Chapter 1

Introduction

Elisabeth Croll observes that Chinese women, in particular the daughters

> who escaped their families, rejected past conventions and embraced new forms with comfort and confidence...[f]requently ..found themselves still strongly bound by inherited rhetorical ropes and straddling both old and new, male and female and Chinese and Western behavioural patterns in their endeavours to break free from Confucian rhetoric, the family and the past. (7)

The above is a description that unerringly depicts the dilemma of Chinese women that is caused by the inherent Confucianistic values of Chinese society and the equally contradictory demands of a Western, secular society. On the one hand, the ideals of Chinese society encourage secondary as well as specific behaviourial traits of its women in relation to men. On the other hand, the models of a modern

and Western society necessitate that the seemingly ideal concepts of individuality and equality be practiced by both men and women alike. It is this contradictory demand between the two cultural modes of behaviour which impels the protagonists of Maxine Hong Kingston's The Woman Warrior and Amy Tan's The Joyluck Club to search for symbiotic identities through their narratives that will try to reconcile the contradictory demands of both the Chinese as well as Western cultures.

The search for a symbiotic identity requires a re-reading of the philosophy of Confucius. Confucius and his tenets on epistemology, axiology, aesthetics, political as well as social philosophy have been continuously studied, commented on and researched. Therefore, I propose to examine how the fundamental ideals contained within the philosophy of Confucius have evolved into social rites and rituals contained within the Five Classics and Four Classics for women; for it is the social conventions that form the essential patriarchal structure in addition to the moral norms of Chinese society. The study and analysis of Confucius' principal doctrines will help us to understand the roles and responsibilities held by Chinese women within the structural hierarchy of Chinese family and society in general. This, in turn, will provide for a unique comparison of the contradictory values that beset the protagonists of both novels as they search for a harmonious interweaving of the values of both Chinese and American societies.

Confucius' core values lie in the principles of Ren, Yi and Li. Ren refers to the ideal of being humane. Thus, benevolence in the individual will be the important contributing factor to produce ethical comportment as embodied in the axiom of Yi which requires the individual to act correctly according to the needs of the circumstance. Moralistic conduct by the individual, however, is in turn governed by the body of proper ceremonial conduct as contained within the principle of Li which correspondingly means rites and rituals. Conclusively, the three ideals of Ren, Yi and Li form the nucleus of Confucianism. It is from this trinity of values that the ethical standards of Xiao, Di, Zhong and Shu evolved. Xiao touches upon filial piety to one's parents, family and state whereas Di bears upon the brotherly camaraderie between men. If Xiao means filial piety, Zhong signifies being true and constant to one's conscience and this would be taken to mean absolute loyalty to one's parents, family and country. Shu the final value, contains ideal altruistic sentiments that one should feel towards others in society in general. Nevertheless, to practice and to achieve all of the above, it becomes necessary for the individual to adhere to the ideal of Zhengming. The Confucian concept of Zhengming requires the individual to behave and act according to his given roles. A son will have to fulfill the responsibilities of a son towards his parents, like a minister fulfilling his responsibilities towards his leader and state; revealing a preoccupation with rigid and deliberate delineation of roles for everyone. Accordingly, a hierarchical society with specific roles for every person is structured. Confucianism then concerns itself with perfecting a moral as well as ethical system of values that promotes status as well as role-conscious attitudes in

its members. It is a society where the individual is defined by his given position and social roles. Thus, the values that are briefly defined above reflect, as well as hint at, a society that rests its existence on the enforcement of moral values through examples of didactic behaviour. It will be this constantly conflicting demand to abide by traditional responsibilities and duties endured by the main protagonists from both novels that will be the focus of my analysis in this thesis.

Nevertheless, it is important to note that the manifestation and practice of the core values of Confucius together with the reinforcement of its ethical standards are centered and exemplified within the persona of the educated gentleman who is better known as the Junzi. The Junzi is the educated individual who must strive to study as well as to apply and exercise the teachings of Confucius in his daily life. Thus, the Junzi must inwardly study the principles of Confucius and outwardly manifest them in his interactions with others in order to set an example for others to follow. Consequently, the Junzi, by putting the philosophy of Confucius into practice in his life, will become the center as well as focus of a benign, patriarchal and fatherly authority. As such, within the family, the benign authority lies with the oldest male while the fatherly authority in the state lies with the minister and this hierarchical differentiation reaches upwards to the king or emperor who will ultimately be the benign, fatherly leader of the country. Therefore, the Junzi or the gentleman contains within himself the essence of the teachings of Confucius. Confucianism, then, composes a body of knowledge that gives prominence to male or masculine ascendency and authority.

