The Woman Warrior: The Conflict Of American And Chinese Culture For The Main Character

The incongruous memoir, “The Woman Warrior, written by Maxine Hong Kingston, illustrates how woman’s hardships in the Chinese society have followed emigrants to the New World. Each Chapter in the novel is a focus on a Warrior Woman that has formed Kingston’s life by combing their worlds and culture to her own to create a harmony.

Once Kingston began to menstruate, her mother told her about an aunt that was unknown to the family. This aunt went against Chinese customs when she performed adultery and gave birth to an illegitimate baby. She brought such disgrace to the family that when she committed suicide they decided to pretend that she had never existed. This story explained to Kingston the “invisible world” of ghosts that exchanged from Chinese rural life into their new homes on “the Gold Mountain.” The Chinese rural life lived in “roundness”, people (especially women) needed for expression, but society needed control. Her aunt although dead, made a statement. In such a strict ordered society, she disrupted the order and unsettled the existence of the village. The struggle that her aunt went through, represents the struggle Kingston was having finding her own culture.

Kingston then imagines herself being the woman warrior in a folk-tale, Fa Mu Lan. The young girl is taken to the mountains to be trained as a great warrior of the course of 15 years. Once her training is complete, Fa Mu Lan leads an army of men disguised as a man herself. Eventually, she leads China to overthrow their corrupt ruler and replaces him with a servant. This fantasy becomes reality in Kingston’s life in America. The Chinese emigrants – that still believe woman are worthless to society- and racists bosses represent the corrupt ruler in Fa Mu Lan’s tale. She learns to become a woman warrior like the one she admires by uniting her people through her words.

Brave Orchid, Kingston’s mother, got away from the traditional role of a housewife. Once her husband left to America, she decided to use the money he was sending to go to medical school where she became a doctor. She became a woman warrior in her own right when she fought off a ghost that haunted the medical school. Even though, she went on her own path away from society norms in China, Brave Orchid encouraged the negative stereotypes the Chinese have placed on woman, in America. She transformed herself from an intelligent, powerful woman to just a working wife and mother. Brave Orchid transformed herself so she could teach her children to follow the Chinese customs. She did not want her family to become solely Americans, so she made her family live with ghosts from her talk-stories about China. This makes it extremely difficult for Kingston to live the normal American life she wants to live because she is constantly being reminded of these ghosts in one way or another. Kingston is not taught to call America home, but to call the place she knows nothing of home. Kingston is the ghost to her mother’s home, China, as her mother is the ghost to America.

The end of the novel, is where Kingston finds herself as a woman warrior. When she was younger, Kingston and the other Chinese- American children were told not to talk about their lives to the Americans in fear of deportation. This ultimately signaled that most children from the culture would not be the ones to have a voice in Chinese society. This contradicted many

aspects of the novel. As her mother was trying to make her more Chinese like, she made her more Americanized. (Chinese woman are known to have a loud voice, parents told their children to keep their voices down so the Americans wouldn't hear them, yet the Chinese categorized American's as people with low voices.) When she was younger, Kingston had outbursts of criticism that could have been a result from keeping in her voice. As Kingston matured, she acknowledged she must translate her culture whether it is Chinese, American, and or Chinese-American through her writings, nonetheless her words.

The Chinese society followed Kingston throughout her life despite the fact that it is rather a ghost town to her. A conflict arose throughout her normal American life and the Chinese life her mother wanted her live. However, due to Brave Orchid's talk-story and customs, the old Chinese ways was and always will be a part of Kingston's life.