



Clash of Cultures: The Portrayal of Western Influence in Chinese Narratives of East Wind: West Wind, Chinese Cinderella, and Thousand Pieces of Gold

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Introduction

This clash of Oriental and Occidental has been seen as a major topic in many works of literature, especially Chinese literature. These interactions though characterized by contest and accommodation, have shown the dynamism of cultural relations and the effect of the WEST on the enclosed and isolated traditional Chinese society. This paper examines three significant literary works—Pearl S. Buck's *East Wind: West Wind* (1930), *Chinese Cinderella* by Adeline Yen Mah (1999) and *Thousand Pieces of Gold* by Ruthanne Lum McCunn (1981) to analyze how these narratives represent the impact of culture clash in Chinese culture with special reference to Chinese women as the agents of crossover between the two worlds.

In *East Wind: West Wind*, Buck presents the picture of early twentieth-century China which was in the process of social transition due to the presence of imperialism of the Western countries. Thus, the conflict between the traditional Asian culture and the strife of modernity imposed by Western penetration into the Far East is disclosed by Buck through the experience of the main female protagonist, Kwei-lan. The struggle within Kwei-lan's personality and her relations with her Westernized husband represent some underlying transformations within Chinese culture (Buck, 1930).

Peering Kin with My yen-daily Life told from a chimney sweep's point of view – *Chinese Cinderella* provides an eyewitness account of Western education's experience on a Chinese girl. Adeline Yen Mah brings out the suffering of the main character, Adeline, as she has to fight the conventional, strictly Confucian-based Chinese family and yet is influenced by the Western mode of thinking. This memoir



brings out the trauma and the psychological aspect of being raised in a bicultural and socially ambivalent context where the American and Chinese cultures occasionally conflict (Mah, 1999).

In *Thousand Pieces of Gold*, McCunn narrates Lalu Nathoy who was sold as a slave and taken to America. Racism, sexism cultural conflict and assimilation are key themes in Lucy's novel as she portrays the West as paradoxically a source of oppression and emancipation. Lalu's narrative of moving from a position of subjection to one of power represents the tortuous process of acculturation in a multicultural province as described by McCunn (1981).

Hopefully, this academic work will reveal the notions of cultural clash, and the issue of identity and gender roles in the selected texts, yet, will also demonstrate how every author creates and depicts situations in Chinese society under the influence of the West. Drawing from postcolonial theory, feminism and hybridity this paper aims to understand the dynamics of cultural contact in literature.

Literature Review

The discussion will draw on the secondary literature in the fields of cultural studies, post-colonialism and gender about the chosen texts. What follows will be a detailed discussion of the theoretical lenses and the critical approaches that might be useful in analyzing the impact of the West on Chinese writing.

Postcolonial Perspectives

The postcolonial theory hands out a competent method of studying the relations of power and cultural interactions between the Oriental and the Occidental worlds. The most pertinent theory seems to be that of Orientalism, which was proposed by Edward Said (Said 1978) because it shows how the West, in general, creates its image of the East in compliance with the colonialist philosophies and power relations. Moreover, as a means to interpret Chinese literature, postcolonial theory helps to reveal how Westernization is depicted as both a disruption and a decolonization.

Another theory significant for analyzing the interplay of the Eastern and Western cultures in the selected texts is Homi Bhabha's theory of cultural hybridity. In this kind of infrastructural exchange, Bhabha proposes the phenomenon of 'third space,' a realm where the colonist and the colonized produce novel cultural identities and modes of being in the world. This concept is particularly relevant for analyzing the experiences of the protagonists in *East Wind: Chinese Cinderella*, *West Wind* and *Thousand Pieces of Gold* are the characters who still have to encounter difficulties of stereotype issues related to cultural emergence while interacting with the Western mode of life.



Feminist Approaches

Another useful theoretical approach to the consideration of gender construction and the effects of Westernization on the main female characters in the selected texts is feminist criticism. Gayatri Spivak's notion of the 'subaltern' (Spivak, 1988) is especially pertinent in exploring how and when women – and women in particular the subaltern – are spoken for without a voice of their own. When applied to the chosen texts, the use of feminist theory allows us to reveal how the female characters undermine, conform to, and are formed by the cultural norms of both the East and the West.

