

# THE SUPREMACY OF MODERNITY TO KWEI-LAN AND THE HUSBAND IN PEARL S. BUCK'S NOVEL-- *EAST WIND: WEST WIND*

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## Abstract

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This study deals with the condition of contrastion between tradition and modernity of two major characters in **Pearl S. Buck's** *East Wind: West Wind*. The tradition is presented well by Kwei-Lan, an ordinary Chinese woman who is startled to be adapted with the opposite way of life of her Chinese husband who has come from Western country after years. The matter of modernity becomes crucial to the extent of Kwei-Lan's conservative conduct and thought. The problem occurs when Kwei-Lan assumes her husband's effect of mimicry towards Western culture as a threat to her character since the beginning. With rational and intelligent senses her husband has, Kwei-Lan finally taken in the new way of him. Question, hesitant, and confusion become common signs of ambivalence Kwei-Lan experiences throughout her husband's modernity. This study reveals Kwei-Lan's Chinese tradition and her husband's Western modernity using post-colonial theory of Homi Bhabha. This study uses it so since the husband shows the performance of colonizer and somehow imitates Western ways as it comes with the notion of freedom. The husband shows a new way of protecting Kwei-Lan's character from tradition of patriarchy that restrains most of Chinese women. The analysis of this study will possibly mark the influences of modernity to both characters briefly: the emergence of adoption and adaptation of Western culture and the mixture of Chinese and Western culture. Overall, the analysis verifies and convinces the theory of Homi Bhabha about the correlation and co-existence of East and West appear in the novel. The interpretation of modernity recognizes the fallacy of humanity concept and sets new significant changes that are apart better in detail of manner of living.

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**Keywords:** *Tradition, modernity, post colonialism*

## INTRODUCTION

**To write a novel means to carry the incommensurable to extremes in the representation of human life. In the midst of life's fullness, and through the representation of this fullness, the novel gives evidence of the profound perplexity of living (Bhabha, 1994, p. 161)<sup>1</sup>.**

This study uses the novel of Pearl S. Buck, an American author lived in China following her parents missionaries, *East Wind: West Wind* that tells the ambivalence experiences through modernity of an ordinary Chinese woman named *Kwei-Lan*. The themes of her works are mostly related to the contrastion of East and West, the inequality of gender roles in Chinese tradition, and the split of social beliefs because the existence of Western liberal thought. Pearl S. Buck has shown the different way of living and thinking through *Kwei-Lan* who seems like an innocent character that has not yet been touched and preserved. She upholds the tradition of Ancient China. Throughout this study, we will possibly see the existence of tradition and modernity – conservative and modern

– represented by the main characters, Kwei-Lan and the husband in Pearl S. Buck's *East Wind: West Wind*. The meeting of two different cultures then creates culture shock for Kwei-Lan who only knows that the truth is her customary belief. This becomes a matter as Kwei-Lan's husband himself is apparently feminist. The direction of the husband always fails to interrogate and correct Kwei-Lan's attitude and behavior in the beginning of marriage. The husband seems clear in his attitude and behavior that he rejects such rural thinking. With intellectual and modern ways of life the husband has accustomed to, he persuades Kwei-Lan and makes the movement to combat the old tradition. The husband shows the view of gender roles equality, the use of science, and the practice of independent working lives. The husband is clearly the representative of West modernity. Meanwhile, Kwei-Lan in her conservative ways, only sticks out to the patrilineal family structure and the duties of a Chinese woman becoming inferior in the society.

The setting of the novel itself is in the North China where the existence of West people and their culture does affect the society. The story in the novel has given a clear understanding regarding the progress of Chinese civilization at the time West people came and visited the area. This novel offers an understanding of the theme of post colonialism in such different way of narrative telling, under the relationship between characters and the global movement of modernity. Kwei-Lan experiences curiosity over the husband's character which leads her to learn the modernity of the husband in the end, under the relationship of marriage. By knowing the conflict as this novel portrays above, this study then focuses on the depiction of the tradition within the character of Kwei-Lan; and modernity within the character of the husband. Tradition lies on the social beliefs where the people even can do nothing about them. Meanwhile, modernity reflects the value of inherent systems into intellectual value systems. Besides, this study will also focus on the influences of modernity that the husband brings related to both his and Kwei-Lan's characters. The depiction of both tradition and modernity can be seen throughout the characters' way of thinking; their attitude towards family members; and their attitude towards each other.

