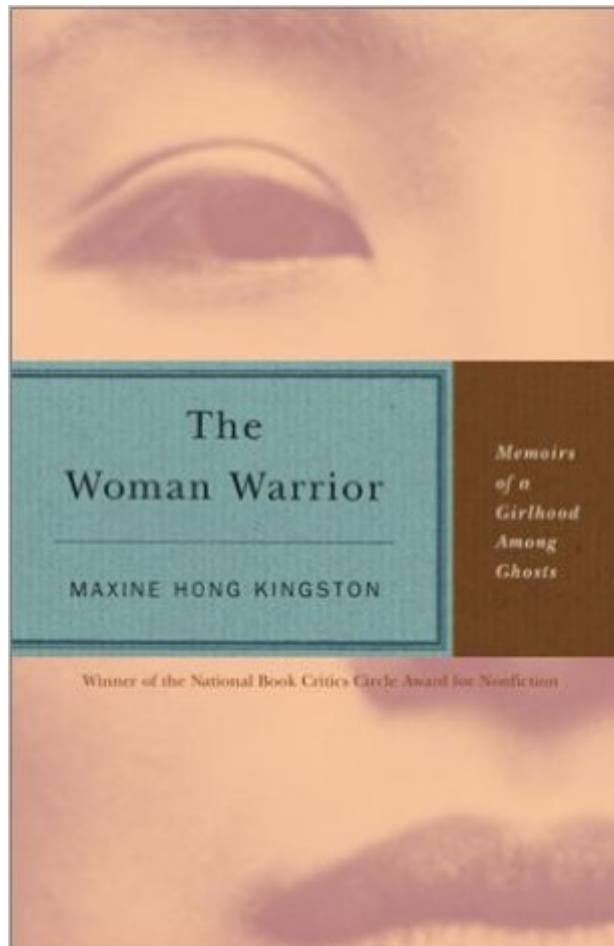


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The Woman Warrior: Memoirs Of A Girlhood Among Ghosts



Synopsis

A Chinese American woman tells of the Chinese myths, family stories and events of her California childhood that have shaped her identity.

Book Information

Paperback: 209 pages

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Customer Reviews

The Woman Warrior, by Maxine Hong Kingston, captures readers with her own interpretation of what it was like to grow up as a female Chinese American. As a little girl, she came to America with her family. Despite being in a new country, she had to deal with the old traditions from her homeland. Kingston hears different legends which she pieces together to create her woman warrior. It becomes her source of strength in a society that rejected both her sex as well as her race. The book, divided into five interwoven stories, is at times confusing as it jumps around. Nevertheless she does a great job explaining her life while growing up. The first story, called "No Name Woman," tells of her paternal aunt who bears a child out of wedlock and is harried by the villagers and by her family into drowning herself. The family now punishes this taboo-breaker by never speaking about her and by denying her name. However, Kingston breaks the family silence by writing about this rebel whom she calls "my forebear." The next story is called "White Tigers." It is a myth about a heroine named Fa Mu Lan, who fights in place of her father and saves her village. This story became the Disney movie, Mulan. "Sharman" is a story of Kingston's mother. It explores what it was like to study as a woman to become a doctor in China. "At the Western Palace" is about Kingston's aunt who comes to America and discovers that her husband has remarried in America. Finally, the

last story, "A Song for a Barbarian Reed Pipe" is about Kingston's own experience in America when she first arrived. She explains what it was like to be a newcomer in a strange culture. Kingston constantly mentions that her friends and she are ghosts because they are American. All of the people who surround her family are ghosts, except for the Chinese people who live on the Gold Mountain, a section of Chinatown in San Francisco. Kingston feels like a ghost herself, " We had been born among ghosts, were taught by ghosts, and were ourselves ghost-like. The Americans call us a kind of ghosts" (p.183). The interpretation of what ghosts mean in this book is difficult to figure out. It could show how some people view a person from a different culture with ignorance as if she doesn't exist. Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* has some similarities with *The Joy Luck Club* by Amy Tan. First of all, both stories are written by Chinese American authors about their cultural heritage. Both novels deal with major concerns faced by Chinese American women. Living with their traditional culture in American society, Chinese-American women suffer problems of cultural conflicts. However, there are differences that make each work distinct. *The Joy Luck Club* is fiction and is not personal. It is also more likely to be read for pleasure. *The Woman Warrior* portrays a first hand view of the cultural differences between the United States and China. Also, Kingston succeeds in combining her emotions with her experiences. *The Woman Warrior* is a fascinating book. One of the most amazing aspects of this book is Kingston's ability to show how silence is a form of communication and how it shaped her being. Her mother tells her to be silent, yet she goes against her cultural standards by talking about her aunt. This act of will on Kingston's part offers the readers her ancestry. The expectation of silence can be simplified into a symbol of oppression. As a Korean-American, I felt the emotions and understood how Kingston felt for being a stranger to a new culture. Her internal struggle to fit into two different societies is difficult. I personally recommend this book to anyone interested in reading about the experience of one Chinese-American woman. It is not the definitive story of Chinese-American women's experience, but it is a very vivid and well-written account of one woman's life. Pg. 209. Published in the United States by Random House, Inc., New York

This is a remarkably intelligent, personal account of success, failure, frustration, and identity. No, the writing and structure are not straightforward, and yes, some of the plotline may be disturbing. But this is ultimately an intellectually rewarding read, and a personally emotionally moving experience. The anti-feminist backlash this novel seems to elicit (e.g., on this review page) should be testimony to how provocative it is, and how many assumptions it can challenge. As for it being a misrepresentation of Chinese culture, well, it's a subjective account. It's the culture through

Maxine's eyes (and her family's eyes); it is not meant to be an objective anthropological study. And I did not find it at all exoticizing. In fact, it's a shame that MHK often gets mentioned in the same sentence as Amy Tan -- beyond the superficial similarity of both being Asian-American women, they have little in common. MHK does none of the silly exoticization that AT does, and at least to me, does not engage in the "Asians must be rescued by Western culture" ideology of AT. This is ultimately a personal, autobiographical account, that is neither judgmental nor self-pitying.

I didn't know beans about Chinese women when a friend put this book into my hands about 20+ years ago. Talk about a revelation. *The Woman Warrior* preceded Amy Tan's novels by at least a decade and went on to win several awards. It's about growing up Chinese American in California's Central Valley, working in the family laundry, and having to listen to her mother's stories that were designed to scare her into "good behavior." Some of these "talk stories" depicted women as fierce and strong warriors, while at the same time they were enslaved by their culture. This memoir is intense, mystical, introspective, and full of marvelous and unexpected twists and turns. If you haven't yet read it, now's your chance.

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