Rey Chow (1991) and Lisa Lowe (1996) have analyzed gender, race and culture in Chinese American literature pointing to how the works of Buck, Mah, and McCunn have depicted the themes. Their analyses lay a foundation for knowing about gendered aspects that are contained in cultural interactions of the selected texts with a particular focus on how the female characters overcome the patriarchal cultures in both the East and the West.

Cultural Hybridity and Identity

Cultural hybridity serves as the dominant notion for the interpretation of the singled-out texts as it describes the processes occurring in the sphere of cultural contacts and the context of the formation of the East-West identities. Cultural hybridity as a concept has been discussed by scholars like Stuart Hall (1996) and Paul Gilroy (1993) in as much as it questions the orthodox principles of identity and established concepts of citizenship in the current globalised and diasporic world.

Regarding the selected texts, cultural hybridity is depicted as the cause of conflict, as well as the possibility of empowering the marginalized. The female protagonists in *East Wind: Chinese Cinderella*, *West Wind*, and *Thousand Pieces of Gold* have to deal with conflict at the interface of traditions and cultural identity and the influences of the Westernization process. Among them, they demonstrate the problem of cultural identity and how the prospect of cultural change poses a threat to those who wish to preserve their culture and yet they show the potentiality of constructing new forms of identity that can cut across cultures.

Theoretical Framework

Below, the author presents the theoretical framework that has been the basis of the analysis of the selected texts including postcolonial theory, feminism, and cultural hybridity.



Postcolonial Theory

I found postcolonial theory to be very useful when it comes to understanding the relations of power as well as the cultural exchange between East and West in the chosen texts. Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) is an important reference here because it examines how these 'oriental' representations are formed through the lens of colonialism. Applied to the context of the texts selected, the concept of the postcolonial theory serves to explain how the Western culture is depicted as a force that is destructive in as much as it is renewing.

Another critical approach that exhibits the relation between the Eastern and the Western world in the selected texts is Homi Bhabha's theory of hybridity (Bhabha, 1994). In Bhabha's view, the process of colonization forms a hybrid 'third space' as a result of contact between the colonizer and the colonized. This concept is particularly relevant for analyzing the experiences of the protagonists in *East Wind: Chinese Cinderella*, *West Wind*, and *Thousand Pieces of Gold* because they have to deal with the dynamics of the interaction between "Oriental" and "Occidental" as a part of their lives.

Feminism

Analyzing the selected texts, it is possible to use the concepts and ideas of feminist theory to understand the gender aspects of cultural interactions. The Indian post-colonialist Gayatri Spivak's theory of the 'subaltern' (Spivak, 1988) is particularly helpful in understanding the representation or lack thereof of women – especially third-world women – in literature. When analysing the selected texts, feminism aids in demonstrating how the female characters subvert, comply with and are formed by the oriental and occidental cultural norms.

Cultural Hybridity

To examine the lives of the protagonists in the chosen texts, it is possible to employ the notion of 'cultural hybridity' developed by Homi Bhabha (1994). Cultural hybridity is a synonym for how new cross-cultural interactions result in the development of new cultural markers. In as much as cultural hybridity is presented in the selected texts as the cause of conflict and the location of possible power.

Analysis of East Wind: West Wind

This section provides a detailed analysis of Pearl S. Buck's *East Wind: West Wind* on how the novel paints the picture of the effect of Westernization on traditional Chinese society especially about the female character Kwei-lan.



Historical Context

East Wind: West Wind is set during the early part of this period, that is, in early twentieth-century China a time that saw the emergence of various social conflicts following the arrival of the new civilization from the West. The novel reflects the conflict between Confucian and Go |The struggle between the attitudes and ideas of the traditional Chinese society and the novelty brought by the Western world. This historico-cultural background is important in defining the struggle;e that the main character has to go through due to the war between tradition and modernity (Buck, 1930).

Character Analysis

Kwei-lan, the protagonist of East Wind: West Wind portrays the feelings of many Chinese women, especially those who were forced to follow the Confucian doctrine of obedient daughters and wives to their Western counterparts, yet, on the same instance, they were being flooded with the ideas of individualism and equal rights. Her torn conscience is the focus of the novel when she tries so hard to fit the traditional Confucian ways of thinking that were instilled in her into the new values introduced by her husband who has been to the United States (Buck, 1930).