This study uses the theory of post colonialism or post-colonial theory of Homi Bhabha's *The Location of Culture* (1994) that witnesses the unequal and uneven forces of cultural representation of social authority within the modern world order, within the ideological and geopolitical divisions of East and West, North and South. In the most literary works; moreover in the postcolonial studies, the West represents modernity while the East represents tradition. The play of colonial power coordinates knowledge or ideology with the strategy of differentiation – between the East and the West, defense, fixation – from tradition to modernity, and their characterization. Post colonialism concerns on the recognition and disavowal of racial/cultural/historical differences. Here, even though the character of Kwei-Lan's husband is originally Chinese, the migration over 12 years in America is considered has a big impact to his character and belief. This perspective then becomes the reason of why the husband is the representative of West Modernity. This study explores the tradition of patriarchy and the way the notion of freedom in term of gender roles even the custom – of modernity – affects it. Eastern people are artificial and their tradition required being modernized and civilized. The influences of modernity then will be explored by the act of the characters in the novel – depend on their attitudes toward modernity itself.

## REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE:

### Tradition

Tradition is referred belongs to the East. In Homi Bhabha's *The Location of Culture*, the East is described as an alien territory which has a meaning as a territory or area of subaltern that has such wilderness – the practice of an

old tradition, a primitive, rural and even conservative. Such wilderness then becomes a reason of the West to construct strategy of globalization to fix the social order within modernity with the aim of salvation. Ancient China as the Orient or the East stands in such margin. The development of the country comes after globalization of the West. Tradition is kept running within the progress of modernity, it is the person that decides to value the custom they have since it characterizes and reflects themselves.

**Tradition is a socially and culturally established, inherited or customary pattern of thought, action or behavior. Tradition also refers to a characteristic of manner, method or style of organisation or conduct (Wolfreys, Robbins, & Womack, 2002, p. 98).**

It means that tradition is wholly established in a society and it is believed over generations. It constructs a personal way of thinking, attitude, and behavior. Based on Homi Bhabha's *The Location of Culture* (1994), tradition stands on the point when it becomes a rule for particular societies. It contains the details of life: where you can sit, or not; how you can live, or not; what you can learn, or not; who you can love, or not. It is true that tradition is the reflection of others/Orient. Since the term of culture differences exist between the East and the West, the West starts to refer the East as uncivilized with its strange and uncultivated tradition being established. That is why the West makes it clear that the idea of colonialism began the invasion to the East within the introduction of modernity to free the people from the tradition restriction. In this case, the existence of who is the one experiences and the one makes the invention quite ambiguous, whether it is because the tradition of the Orient being in progress to modernity, or it is because the goal of colonialism of the West has been achieved. This concept is actually as the same as Giddens suggested:

**Tradition is not wholly static, because it has to be reinvented by each new generation as it takes over its cultural inheritance from those preceding it (Giddens, 1990, p. 37).**

Again, what has to be underlined here is, there is ambiguity who the one makes the changes to the established tradition is, whether it is the natives or even the colonizer. In most cases, migration with the offer of science takes the most reasonable concept for the idea of the change of traditional belief or custom (such as the reason of studying overseas). There is the possibility of natives ideological split – from conservative into modern one, the West liberal ideology.

Tradition lies on the social beliefs where the people even can do nothing about them. It is straight and has to be concerned. Sometimes, the tradition itself contains a particular lesson for the society to trust without any exception. The sign of tradition is that the people who hold it mostly believe their custom as the truth. They will surely experience ambivalence when modernity faces them. According to Foucault in Bhabha, those people – of the East – are subjects that are placed in the subaltern where the tension between law and order make them becoming disciplinary or pastoral society.. It is then the custom or objectivities that seem characterize the people. In conclusion, just like what Cornel West in Bhabha (1994) has proposed, the idea of tradition or genealogical materialism represents the logic of living contains the everyday life of different ideological forms starting from race, religion, and custom. At last, it then becomes the foundation of self-images and self-identities.

