

Towards a New Identity:

Maxine Hong Kingston's Rewriting of Fa-Mulan

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Abstract

Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior. Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts* (1976) has always been criticized by purist Asian American critics (embodied in the figure of Frank Chin) because, according to them, its cultural and mythical recreations are distorting rewritings of Asian folklore based on white cultural stereotypes. This paper undermines this criticism by showing that it is out of place because of three main different facts. First, different studies in folklore have demonstrated that myths change and evolve through time, so it is normal Kingston's adaptation of the folklore to her own time and experience. Second, Kingston is not purely Asian because she was born in the U.S.A., so she has a hybrid identity and has to find a balance between her Asian and American identities. Third, she does not belong to the dominant male power, and, consequently, has to overcome the difficulties she faces as a woman.

Therefore, her quest for identity has two conflictive axes she has to deal with: on the one hand, she has to come to terms with her hybrid identity, and, on the other, she has to overcome the restrictions caused by her female condition in a patriarchal system. The exploration of all these aspects in the section entitled "White Tigers," where she rewrites the traditional myth of Fa-Mulan, sheds light on the motivations that led Kingston to change some particular segments of Asian folklore. In her fictional

autobiography (defined by herself as a “memoir” in the manner of Proust), the writer adapts the myth to a new epoch in which the content, the power, and the force of the “original” version would not have the same effects as in the past.