

# In women's community working part-time at a feminist



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

In the memoir "The Girl Who Wouldn't Sing", Kit Yuen Quan describes her life experiences growing up as a Chinese girl in America.

In her attempt to try and find her place in society, Quan intermingles with several groups of people. Her interactions with a feminist group, two young Cambodian girls, and finally her own father allow her to explore her Chinese background and how that affects her interactions with people. In order to find her own "voice" in a society that is not really hers, Kit Yuen Quan explored relationships with people of different lifestyles. She does so in order to be able to recognize how she wants to express herself, and through which culture, American or Chinese, if not both, she wants to do so.

When she ran away from home, Quan "sought refuge in the women's community working part-time at a feminist bookstore" (Quan 214). Yet, because of her Chinese background and difficulty in understanding language, Kit found she wasn't as accepted as she had hoped she would be. The fact that she could not understand many of the issues discussed by the feminists she was surrounded by was very frustrating for Kit. This frustration acted as a vehicle for her to gain a desire to be more proficient in the "feminist rhetoric" (Quan 214). Although her desire to be part of the community was strong, she continuously encountered problems because of her age, nationality, and lack of a "formal American education". The frustration that Kit encountered made her feel even more misunderstood, and she sought her voice through other communities and Kit's first failed attempt to become a part of a community was because of her inability to "properly" express herself and her ideas.

In her quest for acceptance, Quan decided to immerse herself in an abeneficial situation in which language would not be a problem, and she decided to tutor two Cambodian girls. The two girls, Yan and Eng, lived in a terrible neighborhood where there were “ drunk men and prostitutes near corners”, “ the fragrant smell of piss and jasmine rice wafting from windows”, and “ a medley of languages: Vietnamese, Chinese, Cambodian, English, Black English, Laotian”(Quan 216). Kit went into the situation thinking that she would be able to connect to her culture through knowing a common language. Somewhat to her surprise, the connection to her culture did not come through language, but through observing the experiences of childhood that these two girls were immersed in. Kit states that “ whether they were living in a refugee camp in the Philippines or in Thailand or in some one-room apartment on Eddy Street, they were connected to each other through their language and their culture”(Quan 217).

It was not so much Kit's own interaction with the girls that allowed her to realize where she would find herself, but her observation of the girls and their interaction with their native culture. Kit's experience with Yan and Eng compelled her to learn more about her native culture, rather than solely try to fit into the American culture. Kit's attempt to conform to the American standards and culture was precisely the mistake she had made with the feminists. Kit Yuen Quan's time spent with the Cambodian girls allowed her to see how important being in touch with her Chinese background is. Not only did this cause Kit to learn to speak Chinese, but this catharsis also helped her realize that being in touch with her culture also means reconnecting with her family.

In making this realization, Kit decides to reconnect with her father, and she says that "speaking Chinese with my father is the closest I have felt to coming home" (Quan 219). Although being home was originally something that was uncomfortable for Kit, it is the same home that she returns to in order to receive that comfort that she has been missing in all other aspects of her life since the age of sixteen. Kit Yuen Quan's life, as described in her memoir, is a series of life-changing events that have caused her to question her methods of expression. The title of the memoir, "The Girl Who Wouldn't Sing", is very telling of Kit's personal search for a comfortable way to express herself. Quan's personal journey has allowed her to connect with her culture and language in a way that probably would not have happened if she hadn't left home.

The fact that Kit had the experiences she did, with the Cambodian girls, the feminists, and her father, has allowed her to see life in a new light. Through her language and culture