## Modernity

In the terms of post colonialism, the West is the one that has superiority and originality while the East is minored with its inferiority. The West as the colonizer always has the ambition to modernize or civilize the native. The term of **modernity** itself (that deals with the existence of the West) according to Bhabha is when a space – of minority identities – normalized, pastoralized, within the techniques of modern power and police: the personal-*is*-the political; the world-*in*-the home. The words of “the world-in-the home” seem to have the meaning of the implementation of the *Western modernity* in the country of Orient by the natives of the country itself. The possibility of colonialism is high since the ideal ego of the West is that they are the society with the racial origin and their ideal ego is the white and whole, belongs to their race is the reason for civilization..

The colonizer creates such series of sameness and disavows the cultural diversity. In this context, the colonizer authorizes discrimination towards the Orient. They work up on the difference and the recognition of the movement attributed to the stereotype. Their race is the political sign of superiority. Since the spread of liberal ideology works, the West has been a place where *Others* need to focus and occupy. It is probably within the reason of social differences between the *West* and *Others*. The effects of colonial discourse regarding modernity do not only refer to the person or a struggle between self and other, but also to the tradition – the existence of discrimination between mother culture and alien cultures. Modernity reflects the value of inherent systems into intellectual value systems. It identifies enlightenment project related to thought of inevitability progress. The idea of modernity ranges modes of production<sup>2</sup>, social formations, and economic relations. It emerges struggle, and opens the gap between past and present. Some theorists also argued that the existence of modernity deals with the transformation between society and technology. There are always stereotypes of East and West that only the East views. The West with its modernity has started the life in an electronic age, and the East also stereotypes the West with such American interests.

**The people are now the very principle of ‘dialectical reorganization’ and they construct their culture from the national text translated into modern Western forms of information technology, language, dress (Bhabha, 1994, p. 38).**

The implementation of technology and the way people speak and dress in the West are only the symbol of modernity itself. There are differences between the way people in the East and the West learn, speak and dress, they show the differences between intelligences or qualities of the people. The modern form aims to unify the society – the natives – culturally within its borders as a problem. It is an order of reality and fixed gaps within the connection to science. In another words, to be modern is to deal with changes on the human qualities through science or knowledge. Just like what psychoanalyst Annie Reich in Bhabha has argued, modernity is not something that is only visible in the eye of the Orient as explained in the previous paragraph, but it is more likely the understanding of such belief or ideology behind the image of outer side. Green also has made it clear that tradition itself belongs to the production of minority identities and the *West* is the only source of modernity to be made as projection. In order to make the goal of colonialism achieved, the West begins the movement of introducing modernity under the liberal ideology to the East. Therefore, modernity comes with the notion of invention and intervention . It has the sign of such assimilation of technology, renewal of the previous tradition

and cultural mixture or cultural hybridization. It can be said that the invasion of modernity – the liberal belief of the West – works in the form of hegemonic influence or domination by using such popular media and specialized institutions and academics that are not so much in doubt. It demonstrates enlightenment relativism or humanism. In conclusion, modernity refers to the way of producing and classifying knowledge; and it emphasizes the construction of cultural and social identities as part of development process. James has proposed that the signs of modernity are as simple as liberty, equality, and fraternity.

## ANALYSIS

### Adaptation and Adoption of Western Culture

There are adaptation and adoption of Western culture shown by the two main characters, Kwei-Lan and the husband in the story. Kwei-Lan as the main woman character that holds the Chinese tradition strongly, slowly changes her mind since she meets the husband and binds in the marriage altogether. For Kwei-Lan, she does not fully adopt the Western culture just like what happens to the husband. She only tries to adapt the culture and accustom to the way her husband lives his life.