Its ideal social structure requires the purposeful division of roles in keeping with specific functions and values accorded to both men and women. Thus the basis as well as the foundation for the orthodox and patrilineal nature of Chinese society stems from Confucianism.

Undeniably, this body of Confucianistic knowledge, which encompasses the works of Confucius (Lunyu), Mencius (Mengzi), Xunzi (Xunzi) and The Great Learning (Da Xue) as well as The Doctrine of the Mean (Zhong Yong), puts forth the theoretical foundation for the structure of Chinese society. Interestingly, the main ideas as well as views of women who were constantly exhorted to adhere to the ideals of being the perfect daughter, wife and mother, reveal that Chinese women are apportioned secondary and supportive roles in deference to men in society. They are constantly urged to fulfill the orthodox roles as mentioned above. Thus, the roles of women are circumscribed and contained within the rigid schematic structure of Chinese society.

To justify the qualities and functions of the ideal woman in Chinese society, Confucianistic values are translated into social norms in the Five Classics or better known as the Wu Jing. The Five Classics comprise the Book of Changes, the Book of Poetry, the Book of History, the Book of Music, the Book of Rites and Ceremonies. The Book of Changes together with the Book of Poetry astutely draws the basic nature of woman which is essentially inferior to man. Woman, in the Book of Changes, contains within herself the Yin qualities of subtlety,

yielding and weakness. These qualities are the opposite of those of man who contains within himself the Yang qualities of aggression, strength and directness. Such qualifications are taken up in the Book of Poetry where the various images and metaphors are symbolically interpreted to emphasize as well as to reinforce the Yin characteristics of the women. Such emphasis will in turn justify the woman's subordinate position. This will then qualify the man's authority to regulate her behaviour. As a result of the fact that the nature of woman is weak, she is limited to the sphere of the family where household responsibilities will be her mainstay. The Book of History, together with the Spring and Autumn Annals, chronicles the reign of various princes and kings. Nevertheless, the two texts illustrate examples of the conventional good and bad women in history who were responsible for the flowering of the different reigns of kings or the downfalls of the various dynasties respectively. However, it is in the Book of Rites and Ceremonies where the dichotomy between men and women is clearly outlined. This book carefully draws specific behaviourial norms for men and women according to their status and position within the household and in society. Consequently, in the Five Classics, the images and views of women reflect once again Confucian aspirations for a carefully structured society that is patriarchal in nature. It must be noted that the Five Classics merit in-depth studies on their literary as well as socio-political values. However, I will confine the scope of my thesis only to how the philosophical principals of Confucius evolved into social practices that led to the deliberate division of roles between men and women.

However, the roles as well as the responsibilities of women in Chinese society are made even more apparent by the specific duties that women should uphold as explained and argued for in the Four Classics for women. Pan Chao's Nu Chieh with its seven chapters of prescriptive rules of behaviour for women that would be the prototype didactic classic that was used by the other writers as an exemplary model to imitate. It is thus seen that Liu Hsiang's Lieh-nu-chuan and Pan Chao's Nu Chieh that have been more influential in setting as well as influencing the composition of the ideal stereotypes for women in Chinese society. Interestingly, Liu Hsiang's book chronicles the lives of women in classical Chinese history. The book depicts examples of women who were either known for their exemplary behaviour or were wickedly licentious and were responsible for the downfall of their families and states. Nevertheless, what is more important is how the lives of these women are held up as meritorious or notorious examples for women in Chinese society to follow or not to follow. Thus, a set of stereotypical representations was created and constantly promoted. Pan Chao's text however, specifically outlines the behaviour and exact duties for women in detail. What is formulated is a series of comparatively explicit social standards that reinforces the woman's auxiliary position to man. She is exhorted to follow such rules and to perform such duties in order to become the ideal woman who is a complementary opposite to her husband. Consequently, what can be traced is how the philosophical ideals of Confucius evolved into detailed rules and role models for women in Chinese society. What is more important is that Confucianism and the Five Classics as well as the Four Classics for women, Liu

Hsiang's book and Pan Chao's essay, reveal the polaristic and subordinated position of women as opposed to men. Thus, the first chapter attempts to trace how the ideals and principles of Confucianism are translated into a patriarchal social system with moral as well as ethical values that are male-centered.

The revelation of the philosophical values of Confucius is evidently communicated through the social norms practiced in Chinese society. As such the reconciliation between philosophical principles and societal practice of Confucianistic doctrines becomes my concern for the second chapter. The starting point of this study begins with Maxine Hong Kingston's The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts. In this chapter, I propose to study and analyze how the protagonist of the book seeks her personal identity. The search for self-identity is compelling in that the protagonist strives to reconcile values from both her Chinese culture as well as those from the American culture into which she was born and brought up. This endeavour to exert her narrative imagination stems from the feeling of having disembodied identities. She questions the confusing nuances of being a woman, of being a woman in Chinese culture, and of being her own individual self. It is thus an interesting study for it allows us to trace how the protagonist overcomes the limitations for women that are set by Confucianistic social values.

