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MULTITUDINAL QUINTESSENCES IN CINDY PON'S SILVER PHOENIX

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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on Chinese literature, Chinese culture and multitudinal quintessence in Cindy Pon's *Silver Phoenix*, analysis the life of Cindy Pon, one of the distinguished Chinese writers of the twenty-first century. *Silver Phoenix* spotlights on Ai Ling, she discovers a power welling deep within her. She can reach into other's spirit, hear their thoughts, see their dreams and that's just the beginning. She must conquer Zhong Ye and rescue her captive father, while mythical demons track her every step of her own, whose fate is inter-wined with her past. This paper mainly focuses on the general ideas of Chinese fantasy and adventure in relationship with friendship, feminism and patriarchal domination.

Keywords: Chinese Literature, Friendship, Feminism and Patriarchal domination

Chinese Literature remains a hidden seam in the rich strata of Chinese culture. As a matter of fact, it is a treasure of a very considerable number of brilliant and profound works as each dynasty, in the long history of China, has passed down its legacy of magnificent events and works. Chinese Literature in Translation has long played an important role in modern China. Some writers such as Lu Xun, Yu Dafu, Ba Jin and others are literary translators themselves and many present day writers in China, such as the Nobel laureate Mo Yan, listed translated works as sources of enlightenment and inspiration.

Chinese culture is one of the world's oldest cultures, originated thousands of years ago. Chinese culture is extremely diverse and varying, and it has a profound effect in the philosophy, virtue, etiquette and traditions of Asia to date. Chinese culture is considered as the dominant culture in East Asia historically. Chinese language, ceramics, architecture, music, dance, literature, martial arts, cuisine, visual arts, philosophy, business etiquette, religion, politics and history have a profound impact on the world.

Cindy Pon is born in Taipei, Taiwan, and her family immigrated to California in 1980, settling in the suburbs of Los Angeles. She has begun writing stories before she has been officially declared as an English proficient. She has received her bachelor's from the University of California, San Diego, and also has earned a Master's from New York University. The author is a student of Chinese brush painting, and her love for the art is reflected in her storytelling. Cindy Pon lives with her husband and two small children in San Diego, California. Cindy's award-winning brush paintings have been shown in various venues in San Diego. A children's picture book featuring her Chinese brush paintings have released in 2011. Cindy Pon is greatly influenced by two great phenomenal writers Ursula Le Guin and Iris Murdoch. Her writing is graceful, clean and assured. She is significantly acquired with the genres like fantasy, science fiction and horror novels. Her debut fantasy novel is *Silver Phoenix*. *Silver Phoenix*, which is named as one of the Top Ten Fantasy and Science Fiction Books for Youth by the American Library Association's Booklist, and one of 2009's best Fantasy, Science Fiction and Horror by VOYA.

Silver Phoenix is Cindy Pon's debut novel a young adult quest fantasy set against a luxuriant, ancient China-inspired backdrop. Ai Ling can see into other people's minds and reach into their spirits. But she does not know why this power has awakened inside her. She only knows that it is growing. It leads her on an epic journey – one that brings her to the edge of the deepest evil. Chen Yong has a quest of his own, but then his path crosses Ai Ling's. And there is a connection so strong that neither can ignore it. Now they must face terrifying demons determined to kill them, and battle through treacherous lands. It is their destiny.

Silver Phoenix by Cindy Pon has inculcated with omnifarious themes such as feminism, patriarchal domination and friendship. According to J. A. Cuddon, feminism is defined as,

a development and movement in critical theory and in evaluation of literature which was well under way by the late 1960s and which has burgeoned steadily since. It is an attempt to describe and interpret women's experience as depicted in various kinds of literature – especially the novel; and, to a lesser extent, poetry and drama. It questions the long-standing, dominant, male, phallogocentric ideologies, patriarchal attitudes and male interpretations in literature. It attacks male notions of value in literature – by offering critiques of male authors and representations of men in literature and also by privileging women writers. (315)

In this novel, *Silver Phoenix* the author has conveyed feminism through the character of Ai Ling. Ai Ling is an intelligent and kind girl who loves her parents deeply. Chen Yong is the main character in *Silver Phoenix*. He is on a journey to find his mother in the Royal Palace and aides Ai Ling on her quest to defeat Zhong Ye and save the kingdom of Xia. Chen Yong asks to Ai Ling about her age. She replies that she is seventeen years old. He asks her why she is roaming alone and added that it is dangerous for a girl to travel alone. She replies him that she does what she is to do. She also says that most of the girls are sequestered within the inner quarters and it does not mean that she too has to be so. She decides to leave the home but Chen Yong admonishing tone irks her. She speaks boldly to Chen Yong. Eventhough Ai Ling considers Chen Yong to be the symbol of friendship, yet once when Chen Yong seems to underestimate or show of his male domination towards her, Ai Ling voices back. She is the feminist voice of this novel through the words of the author. Ai Ling is a symbol of boldness has

described beautifully in the novel. The novelist raises the question as to how long woman will be under the control of their husband, doing the household chores and satisfying his sexual desires. Their role as home makers has stayed predominant during all times. Ai Ling is completely different. Ai Ling is the symbol of boldness and courage. She speaks boldly and without fear even to strangers.