In her, Buck presents the reader with the major processes that were taking place in the Chinese society of that time owing to the conflicts between tradition and the Europeanization of Chinese society. It can be interpreted as a search for the main character, Kwei-lan, who struggles to preserve the cultural values in the conditions of the changing society, and, at the same time, embodies the process of the individual's gradual transformation and becoming the mistress of her fate despite the adaptation of the values belonging to a different culture (Conn, 1996).

Themes

One of the central themes of East Wind: West Wind is the opposition between the old and the new age in particular Kwei-lan traditions and her husband's new thoughts. This theme is discovered in the conflict of the main character's inner self and as a social transformation in the novel. Regarding this cultural conflict, Buck provides a clear perspective of how the process of cultural assimilation in the book is not without its struggles and difficulties involved hence; (Buck, 1930).

Education is yet another significant theme in the novel, and, in fact, the leading one in terms of the volume of treatment. This was a general setting of a Chinese woman like Kwei-lan struggling between the confinement of Confucian morality on one hand and the liberalism of the new Western culture on the other hand. Thus, it is through the analysis of the main female character, Kwei-lan, that Buck is shown



to discuss the specifications of the ultimate fulfilled Women in the face of a progressive future and the role these 'new' women are to play in it (Conn, 1996).

Narrative Techniques

Buck uses a variety of narrative techniques to convey the cultural tensions and the protagonist's psychological struggle in *East Wind: The West Wind*. Due to the first-person narrative employed by the author, it is relatively easy to track Kwei-lan's growth as a character and her changing awareness of the environment she is living in. It also offers a view of other social and cultural changes going on in Chinese society in terms of what Kwei-lan personally observes in her life and the lives of others (Buck, 1930).

Another significant approach to the treatment of the events in the novel is the involvement of symbolism as well. For instance, the bound feet of Kwei-lan which is the Taiwanese wife of Ting are reminders of the oppression of women the Confucian society imposed on them. An example of her liberation is when she loosens the bandages on her feet under the urging of her husband, who was educated in the West; her liberation comes from adopting the cultural ideas of the West (Buck, 1930).

Critical Evaluation

This section analyses Adeline Yen Mah's *Chinese Cinderella*, whereby the following issues will be discussed: The role adopted by the Čech fiction in depicting the effects of the West education and principles on Chinese children and their families.

Analysis of Chinese Cinderella by Adeline Yen Mah

Chinese Cinderella is a work of fiction based on Adeline Yen Mah's childhood and her experiences as a daughter of a traditional Chinese family in post-war China. The memoir reveals the story of the author's childhood which can be characterized by neglect and a degree of emotional abuse in the context of a patriarchal family. This auto-biographical frame is important to set the background for cultural clashes described in the memoir, especially the clash between Chinese culture and Western education (Mah 1999).

Character Analysis

The main character is a young girl named Adeline who is depicted as a smart and strong-willed girl who does well in school despite the bad home conditions. Her improvement in the Western style of education



turns to the pride or issue of her family as it disrupts the traditional gender-coded norms set by her traditionalist patriarchal father and stepmother (Mah 1999).

The impact of the contrast between the traditional African and Western educations together with the values that come with it is depicted in the emancipation and at the same time marginalization of Adeline. On one hand, her academic accomplishments give her the feeling of worth and the ability to leave the tyranny of her family life. On the other hand, her success strengthens the gap between her and her family who are still bound by old Chinese culture and do not accept and have hatred for the Western education she gained (Mah, 1999).

Themes

Another focus in the novel is the theme of tradition and change: though being Chinese, and having been duly brought up as such, Adeline has to attend a British school. This is achieved through the use of the protagonist's experiences that are depicted in the book as being in the home front and school as well as the changes taking place in the society in post-war China. In this regard, the memoir exposes the difficulties of the postcolonial 'in-between' condition in which, after becoming a convert to Christianity and receiving Western education, Adeline has to wrestle with the different sets of expectations emerging from her dual cultural identity (Mah, 1999).

