her new individual identity instead of a collective identity of a female Chinese American which does not allow “singularity.”

In her effort to realize her ideal Kingston uses her autobiography to gain freedom. The autobiography is presented as a contrast to the talk-stories and folklores used by her parents to educate their children. Kingston sees that an autobiography is written by a person who wants to communicate his life experience or history to other people. An autobiography therefore represents one’s freedom to express himself, to communicate his feelings, and to show his perception about himself, about his surrounding, and about life. An autobiography can also be made as a means to communicate one’s ideals. As an autobiography is an expression of freedom to express oneself, it is subjective and personal. Kingston purposely juxtaposing such notion with the Chinese people’s tendency to “hide” behind something or someone else. Kingston shows the contrast between her autobiography through which she individually exists and their seniors’ fear to express their personal feelings and opinions. She contrasts her courage to exist with the Chinese parents’ tendency to always hide themselves behind ancestors, family, community, or even behind folktales, talk-stories, and superstitions. In many cases, Chinese parents or Chinese people in general, refuse to show their personal ideas or opinions. In the autobiography Kingston shows such tendency by depicting Brave Orchid, her own mother, who uses folklores and talk-stories as a means to educate young generation about Chinese values.
and tradition. Instead of delivering the teaching or values directly and assertively, Brave Orchid, a representation of Chinese parents, prefers using indirect method. She refuses to have a dialogue or heart-to-heart talk with the children. In many Chinese-American works, for example the ones written by Amy Tan, Jade Snow Wong, and Maxine Hong Kingston, a reader can find such tendency. Those writers portray mother-daughter relation which is wrapped in talk-stories and folktale telling. The tendency to use indirect method or telling talk-stories and folktale can be seen as an indication that Chinese parents do not have any individual voice. They just echo ideas and borrow them from the tales, fearing that they have to expose themselves. Being subservient, Chinese parents are seen as inferior and lack self-confidence. To Kingston such attitude is ridiculous. Educating children is every parents’ duty. Feeling uneasy to educate one’s own children really matters for a woman with a modern outlook like Kingston. In this case, she does not tolerate Chinese parents’ attitude toward children especially daughters. Thus, she is criticizing Chinese family system that regard children worthless. Psychologically, the parents’ way of treating and educating the children bring a serious impact to the children’s self-confidence. The lack self-identity as being experienced by Kingston could be one of the results of the ways Chinese parents treat and educate their children. They make themselves examples of ones who have no individual voice. Educated and Americanized, Kingston can see these phenomena. Thus, instead of hiding herself she used her autobiography to celebrate her existence and confidence as an American-Born Chinese woman who deserves for respect and appreciation.

If a reader examines carefully, he would notice that the autobiography is not narrated by a single author. There are some narrators in the work. Kingston subtly manipulated the use of narrators to tell her life story to show a contrast between talk-stories and folktale with her autobiography. In literary genre, folktale is considered a grand narrative discourse. In contrast to the traditional, she uses a “framed-narrative” which consists of “little narratives” (Chatman, 1990:97). The Woman Warrior is therefore postmodernistic in the sense that the author is using a postmodernistic design of telling stories through the presentation of “little narratives” as a contrast to traditional theory of “grand narrator.” She has contrasted the grand narrative style of telling stories with the little narratives style to show that the later is more objective in essence. Kingston is really aware that a grand narrative like folklore is essentially authoritative and standardized, therefore endangering and unquestionable. By presenting some voices or “little narratives” in the autobiography, Kingston shows the reader that she rejects domination of any force.
This has to do with her theme of rejection to be dominated or possessed by the traditional Chinese values which are no longer suitable with her condition. She tries to show that there is no absolute truth about anything. She intentionally declares that there are many possibilities and choices in the world. Kingston is a true postmodernist who thinks that "grand narrative" like folktales and talk-stories are no longer able to answer all society's or individual's problem. They are felt as too repressive of individual's creativity. Like Lyotard, Kingston thinks that as a means to communicate knowledge, "grand narratives" are not objective and tends to be authoritative and fix. According to the theory family stories, folklore or folktales are able to explain everything and every man's problem (Sim, ed., 2001: 37) Kingston questions this notion. However, Kingston is not fighting against them, she simply stops believing in them for she finds she could no longer rely on them to guide her actions. Kingston just feels that like ghosts, her mother's folktales and talk-stories ceaselessly force their will on and horify her. Kingston tries to construct value judgments which are more acceptable and reasonable for herself as a young female and educated Chinese-American. That is why she presents "little narratives" (gritt rect) which consist of some voices which are put together as a strategy to achieve some particular objective which enables her to search for paradoxes, instabilities, and the unknown. By doing this she can personally come to a more objective judgement and knowledge rather than a fundamentalistic point of view about certain values. Thus, in asserting her own individuality, she also gives her nameless aunt a chance to defend herself. More than that, she wants to criticize the superiority of men and unjust treatments toward women in traditional Chinese society. In this case, she tries to juxtapose the gender-discrimination and unjust treatment toward women in "frame narratives." She depicts some female voices to retell her mother's story. Thus, in the first chapter of the autobiography, the incident of "No Name Woman" is retold in different version. The technique is used to show that she wants to see certain event or thing from different perspectives. In her effort to see the event in a more objective point of view she creates the structure of the entire story subtly and uniquely, in a tragic story-in-story, or, as Chatman (1980) calls it, "fram-d-narrative" technique (97). Thus, after presenting a talkstory of a traditional or conservative and moralistic outlook mother, the "ghost" of the nameless aunt is presented to tell the story in its own version. By doing this Kingston is giving a chance and credit to the aunt to defend herself. The "ghost" of her aunt describes how she was forced to have sex with the unknown man and intimidated:
Further, Kingston makes the narrator describe the aunt’s feelings:

