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Quest for Identity in Maxine Hong Kingston's Autobiography, *The Woman Warrior*

Maxine Hong Kingston's autobiography, *The Woman Warrior*, features a young Chinese-American constantly searching for "an unusual bird" that would serve as her impeccable guide on her quest for individuality (49). Instead of the flawless guide she seeks, Kingston develops under the influence of other teachers who either seem more fallible or less realistic. Dependent upon their guidance, she grows under the influence of American and Chinese schools and the role models of Brave Orchid, Fa Mu Lan, and Moon Orchid. Her education by these counselors consequently causes her to abandon her search for an escort, the bird to be found somewhere in the measureless sky, and she begins to look inside herself for "the ideograph 'to fly'" (Kingston 35). The new song Kingston finally creates with her "talk story" of Ts'ai Yen, verifies her optimistic distinction from her educators, cultural norms, which have indoctrinated and restricted her childhood.

During much of her childhood, Kingston goes to the "American School" during the day and the "Chinese School" in the evening as she filters the conflicting material given in each of

these environments to determine what works in her Chinese-American life. In attending the American school, Kingston discovers American ideologies of loquaciousness and arrogance. From the influence of their American schoolmates Kingston and her siblings "never said, 'Oh, no, you're too kind. . . . I'm stupid. I'm ugly.' They were capable children. . . . But they were not modest" (Kingston 134). The children expected their Chinese parents to join in their arrogance, and Kingston proudly tells her mother, "I got straight A's, Mama" (45). H...

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...d not the measureless sky, her voice begins to sing a distinctly Chinese-American song. Kingston sings just as Ts'ai Yen "sang about China and her family . . . [from] savage lands," and speaking of her newly found [identity](#), established in America but conceived in China, Kingston decides, "It translated well" (Kingston 209).

Works Cited

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