**I began to realize. My husband was not one of those men to whom a woman is as distinctly an appeal to the sense as a perfumed flower or a pipe of opium.** The refinement of beauty in body was not enough. I must study to please him in other ways. I remembered my mother, with her face turned to the wall, and her weary voice, saying, "**The times have changed.**" (Buck, 1930, p. 77)

According to her way of thinking, she begins to realize that the husband is different with Chinese men generally. In order to attract the husband and win his heart, she tries to start being a modern woman. With such decision, she tries to cooperate with the husband in the works of modernity. She starts finding her conversation with the husband interesting. She then also starts knowing the outer countries and their inhabitants. Everything that her husband tries to teach to her is accepted slowly – since she is experiencing such confusion in absorbing another culture instantly.

**I never grew weary of hearing about the foreigners, and especially did I like to hear of all their marvelous inventions: of turning a handle and getting hot or cold water out of it, and of a stove with no fuel that one could see, and yet having heat self-coming water and self-coming heat, these are called. And how amazed was I at his stories of machines on the sea and of others flying in the air and floating under the water and many like marvels! "You are sure it is not magic?" I asked fearfully** (Buck, 1930, p. 89).

She learns and practices things a lot. After unbinding her feet, she starts to value the idea of freedom. She can feel herself walk freely as a person supposes to do. She even feels lighter after releasing herself from the burden of the custom of foot-binding (Buck, 1930, p. 85). Kwei-Lan currently strives against the inconvenience that Chinese tradition has brought to the people. If a person starts to understand the feeling of a new thing, sooner she/he can change her/his point of view to some specific variables regarding the existence of the new thing. It is not that the old one has been broken, but it is that the person has to look at more possibilities of the new one. In the idea of women's freedom, she can see that a woman should show who she is. At last, by exploring the mind of Western women – from her perspective towards her brother's wife – she can find that love is one of important aspects in marriage. Just like Marry loves her brother, she thinks the way she starts her love to her husband. She rethinks her decision of being against her brother's cross cultural marriage and looking at the reason of why the marriage exists. She no longer hates Marry after all.

In the influences of modernity within adaptation and adoption, the husband is the one that adopts the



Western ways. He fully understands the way it works and practices it in his home even persuades Kwei-Lan to follow.

**I saw him standing there in his stiff, black, foreign clothes. He was tall and straight like a young bamboo. My heart went cold and hot together** (Buck, 1930, p. 34).

**For he works as though he were a laborer who must earn what rice he eats, instead of being what he is, the son of a wealthy official** (Buck, 1930, p. 49).

Since the first sight, Kwei-Lan has witnessed her husband behaving like a servant and working like a labor. Nothing of his scholar family aspects resembled in his every single action. To Kwei-Lan, to live as a noble is to do nothing about struggling in life – since the parents are wealthy official. The independent house of the husband makes it obvious that her husband has different side of living. His rational thinking is also one of the influences of his Western culture adoption. To him, the old tradition is broken and lacked in some parts since it does not give any advantages to the people. There must be stronger reason of a personal conduct. He later challenges Kwei-Lan by raising her guilt to think beyond of whether the happiness of the brother should be fulfilled or it is the parents' desire should be obeyed. When Kwei-Lan asks why her brother decides to marry an American woman and disobeys the parents' instruction to marry daughter of Li, the husband takes superior-inferior relationship as unnecessary to be put up as the reason.

### Mixture of Chinese and Western Culture

Since both of the main characters – Kwei-Lan and the husband – are originally Chinese, there will be some parts of tradition left in their character even though they fully adopt the Western culture. It does not matter to Kwei-Lan as she just only tries to accustom or adapt the modernity her husband brings. For the husband that fully adopts the Western culture, still there will be parts of tradition roots him. It is about the origin of the person, from where she/he was born. When this issue comes up, the only solution occurs is the existence of characters' cultural mixture between East and West. In Chinese tradition, praying to god is one of responsibilities that parents should do to keep the son saved. To the husband, praying is one of customs he cannot lose for. It is true that Kwei-Lan is the person requests him to pray, but the willingness is under his control.

I presented him with these words, "My dear lord, behold thy firstborn son. **Take him. Thy wife gives him to thee.**"... He spoke, "**I give him back to thee. He is ours.**" His voice was low and his words fell through the air like drops of silver. "**I share him with thee. I am thy husband who loves thee.**"

Becoming modern does not mean to lose a person's religion. It just fixes a wicked thing that troubles people altogether. The quotation above has proved that the husband still has the value of Chinese social beliefs. Modern is not defined by absorbing all of the aspects of a culture. The husband also lets Kwei-Lan behaves to what she accustoms to. He only fixes the trouble of gender and family roles that seem unreasonable. Here, he will not allow Kwei-Lan to cling his hand in public since it is impolite for a Chinese woman to do so. He overcomes Kwei-Lan's originality. Polite and impolite are still considered.