"After the villagers left, their lanterns now scattering in various directions toward home, the family broke their silence and cursed. "Aha, we’re going to die. Death is coming. Death is coming. Look what you’ve done. You’ve killed us. Ghost! Dead ghost! Ghost! You’ve never been born..." Then she ran out to the fields, far enough from the house so that she could no longer hear their voices, and pressed herself against the earth, her own land no more. When she felt the birth coming, she thought that she had been hurt. "They’ve hurt me too much." she thought. "This is fall, and it will kill me." With forehead and knees against the earth, her body convulsed and then relaxed. She turned on her back, lay on the ground. The black welts of the sky and stars went out and out and out forever, her body and her complexity seemed disappear. She was on the stars, a bright dot in blackness, without house, without a companion, in eternal cold and silence. An agoraphobia rose in her, speeding higher and higher, bigger and bigger; she would not be able to contain it, there would be no end to fear." (Ibid, 21).

Thus, by portraying the story in various versions to show her disagreement toward dominion of oral tradition which tends to create absolute truth. The narrator presents her defensive attitude to the nameless aunt by showing a story in different angle. In the narrator’s story one can examine further the context and time-setting of the event, the period when the story took place. Certainly it was a time when the 1852 Chinese Exclusion Act was still in effect. It means that it took place in a period when Chinese laborers were not allowed to leave and return to the United States freely. Thus, the time-setting can be associated with the Accord era, a period when the United States government forbade Chinese women from coming to and joining their husbands in the country. Describing the Chinese immigrant’s condition in that era, Chan comments:

Under such strict conditions, the number of Chinese females entering the country each year during the decades when Chinese exclusion was in effect numbered in the hundreds rather than the thousands. Comparing the settlement history and patterns of the Chinese laborers with those of their European counterparts, the Chinese imposed at a point which truncated the natural development of the community when the male laborers could have brought their wives ever from China and raised their families in more permanent locations rather than drifting along the ethnic enclaves of Chinatown across the country (Ibid, 106).
In this context, the no-name woman’s tragedy is but a direct consequence of Chinese feudalism and poverty, and also an indirect result of Western colonialism and the United States’ institutional racism. The rationalization of this idea is, since her husband left for the United States exactly after their wedding in 1924, the narrator’s aunt could not follow him immigrating to the country because of various immigration restrictions. So that, her husband would not be able to go home to China for exactly the same immigration and financial reasons. As a result, the aunt had to live like a widow. The fact that she did not live with her parents-in-law also shows that probably she wants some freedom and feels dissatisfied with her condition. The fact might also explain why she is living with her own parents rather than in-laws according to Chinese custom: “But they sent her back to her own mother and father, a mysterious act hurting at disgraces not told me. Perhaps they had thrown her out to deflect the avengers” (Kingston, 1981: 8). What Kingston calls a “mysterious act” might be the prelude to the aunt’s love affair with her fellow villagers. The ghost off her no name aunt finally explains the truth and defends herself. In this case, Kingston thinks of the possibility that her aunt is just a passive victim of a society which is really feudalistic and oppressive. The passive aunt gives readers an insightful look into her surroundings, proposing a degree of identification with her, and inducing a temporary familiarity with the period’s gender-discriminative attitudes. Both Kingston’s mother and aunt represent desperate women who do not have any courage to protest and are too weak to even realize their own condition.