The second major topic of the memoir is the destiny of women in Chinese culture specifically within the framework of the patriarchal family. The Life of Adeline eschews the prevailing difficulties of girls and women of Chinese origin, who, in the context of their families and society, were discriminated against and 'maltreated. As is seen through the character of Adeline, Mah raises the themes of female emancipation and the benefit of education and the topics of the psychological price of rejecting one's culture (Mah, 1999).

Narrative Style

The Chinese Cinderella's writing approach is perhaps best described in the sense that it writes in a simple manner that reveals the protagonist's snapshots of her life and emotions. By adopting a first-person narrator, Mah gives the reader a personal view of her childhood, while at the same time giving a social and cultural picture of the times. The literary work's plain language and lack of stylization are smoothed in the memoir to spot the emotional appeal of Adeline and her endurance and determination (Mah, 1999).



Analysis of Thousand Pieces of Gold by Ruthanne Lum McCunn

Observed when writing *A Thousand Pieces of Gold*, a Chinese novel is not a mere document of facts or actualities of a society but an interpretation of a culture as seen through the eyes of a Western scholar.

This section is dedicated to the discussion of Ruthanne Lum McCunn's *Thousand Pieces of Gold* with an emphasis on Chinese immigrants' experiences in the American West and changes introduced by the Western culture to the novel's protagonist Lalu Nathoy.

Historical Context

Thousand Pieces of Gold depicts the main characters experiencing the later part of the 1800s to early 1900s, the time frame that shows the prevalence of China immigrants in the United States. The novel narrates a history of Chinese immigrants struggling with living in America in the 1800s and early 1900s when the American West was not hospitable to foreigners, to say the least, and Chinese immigrants, in particular, could hardly find a friendly face. This background knowledge is essential for decoding the social themes present in the novel namely the positives and negatives associated with Westernization (McCunn, 1981).

Character Analysis

The main character Lalu Nathoy is depicted as a strong, independent woman who is bought and brought to America where she has to go through all the struggles of a Chinese immigrant. The story of Lalu's transformation from a sexually exploited woman to a self-empowered one gives a cultural metaphor of adaptation and search for identity in a multi-cultural social milieu. These experiences place her in the context of Chinese women in the American West, and the prospects for subjectivity and choice in lives that have been so fraught (McCunn, 1981).

Lalu's decision to get married to Charlie Bemis – a white American removes her from the context of slavery and offers her an opportunity to learn and live in a multicultural society. When the rivers merge this relationship also depicts the possibilities for cultural fusion and ethnic merger, which means the formation of a new unified racial and cultural front (McCunn, 1981).

Themes

Another important issue shown in *Thousand Pieces of Gold* is the racial-sexual politics of Chinese immigration to the American West. Thus, the novel shows and at the same time emphasizes the positive and negative aspects of the presence of the progressive Western culture by depicting the struggles of the



Chinese woman, Lalu living in a racially segregated society. This aspect is expressed through Lalu's issues of racism and cultural clash, and her process of liberation as well as through her relations with other characters who embody different facets of the 'Western Frontier' (McCunn, 1981, p. 1865).

Another great theme that can be mentioned in the novel is the exploration of the issues connected with cultural identity and cultural creolization; all the events described in the novel remind Lalu's experience of creolization. It shows how the elite struggles and strives to preserve culture and yet innovate and alter their culture to become new and begin anew, with new reinvented selves that are not confined to the old cultural paradigms. While telling the story of Lalu McCunn discusses how the elements of multicultural existence can be synthesized, and how new identities can be formed in a racially diverse society.

Narrative Structure

As the above discussions show, *Thousand Pieces of Gold* is realistic in its exploration of the narrative structure, the result of historical and cultural historicization that encompasses a detailed description of the Chinese immigrants' station in the western United States. McCunn's choice of the third person narration lets the reader be as close to Lalu's persona as possible but at the same time, gives a panoramic view of the culture and social surroundings of the novel. This means that the novel itself is episodic, a fact that mirrors the difficulties and the unpredictability of Lalu's experience of life in a multicultural world (McCunn, 1981).

Comparative Analysis

This section aims to compare and contrast Westernization in all three texts analyzing the threads of the authors' work and their attitudes.