The narrative act that begins this search for the narrator's own unique sense of self combines both the imaginative reconstruction of the essential

standards as well as customs of Confucianism while simultaneously constructing an empowering identity which appropriates positive values from both Chinese and American cultures. She initiates this narrative undertaking by recreating her own feminine ancestral lineage in contrast to the Chinese patriarchal norm of only maintaining as well as recognizing the masculine line of ancestors. By appropriating the Confucian belief in ancestral lineage, the protagonist embarks on her narrative journey to reclaim the intricate aspects of her cultural heritage. Undermining lineal authority, the narrator fleshes out the tragic life history of her aunt who had been deliberately obliterated from familial history. She was punished for carrying and bearing an illegitimate child that might have threatened the continuity of the clan. Even as the aunt with no name is being used by the author's family as a means of exhorting obedience from the female members of the family to familial laws, the figure of the aunt in the novel's section "No Name Woman" is conceived of as a tragic persona after the author's imaginative reconstruction of her history. Establishing her feminine ancestral roots with her (ancestral) aunt, the narrator moves towards renewing her maternal links with her mother in the section of the book entitled "Shaman". The piecing together of the mother's life prior to her joining the protagonist's father in America is an account of courage and bravery. Breaking away from the Confucian supposition of the acquiescent daughter-in-law patiently awaiting the call of her husband, Brave Orchid strikes out on her own by taking up a midwifery course and subsequently working as a midwife. The importance of this literary re-creation cannot be denied for it allows the narrator to reconcile herself to as well as to accept the

undaunted woman the mother once was before becoming the old and weary individual who has doggedly endured the vicissitudes of surviving as an immigrant in America. However, the story of the author's immediate aunt, Moon Orchid, develops as a foil to that of Brave Orchid. Moon Orchid epitomizes the Confucian model of womanhood as she waits patiently for her husband in America to send for her. Stripped of familiar material comforts when Brave Orchid sends for her, she slips into madness and death when rejected harshly by a husband who denies her. Brave Orchid and Moon Orchid are parallel studies in contrast. The former defied social conventions to obtain an education and independence whereas the latter, who was compliant to Confucian norms, finds herself unable to adapt to the challenges that life in America throws at her. With the exception of Moon Orchid's life history, the no name aunt and Brave Orchid display a similar quality of defiant courage that the narrator has inherited. Thus, the act of imaginative reconstruction of the life histories of the three women allows the narrator to find as well as to acknowledge her feminine lineal link to the women in her family. The importance of the above cannot be denied for it allows the protagonist to perceive as well as to derive strength to literally rewrite the life stories of the women within her family thus breaking the obedient silence that is the approved ideal for women in Chinese culture. This is in contrast to the marginalization of women in Chinese patriarchal lineages.

As the narrator renews her lineal ties with women within her family, the search for her own individual self is simultaneously realized through the

appropriation of Chinese myths and legends. In this case, the protagonist appropriates the didactic values of the myths to turn them into stories that give her both courage and strength. In "White Tigers", Kingston uses the legends of Yue Fei and Hua Mulan. The former is famous for his loyalty whereas the latter is well known for her filial piety. Thus, the narrator becomes Yue Fei who stays loyal and true to her family and Mulan when she wields a metaphorical sword to fight against the injustices suffered by members of her family. The value of myths in this section is important for they delineate the writer's recognition of her cultural heritage while refashioning an imaginative legend for her own self as a way to deal with the realities of daily life. Consequently, in the section entitled "A Song for a Barbarian Reed Pipe", the protagonist likens herself to Ts'ai Yen, the Chinese princess who was married to a nomadic chief. What is interesting is how history tells us that Ts'ai Yen sought to use her position to strengthen the diplomatic relationship between the nomadic tribe and China. In order to assuage her longing for her homeland, she is said to have written songs using the barbarian reed pipe. Eighteen years later, she was ransomed by her father and she left her barbarian husband and children to return to China. The metaphorical use of the myth is obvious. The protagonist sees herself as being in a 'foreign' land and sees herself as adapting to the cultural nuances of life in America. The 'songs' the narrator writes are the stories of the women and of herself, through which she reconnects with the women in her family. Finally, she recognizes the inherent values of her Chinese heritage and she is able to 'ransom' her disembodied self to find her own individuality. In The Woman Warrior , Kingston combines both the

appropriation of the Confucian practice of keeping the male lineage as well as expropriation the myths of Yue Fei, Hua Mulan and Ts'ai Yen to recreate a unique identity for herself that is made up of elements from both Chinese as well as American cultures.

