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East-West Dichotomy in Tanizaki Jun'ichirō's *The Story of Tomoda and Matsunaga*

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Abstract: The research paper examines the East-West Dichotomy in Tanizaki Jun'ichirō's *The Story of Tomoda and Matsunaga*. It analyses the dichotomic nature of the East and the West concerning philosophy, aesthetics and ultimately, culture, in the select literary work. The nature of the effect of this contradiction on the psyche of the protagonist is evaluated as well.

Index Terms – East-West dichotomy, orientalism, *tetsugaku*, dissociative identity disorder

“Culture is simply the ensemble of stories we tell ourselves about ourselves.” (Sardar and Loon 5) said the American cultural anthropologist, Clifford Geertz. Each culture constructs stories and is, in turn, constructed by the stories it transmitted through the generations in oral and written forms. Such stories become a part of the literature of the cultural group that produces them. Every literature is thus coloured by its unique culture. Sir E. B. Tylor defines culture as a “complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, customs, and other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.” (Sardar and Loon 4) Tanizaki's novella *The Story of Tomoda and Matsunaga* (*Tomoda to Matsunaga no hanashi*), which was serialised in the magazine *Shufu no Tomo* (*The Housewife's Friend*) in 1926, characterised a man whose personality was split between the East and the West. The cultural dimensions in the story open up the prospect of being examined in the light of the dichotomous nature of the East and the West.

The term “East-West dichotomy” was first used by Thorsten Pattberg in his book titled the same. It denotes a “philosophical concept of ancient origin which claims that the two cultural hemispheres, East and West, developed diametrically opposed” (Thorsten 2) to one another. The text taken for scrutiny is set both in the East and the West, which makes it possible to study the differences between the two cultures and their effect on the protagonist who is exposed to both.

Philosophy and culture have a symbiotic relationship with each other. Philosophy emerged as a reaction to culture, and it is the vehicle that justifies every culture's beliefs and values. In this analysis, Japanese philosophy (*tetsugaku*) is taken as a representative of the East. There is an “emphasis on spiritual immanence” (Craig 465) in *tetsugaku*. It holds that the sacred presence or *kami* permeates the world. Therefore, the Japanese are attuned to the natural world. Based on the Buddhist concept of *mujo* or impermanence, a feeling of pathos of the thing called *mono no aware*, derived from the transience of things, is aroused in the viewer. This is evident from the Matsunaga family's visit to Tsukigase, Yoshino and Nara just to see the plum blossoms, cherry blossoms and wisteria, respectively. Contrastingly, Western philosophy emphasises transcendence, i.e., the concept that God is beyond or independent of the material world. This allows room for disregarding the natural world. In the novella, the contrast between immanence and transcendence is noticeable in the descriptions of Japan and Paris (which is considered the

representative of the West). While the former is described in terms of nature, the latter is described in terms of man-made pleasures.

Responsibilities and duties regarding family relations like parent-child and husband-wife play an important role in Eastern culture. These dyadic relationships are also hierarchical in nature, where “the person in the superior position is to care for the person in the lower and the person in the lower position is to be loyal to the superior” (Craig 465), whereas in Western culture, the self is given priority. It can be observed from the very name of the protagonist of the novella. He is called Matsunaga Gisuke with the family name preceding his name. In Japan, the surname of a person is written first, proving the importance of lineage. This hierarchical social role is that which gives Matsunaga’s mother the authority to instruct him and arrange his marriage for him. In this literary text, this difference between the Eastern and the Western treatment of relationships can be observed in the protagonist, who is shown as a man who cares for the family when he is Matsunaga and shuns any responsibility concerning his family when he is Tomoda.

It is understood from the text that Gisuke is a descendant of the samurai Matsunaga Hisahide. Samurai were bound to a set of virtues and ideals called under the umbrella term of bushido, or way of the warriors. Duty, loyalty and self-control are some of the virtues of bushido specified by Inazo Nitobe. While Shigeko performed her duty to her child and remained loyal to her husband, Tomoda denied his duty to his child and was disloyal to his wife by indulging in debauchery. In this context, Shigeko possesses the values upheld by the East and Tomoda, who is enticed by the West, does not.

The ego-centric attitude that made the protagonist leave the house for the pursuit of his pleasures resulted in a nervous breakdown and anxiety. Buddhism, one of the main philosophies of the East, teaches that controlling desires and eliminating egoism can lead to inner peace and harmony. When Matsunaga followed Buddhist principles by abstaining from his carnal desires and being dedicated to his family in the countryside, he was cured of his nervous disorder.