Common Themes

The three texts underlying this paper are bound by themes of culture, especially as manifested in the formation of the individual's personality, and the status of women. In all three stories, the key female characters are women who live between two worlds – the Eastern and the Western cultures and this is representative of the struggle that exists between the traditional and the postmodern world. All three texts involve cultural hybridity as the concept the main characters are trying to determine their place in the culturally in-between space of the 'post-Oriental' (Buck, 1930; Mah, 1999; McCunn, 1981).

The status and place of women in the presented cultural shifts can be named one of the more frequent topics in the three texts. The female protagonists in *East Wind*: Both Chinese Cinderella and *Thousand*



Pieces of Gold are depicted as strong women who have to deal with a society that oppresses women while being also influenced by Western culture. All these point to the potential for female autonomy and voice within the context of culture meeting culture but also the volatility of asserting culture in a modernising world (Buck, 1930; Mah, 1999; McCunn, 1981).

Differences in Portrayal

However, there is a certain difference in the three texts as far as Western impact and the concept of the 'Other' is concerned. In *East Wind: West Wind*, Buck presents the white man's civilization as a force of evil that nonetheless can engender positive change in society's norms and values. The above analysis of the novel is based on the Psychoanalytical criticism of Kwei-lan, primarily focusing on the adjustment of the psychological and cultural factors of society as demonstrated by Kwei-lan and the novel in specific (Buck, 1930).

On the other hand, *Chinese Cinderella* perceives Western influence as liberating and as a source of marginalisation, especially of the character Adeline. The focus on the life of the author means that the strain of cultural creolization is viewed in a more subjective, therefore, emotional way when Adeline has to reconcile her traditional Asian family values with the education she receives in Occident. Areas of emotional and psychological concern that are singled out as features of culturally hybrid environments reflect the rather painful side of the life of immigrants and the second generation (Mah, 1999).

Thus *Thousand Pieces of Gold* offers a more multifaceted vision of the role of Westernization as both the subjugation and the possibility of emancipation. Focusing on Chinese immigrants of the American West during the period of the gold rush, the novel can perform a more copious examination of the experiences and prospects of encounters between cultures and the potential of forging new subjectivity and citizenship amid the multicultural American society (McCunn, 1981).

Impact on Protagonists

The overall effect of the 'othering' Western influence on the female protagonists of the three texts also differs for the simple reason that each of the three texts is set in different cultural and historical settings. In *East Wind: West Wind*, At the end of the novel Kwei-lan, because of contact with the Western culture, questions and slowly comes to reject some of her culture's values. This change is depicted as a process of individual development at the same time as a process of alienation from own native tradition (Buck, 1930).



Opportunities for education and values of emancipation lead Adeline to personal development in Chinese Cinderella but isolation and feelings of rejection by the rest of the family members. The memoir shows that living in culturally ambivalent backgrounds contains psychological and emotional issues, including being squeezed between culturally conflicting expectations of the hero (Mah, 1999).

Whereas in Red Cliff, Ying hates the Japanese people but learns to accept them and accept her status as a prisoner of war; in Thousand Pieces of Gold, Lalu, due to her experiences in the territories of the American West, undergoes a more nuanced change of her identity status. Her transformation story illustrates the idea of freedom and choices and, at the same time, the issue of cultural identity in the context of multiculturalism. Indeed, Lalu's tragic experience illustrates how a new kind of 'culture and belonging' could be produced and negotiated in the context of a multicultural society (McCunn, 1981).

Discussion

The current section will conduct a broader discussion regarding the findings made with an accent on their significance in studying cultural meetings in literature and portraying gender and identity within the sphere of East-West interactions.

Implications for Cultural Identity

The examination of the three texts revealed the crucial issues of constructing cultural subjectivity about the cultural crossover of Eastern and Western cultures. In all three stories, cultural otherness is a major concern: all the female characters find themselves in a state of conflict between their cultural and/or national identity and the Western worldview. Discussing the specificities of cultural identity, the results of the survey point to cultural hybridity as a conflict; and as a possible space for the emancipation of the oppressed minorities, combining tradition and modernity, eastern and Western cultures, with Bhabha (1994) and Said (1978).