Ai Ling also proves her feministic view through the character of Master Huang. Master Huang is a rich merchant. At the start of the novel Ai Ling's father deserts them and leaves her mother to suffer all alone. Ai Ling betrothal is entangled. By this time Master Huang comes to the house of Ai Ling and suggests his idea of marrying Ai Ling as his fourth wife, as he has not yet inherited a son. He wishes to have a son through Ai Ling. "Master Huang was rich and did not need more money. He wanted her to make a son for him." (SP 26) Ai Ling rejects his proposal and voices all her thoughts about future endeavours. She leaves the house in the moonlit night with the jade pendant which has been given to her by her father.

This novel depicts multitudinal quintessence which conveys the vital concept of feminism versus patriarchal domination. Ai Ling is poor in wealth when compared to Master Huang, yet he meets her in the market and expresses his desire of marrying her. Ai Ling knows certain details about the successful merchant but cruel and ruthless as a person. Though he married three women, he does not have any son. His last wife is only seventeen years old. Ai Ling does not like him and leaves the place. After some days Master Huang visits Ai Ling's house. Ai Ling is shocked to see him in her house. Master Huang shows his concern to Ai Ling's family and later unfolds the news that Master Wen has borrowed a large amount of money before his exile. Lady Wen is sure her husband does not borrow any money at all. If ever he borrows anything from others, he is sure to inform her. He prejudices the male society. The author also has picturised the truth that men do not give importance to their better halves even though they are loyal and trustworthy to them. The male dominant society does not give any importance to female desires.

Master Huang desires to marry Ai Ling under the impression of clearing their debts. He takes advantage of the financial burden which is laid in front of Ai Ling and her family. His cruel attitude of male patriarchy is brought to light. He wants to marry Ai Ling as his fourth wife

because he is attracted towards the beauty of Ai Ling. Master Huang considers woman as raw material to produce products. He tries to seduce her but Ai Ling's voices out her anger. Ai Ling is the symbol of boldness which is beautifully picturised by the author.

Later, Fei Ming, the son of Master Tan, who is also a married man, tries to molest her. Ai Ling escapes from the hands of Fei Ming by her power. After that Ai Ling nurses him and saves his life. Ai Ling is the symbol of care and help is beautifully narrated by Cindy Pon through these instances. The man shows his cruel face and vulgarness towards Ai Ling, to him Ai Ling is a lump of flesh and behaves like a hungry animal. He does not give any importance to her feelings and emotions neither does he treat her as a fellow human being. The author portrays Fei Ming as a cruel monster who harasses Ai Ling. Throughout the novel male characters consider women as a material. They do not worry about the feeling and emotion of a woman. They act according to their whims and fancies.

Friendship is considered to be one of the beautiful relationships in the world. This is wonderfully narrated through the character of Ai Ling and Chen Yong. Chen Yong saves the life of Ai Ling when she submerges in the lake. Something has guided him towards the lake and his help has brought them together as friends. But their relationship is strained because of the activities of Fei Ming. He scolds her initially, but later when he understands the situation he apologizes to her, and she readily forgives him. This shows Ai Ling is the symbol of forgiveness.

When they continue their journey, they get a chance to meet Chen Yong's brother Li Rong. He too is attracted towards the beauty of Ai Ling and reveals his desire to marry her. But Ai Ling is not interested in it. She considers him as her brother. They continue their journey to reach the fragrant palace.

During their journey they have an encounter with a monster which kills Li Rong. Chen Yong loses his brother to the monster. He later kills the monster with the help of Ai Ling. Cindy Pon marvellously narrates the loss of his brother's love after his death. Ai Ling comforts him and chides herself for being responsible for the death of Li Rong. Chen Yong comforts her for everything happens according to fate and she has nothing to say about the death of Li Rong. He accompanies Ai Ling throughout the journey. He guards her. It is very difficult in the world to build a relationship between a man and woman in the name of friendship. The novelist skilfully

portrays their relationship in the novel. He is the one who guides Ai Ling in critical situations. He considers Ai Ling as his mother and shows his love and affection towards her. Ai Ling treats him as her brother. Chen Yong is the one who helps Ai Ling to fight against the hardships and helps her to reach the palace. Chen Yong also has a good relationship with her father. Ai Ling's father is a man who has saved Chen Yong's life earlier. Ai Ling's father unravels about his identity.

Ai Ling also is possessive towards Chen Yong which is magnificently narrated by the author, When Li Rong tells about Chen Yong's love and its failure to Ai Ling. She asks further more questions to Li Rong about Chen Yong's love, she feels pity for the death of Li Rong. Chen Yong is a moral support and strength to Ai Ling. Without his help Ai Ling would not have overcome these obstacles which are in front of her. The novelist pleasantly demonstrates the proverb "A friend in need is a friend indeed" through Chen Yong and Ai Ling's friendship.

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