According to Japanese philosophy, the whole is reflected in the part and is not the sum of its parts. Therefore, understanding the part is akin to understanding the whole. The whole (holo-) being inscribed (-graph) in each of its parts can be called holographic in the etymological sense. In the East, all relationships are continuous, which means that everything is correlated and interdependent. Matsunaga realises this and is moved to tears while praying to Buddha in the temple. However, the protagonist fails in internalising this and is split within himself. The holographic paradigm existed in the West during prehistoric times, but it was confined to literature and psychology after the Enlightenment. It has now gained ontological significance in the field of science in the West, but it never went out of fashion in the East.

Aesthetics is the philosophical inquiry of beauty and taste. Coined only in 1883, the Japanese equivalent for aesthetic is *bigaku*. The East and the West are aesthetically different as well. *Bigaku* is considered to be the self-expression of *kokoro*, which comprises the artist, the medium, the audience and reality altogether. Tanizaki is himself an aesthete and has authored a book named *In Praise of Shadows* about Japanese aesthetics. He has made an effort to employ the aesthetic facets of Japan in this novella. A few of those are explored below.

Hidden sublimity or depth, known as *yūgen* in Japanese, is an aesthetic concept that upholds allusiveness over explicitness. This is portrayed in the story with regard to clothing. A silk kimono is worn by Shigeko (who stands for a traditional Japanese woman) when the narrator visits the Matsunaga residence. A kimono conceals the entire body, as Tomoda states that a Japanese woman “buries whatever charms she has under layers of sleeves and sashes” (Tanizaki), which is contrary to the dresses worn by the foreign women surrounding Tomoda that show off the arms and legs. *Yūgen* is also applicable to the Japanese song that is gentle to the ears. This is in contrast to the sopranos and baritones of the Western opera.

Wabi means cultivated simplicity and poverty. The holographic paradigm underlies this minimalistic approach. It is found in the simple construct of a Japanese house that does not have grand furniture and is lit by an old standing lantern at night. This attracts focus on the particular, which is holographic in nature. This is absent in an elaborate building modelled on Western standards like Number 27, which has a dance hall with a divan, piano and electric lighting that can be switched between red, white or blue.

Food is another category where East-West contrariety can be detected. The traditional Japanese diet is rich in vegetables and comprises seafood, soy foods and rice. Simplicity pervades their everyday diet and display of food. It is balanced and, Japanese culture encourages eating till the stomach is eighty per cent full. It minimises intake of dairy, meat, eggs, baked goods, and excess oils and fats. The Western diet is completely reversed. Even sake has a balanced taste in Japan and is less acidic than Western wine. The dietary variance can be noticed from the food habits of Tomoda and Matsunaga.

The type of cutlery used in the East is also contrasted to the West. The use of chopsticks in East Asia was initially encouraged by Confucius, who was a vegetarian. He posited that sharp utensils evoked a sense of violence, reminding one of the slaughterhouse and mealtimes are supposed to be tranquil. His teachings were followed and disseminated. The protagonist, when on the verge of becoming Matsunaga, desired to eat with chopsticks and found it “barbaric to hack at food with a knife and fork” (Tanizaki) in the West.

The protagonist inclines towards hedonism as he becomes Tomoda. It is a Western philosophical concept that views pleasure and absence of pain as good. For a psychological hedonist, “all motivation is based on the prospect of present or future pleasure.” (Audi 364) It was the thought of seeking pleasure that led Matsunaga to pursue his dream of travelling to Paris. Hedonism is absent in Japanese philosophy since there is a belief in the virtues of honest toil.

The contrasting nature of the East and the West is the cause for the split in the personality of the protagonist. Because of the divergence of Eastern and Western ideals, he is unable to combine both and fails at transculturation. Therefore, his Oriental (Eastern) qualities and Occidental (Western) qualities are manifested as two separate identities, namely Matsunaga and Tomoda. The presence of two or more separate identities in an individual is medically termed as dissociative identity disorder (DID). People with DID experience dissociation from themselves and “feel disconnected from the world around them” (Haddock 2). The protagonist is disconnected from the Eastern world when he is Tomoda and sets out to create a Western environment for himself. Similarly, he is detached from the Western world when he is Matsunaga.

DID is a self-defence mechanism that serves to protect oneself from emotional pain. It is observed that most DID cases are activated “once trauma is over and the threat no longer exists” (Haddock 3). This is true in the case of the protagonist. He used to imagine escaping to a world of pleasure because he hated toiling and the lack of freedom to do things as he pleased in the countryside. After his mother, who was the controlling figure in his life, passed away, he felt liberated, and his latent dissociation began to interfere with the functioning of his life.