In searching for self-identity, Kingston makes her autobiography a critique against traditional Chinese for regarding individual identity unimportant. In some part of the autobiography she openly uses the pronoun “I.” In Chinese writing and even in society, people do not use this pronoun. This is because in Chinese language, “t” means “slave.” Therefore, “I” is not used in daily conversation. Even, in Chinese culture a person is not addressed by his name. People address someone according to his position in the family. Adresses such as “Big Brother,” “youngest sister,” “Uncle,” “Aunt,” are the ones acceptable in Chinese society. It means that self-identity is insignificant. The use of pronoun “I” in her autobiography is a part of Kingston’s design to show that to her self-identity is more than significant. Her portrayal of “No Name Aunt” tragedy is also a protest to the Chinese society for not paying any respect to individual existence. Thus, Kingston intentionally shows that the autobiography is written in American sensibility instead of in Chinese. Kingston wants to protest her mother and Chinese-American society in general for their reluctance to integrate with the larger American society and adopt their
positive values. The use of "I" also represents her effort to assert her individuality and identity.

Kingston’s autobiography is certainly addressed to public. Being printed and published, it is purposefully written for a certain audience or readers. Such purpose is actually against or contradictory with Kingston’s mother’s warning to keep silent. Ever since she was a child she was taught to keep silent. In Chinese virtue silent is golden. “A girl must not have a ready-tongue. A ready-tongue is evil” (Kingston, 1981: 13). In her effort to defend her opinion that an individual has a right and freedom to express himself, Kingston rejects the Chinese notion of “silence is golden.” She accordingly portrays her family history and secret in the autobiography. She really means to publish her family weaknesses and dark history. By doing this she can identify her own existence and realize that “nobody is perfect.” She, too, is a member of a family which has a black past. She finds it important as well to realize that traditional Chinese culture, like other culture, has weaknesses. In this case, her autobiography is also a medium to mirror her own weaknesses. By having the courage to face her own Chinese “identity” Kingston wishes to gain a clearer description about her own life. This awareness can be made a starting point to step further and to conduct the direction of her own life. Thus, she intentionally exposes the family’s dark history concerning the tragedy of her adulterous aunt. By doing so, she also gives her aunt a place to express and defend herself. Kingston makes her autobiography a medium to express individual’s appreciation of oneself. She then skillfully criticizes her mother’s warning to keep everything a secret. Her mother’s warning, “Don’t tell anybody anything that I want to tell you, not even your father” (Ibid, 5) has been really ignored. Kingston does not agree with the idea that silence is always good. She had to experience a lot of trouble in her early school years and in her socialization with American peers. She used to be a silent girl for years and experienced much trouble because of that. Her teachers and friends regarded her as a social outcast. In the autobiography Kingston shows her experience in the kindergarten years, years of her suffering because of her being a silent student. She gets much trouble because of her inability to speak. Her obedience to her mother had made her teacher recognized her as a stupid and dumb student. The teacher who does not have any experience in handling Chinese immigrant’s children even says that he does not recognize Kingston’s presence in the class. Inferior and passive in the class, Kingston experienced much trouble in her early school years. Kingston tries to prove that silence and obedience are disadvantageous by writing an autobiography. She disobeys her mother and asserts that total obedience means that one is submissive. She does not want to be an obedient person. Instead, she
wants to be one who has an individual right to do whatever he wants to do. She is striving for freedom as an American-Born Chinese woman. “There is more to this silence” (Kingston, 1991: 16).

CONCLUSION

Kingston’s efforts to search for her individual identity as a woman with dual heritage by writing an autobiography about the past and the present, does not only break the silence but also transform the oral story into written, and by this act denies the power of the community that maintains its cohesiveness through the oral tradition. She has proved that “a story that is oppressive when orally transmitted within the context of family and community is liberating when transformed into writing” (Rabine, 2000: 155).

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