Overcoming Confucianistic limitations for women and the heightened sense of tracing one's patriarchal lineage through the father or the male line is dealt with differently in Amy Tan's novel, The Joyluck Club. The writer's narrative thrust is the confessional monologue where each set of mother and daughter takes turns to tell their stories. It is this telling that produces the fluidity as well as the cyclical nature of the mother-daughter narrative, accentuating the idea that mother and daughter are inexorably linked. Moreover, it is this emphasis on telling which allows the central characters of the novel to recover their connections to their respective mothers. Consequently, this reclamation of matrilineage provides a parallel alternative to Confucian emphasis on patrilineage. My third chapter studies how every set of mother and daughter strives to rise above Confucian social constrains for women to achieve various levels of awareness of their bond with each other.

The mothers' need to deliberately tell their own stories stems from the need to convey the legacy of their experiences in dealing with Chinese customary practices for women. The telling thus becomes necessary in light of the advancing force of materialism in America that their daughters are experiencing. What is

more important is how the mothers have dealt with the Confucian exhortation to stay intensely faithful to the ideal of the loyal and submissively obedient wife. Thus, An-Mei's mother's need to pay homage to a shrine to commit herself to being the faithful wife despite the death of her husband allows her to fall into the trap of Wu Tsing. It is only in the final act of taking her own life that she manages to bequeath strength in terms of social standing upon her daughter. Lindo Jong, however, in her promise to her own mother to remain a good wife, learns to scheme well enough to escape a repressive marriage to a child bridegroom. Subsequently, she learns to trust her own ability and gains freedom as well as independence. Ying-ying St. Clair, nevertheless, suffers greatly in her marriage to a philandering man. Observing the superficial life that her daughter is leading, she realizes the need to tell her tragedy of her first marriage as a means to bond and to give strength to her own daughter. Su-Yuan's story on the other hand, is being told by her daughter June. Her need to give her daughter the best originates from the tragic loss of her twin daughters during the chaos of war in China. The necessity of telling their stories is significant for several reasons. The first is that the act of telling allows the mothers to transcend their suppressive circumstances. The second relates to the importance of imparting their cultural experiences to their daughters who were born in America. Consequently, the telling allows them to reassert their own individual selves. Finally, the mothers through reciting their life histories are able to rediscover their lost bonds to their own mothers. This in effect, places them in unique cultural positions bridging the past and the present,

allowing them sensitive perceptions of the various problems that the daughters are facing.

The chapter further examines the effects of the retelling on the daughters themselves. Similar to the writer-protagonist in Kingston's The Woman Warrior; June, Rose, Lena and Waverly are caught in between the contradictory demands of Chinese as well as American cultural mores. Therefore, the mothers' telling in effect allows them to reconcile Chinese cultural values and the values imparted to them by American society. Rose, who is An-mei's daughter derives strength from the story of her grandmother's sacrifice. She realizes that the strength of character that has been inherited from her grandmother and mother has allowed her to awaken from her dispirited and passive reaction to her impending divorce, to fight for her rights. Lena through her connection with her mother Ying-ying, however, achieves a painful awareness of how her life has been dominated by the manipulation of her husband. The presence of her mother in her life alerts her to the passivity that was inherited from the mother. It also allows her to become perceptive of the quiet strength that now comes from her mother to her. June is forced by her mother's death to tell the story of her mother, Su-yuan's tragic loss. Thus, she is allowed to re-examine her relationship with her mother and consequently becomes aware of the lost hopes as well as fears of her mother. June's telling is important for it reaffirms the cyclical nature of the mother-daughter dyad. Waverly, on the other hand, is a study in contrast to the other daughters. As Lindo's daughter, she has inherited both the cunning and the

intelligence of her mother. Nevertheless, hers is the story of total assimilation into the American culture that she was born into. In The Joyluck Club, Amy Tan has successfully used the personal first person narrative method to recreate her characters' stories. The act of telling is important for it allows the characters to transcend the consequences of Confucian values that limit opportunities for women.

The transformation of the philosophical ideals of Confucius into social norms within Chinese society and how the social rites themselves circumscribe opportunities for women deserves in-depth study. However, due to the lack of accessible material, I have had to limit myself to tracing the evolutionary development of Confucian ideals in the Five Classics and the Four Classics for Women and examine how the protagonists of both novels negotiate and traverse the contradictory values of Chinese as well as American societies to achieve symbiotic identities - identities with values from both cultures.