People with DID feel that parts of their self are separate and sometimes have co-consciousness, which means that they are aware that they are alternating between identities. This is the condition of the protagonist when he confesses to Mr F. K. that “Maybe Tomoda and Matsunaga are two different people after all... When one of them is around, the other is nowhere to be seen. They take turns in possessing this fellow we call “me”.” (Tanizaki) He is aware that he is switching from one personality state to another.

As per Buddhist philosophy, psychological delusions cloud reality. It leads to the concoction of a false reality. The main character is psychologically deluded and concocts a reality based on his understanding of the West when he is Tomoda. This delusion is another reason for his anguish.

The unique feature of his split personalities is that they are accompanied by bodily transformation like Jekyll and Hyde in R. L. Stevenson’s *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*. When the protagonist is Matsunaga, he is gangly, gloomy, with angular features and sunken, unhealthy cheeks and a feeble voice. When he is Tomoda, he is corpulent, jovial, with a round face and booming voice. However, this transformation is brought about through starvation and stuffing up, unlike the scientific experimentation in Stevenson’s gothic novella. This physical distinction in particular owes to the idea of Orientalism constructed by the West. “Ideas about the Orient were formed in a context of domination and submission.” (Sardar and Loon 107) Therefore, the image created was an inaccurate representation that tried to sum up the entire geography and cultures from Lebanon to Japan for control and manipulation. One important aspect of Buddhist philosophy is to understand that our perception of reality is coloured by emotions, beliefs and mental states. The protagonist had digested the Westernised theory of Orientalism when he encountered Western culture. In his own words did he mention that “The self-effacing Oriental philosophy of restraint just makes people weak.” (Tanizaki) This could be the reason why he feels weak as Matsunaga and strong as Tomoda. In *tetsugaku*, the approach towards the mind-body relationship is different from the West. While the West considers the mind and body as discrete entities, the East views it as an inseparable and overlapping internal connection. This seems to be functioning in the case of the somatic transformation along with the psychological change of the protagonist.

After the Meiji Restoration and the reopening of Japan to the West, the country realised that it has lagged technologically and scientifically. To accelerate modernisation out of fear of Western domination, the formula of “*wakon yosai*” or “Japanese spirit and Western ingenuity” was devised to preserve the Japanese cultural values while importing Western science, education and technology. However, once the floodgates are opened, there is no directing the course of a river. Western culture started spreading in the nation, and a character like Tomoda was one of the victims who failed to adopt *wakon yosai*.

The dichotomy of the East and the West implied in *The Story of Tomoda and Matsunaga* is analysed in terms of philosophy initially. Japanese philosophy (*tetsugaku*) is a prototype of Eastern philosophy.

Tetsugaku is a Way rather than a discipline. Its main concept is understanding reality as a field of which we are a part instead of discrete things connected to each other. It is the blueprint upon which the aesthetics and culture of the country are built. It has infiltrated the relationship the Eastern people have with each other, and its dominance is observed in the life of the protagonist. The denial of this hierarchical relationship and the responsibility that comes with it is also observed when the protagonist's identity is switched to Tomoda. The principle of the holographic paradigm is in opposition to the dualistic philosophies of the West. The contrast between the philosophies of hedonism and bushido is also probed.

As aesthetics (*gisaku*) is a discipline of philosophy, the aesthetic contradistinction of the East and the West is examined with reference to clothing, architecture, food and cutlery. *Gisaku* is the self-expression of *kokoro*, i.e. the field in which the artist, medium and audience co-exist. Aesthetic terms such as *yūgen* (hidden sublimity and depth) and *wabi* (cultivated simplicity) are related to the cultural descriptions given in the novella. Its dissimilitude with or absence in the West is discerned. The protagonist was an aesthete in both the identities that possessed him. This made it easy to trace the differences.

The compelling contrast between the East and the West prevented the protagonist from planting his feet on a philosophical position. It resulted in the splitting of the protagonist's psyche into Tomoda and Matsunaga, with the former following Western ideals and the latter upholding Eastern ideals. The East and the West were manifested in a single person as two separate identities. The protagonist was afflicted with dissociative identity disorder, and the nature of this psychological affliction is assessed. This is the reason why he dwindles between two different identities and spends alternate periods of four years living as an Orient and an Occident.

Thus, the dichotomy of the East and the West is studied in Tanizaki's *The Story of Tomoda and Matsunaga* based on the bizarre experiences of the protagonist who lives two lives and the abbreviated narrator who witnesses this.

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