"Would you have me then clinging to your hand in public?" I asked, turning to look at him. He laughed again, his eyes on me. "**No, for if you did such a thing, how truly indecorous it would be!**" (Buck, 1930, p. 182)

The result of the differences is the union – making differences into a unity. Even Kwei-Lan has thought that the cultural differences will only give the hardest time for the son of her brother's family, the husband makes Kwei-Lan realizes that such union of East and West differences could result a joy for the son. The son will receive the same portion of affection or love from his Chinese father and his American mother. People always have choice and have chance to precede changes just like she is now predicting the future of the brother's son. The best way to

diminish the restriction of tradition is not by pretending that there is no changes can be made, but by turning out the mind that there is always possibility of such opportunity can be shored. By now, Kwei-Lan and the husband have chanced themselves living within similar thought upon tradition and modernity and even become getting closer by finding the proper solution in purpose of not losing both identity. They get the same sense of the meaning of humanity – avoiding restraints and preventing forces – that prioritizes the equality and freedom of each individual.

## CONCLUSION

To revise the problem of global space from the postcolonial perspective is to move the location of cultural difference away from the space of demographic *plurality* to the border line negotiations of cultural translation (Bhabha, 1994, p. 223).

The point of postcolonial theory lies in the understanding of differences between the East and the West. It becomes global and cannot be stopped, since the material of the West is absorbed step by step (science, technology, and the idea of liberty). From this study, we can see how the East tradition is reflected by the character of Kwei-Lan while the West tradition is reflected by the character of the husband. The West lifestyle that is brought by the husband exactly affects the character of Kwei-Lan and even influences the view of the previous tradition she held over family lineage in Ancient China, the tradition of patriarchy. The character of the husband brings newness to Kwei-Lan. The performance of Western custom by Kwei-Lan's husband shows how mimicry just like what Homi Bhabha has proposed really does exist. All in all, it can be concluded that the point of Western modernity is 'the ethics of self-construction'<sup>6</sup>. Modernity reconstructs and reinvents the self, the person or the native. It does not totally construct the tradition, but it introduces or installs another ideological thinking to the traditional societies – as the sign of modernity. In this case, the East is not seen as modern or anti modern, but non-modern.

This study has concluded that the tradition and modernity can stick altogether. The tradition can be kept running within the implication of the value of modernity that has been judged. The influences of modernity to the characters are: the characters' adaptation and adoption of Western culture; and the character's mixture culture between the East and the West. Kwei-Lan becomes the character who adapts the Western culture, while the husband is the one who fully adopts the culture. Both of them experience mixing the cultures of East and West since they are originally Chinese and cannot accept the whole values of the West. At last, the influences of modernity related to Chinese tradition are: the changed view of cultural inheritance; and the changed view of marriage. Cultural inheritance somehow links to the family roles, while marriage links to the gender roles. Both of the main characters, especially Kwei-Lan, have changed the view upon both cultural inheritance and marriage of the East within the modernity of the West. The old tradition has restrained Chinese, especially women after all. Tradition has pressured and coerced the society; modernity recommends a better enact and plan to improve the quality of the society initially.

As what Homi Bhabha has concluded in his book, this study confirms how the characters practice the value of dynamic modernity and how they keep the tradition that seems good to walk with. Not all of the aspects of tradition seemed broken and not all of the aspects of modernity seemed wrong. Kwei-Lan and the husband do what they believe regarding to the liberal ideology of the West – modernity, and still live their life as purely Chinese. They take the good of modernity and ignore the bad of the tradition such as the implication of male dominance. They practice the equality of gender roles in the marriage without ruining the values of the wife's

manner towards the husband. Kwei-Lan respects the husband, while the husband never sees her as a slave as like what mostly Ancient Chinese men do to their wives.

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