The representation of cultural mixture in the three texts also speaks volumes of how culture is hybridised in the contemporary globalised world. The experiences of the protagonists in East Wind: West Wind, Chinese Cinderella, and Thousand Pieces of Gold demonstrate the dynamics of cultural contacts and encounters within a multicultural pursuing both the opportunities and the threats in the process of constructing new self-identities that do not necessarily have to obey to the rules of the traditional cultures (Buck, 1930; Mah, 1999; McCunn, 1981).



Gender and Power Dynamics

Gender and power relations also emerge by analysing the three texts, particularly about cultural encounters between East and West. As will be apparent later, all the female protagonists of the three stories are caught between patriarchy and emerging cultural transformation, and so they embody the general evolution of women in a progressive society. The work shows that Westernisation has an ambivalent influence on gendered subjectivities – it empowers as well as disempowers women (Spivak, 1988; Chow, 1991).

The representation of female power in the three texts equally has general consequences for the study of feminism especially in terms of gender, culture and power. The experiences of the female protagonists in *East Wind: West Wind*, *Chinese Cinderella* and *Thousand Pieces of Gold* demonstrate that, while it remains apparent that the female voice can be empowering in multicultural settings, the distinctive opportunities that they offer, depend on the cultural as well as historical framework in which the narratives are set (Buck, 1930, Mah 1999, McCunn 1981).

Cultural Hybridity in Literature

Among the theoretical concepts that may be helpful to understanding cultural meetings described in the three texts, there is a concept of cultural hybridity proposed by Homi Bhabha (1994). The analysis of *East Wind: Based on the analysis of works by West Wind, Chinese Cinderella, and Thousand Pieces of Gold*, it is possible to define the multicultural identity incorporation and hybridity as well as the construction of the new cultural and interactional identify paradigms in the context of cultural globalization.

Besides the detailed theoretical reading of cultural creolisation, it might be also discussed about the general issues of the nature of literature and identity in the context of globalisation. The experiences of the protagonists in *East Wind: West Wind, Chinese Cinderella and Thousand Pieces of Gold* depict and account for the occurrences of cultural contacts in multicultural that reveal that there are possibilities for the building of new cultural subjectivity that is beyond cultures (Buck, 1930; Mah, 1999; McCunn, 1981).

Conclusion

The last part will entail the conclusion of the study conclusion, validation of the significance of the research paper and the suggestion of future direction.



The analysis of *East Wind: Because West Wind*, *Chinese Cinderella* and *Thousand Pieces of Gold* demonstrates the author's themes and invitations of cultural confrontation between East and West, consequently the principal characters which are Chinese women in the centre of two conflicting cultural approaches. The concept of culture as the battle between the local and the American is the dominant one of all three stories as well as the life of the three women in conflict between them (Huck, Buck, 1930; Mah, 1999; McCunn, 1981).

The presented research suggests that mixed culture is always both the ground for the clash and the site of the release, where the people and cultures are in the middle, mediating the global and the local and the oriental and the occidental. The aspect of hybridity portrayed in the three texts is also part of the grasp of culture in as much as culture identity in the age of globalization and uses of gender culture and power about the culturally hybrid Bhabha 1994; Said 1978; Spivak 1988.

The scholarly value of this work lies in the discussion of the various dimensions of cultural contact between the East and the West in the Chinese context. The analysis of *East Wind*: Each of the three texts, *West Wind*, *Chinese Cinderella* and *Thousand Pieces of Gold* have employed the ideological presence of West to narrate how Chinese women were carrying on their life in their own country. The implications of the research are two-fold: extending the existing cultural literature with the concept of culture and how cultural members interact in the multicultural environment and the formation of cultural identity in a postmodern world (Buck, 1930; Mah, 1999; McCunn, 1981).

Future work could focus on a similar topic in other literary works; such work could be done regarding different cultures and periods. For instance, the subsequent research may expand the study of the impact of Westernization in other freshly developed Chinese stories or in other cultures that have had significant cross-cultural interactions with the West. In addition, the future study could centre on the shape of Chinese literature and the Chinese consciousness in the long term under the influence of the West and on the so-called 'second' or 'third space' where Bhabha said cultural hybridity takes place in the contemporary world (Bhabha, 1994; Said 1978; Spivak 1988).



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