

**THE INTERCONNECTEDNESS OF CULTURAL VALUES AND
ASIAN LEADERSHIP: A STUDY IN THE CONTEXT OF AND
THE SOUL SHALL DANCE**

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Abstract:

In the twenty-first century world, Asian leadership is of paramount importance owing to many reasons such as its emerging economy, potential manpower, technological development, and most importantly due to having a vast treasure of rich cultural heritage and value systems. Among the above factors, the latter aspect of rich cultural heritage and value systems derive significance because of a realization that the world, currently enmeshed in materialistic ideals, often fails to recognize the significance of cultural heritage and values in the daily lives of people. This paper provides thrust on the rich cultural heritage and values systems of Asia as having a key role to play in the twenty-first century Asian leadership. It seeks to highlight how living abroad, the individuals can be inspirational instruments in spreading the message of preserving one's rich culture as a way of embracing a life of values. This study seeks to illustrate this point by analysing one of the major writers of Asian-American tradition, Wakako Yamauchi. Wakako Yamauchi in her play And the Soul Shall Dance discusses how adherence to one's cultural heritage can be contributive factor in leading a healthy life amidst the humdrum of a modern life. In a hurried life of twenty-first century, Asia's role should be one that holds a mirror to its rich cultural heritage where the world can find a panacea for many of the malaise it suffers from. Therefore, this paper focuses on the need of Asia's role in holding up a value system embedded in its rich cultural heritages.

In the twenty-first century world, the leadership of the world is seemed to be going to the hands of Asia owing to many reasons such as its emerging economy, potential manpower, technological advancement, and most importantly due to its capability of heading the world with its vast treasure of rich cultural values. Among the above factors, the

latter aspect derive significance with respect to Asian leadership, because of an awareness that the present world, enmeshed in materialistic ideals, often fails to live by the standards of a life of values. Manning (2001) notes that despite the 'Asian miracle' hype in recent years and the 1997 financial crash the remarkably swift rise of Asia is for real. And it is one of the truly remarkable phenomena of the 20th century — a burgeoning political fact that will reshape the contours of world power in the 21st century. More importantly, the twenty-first century world feels the need of having a life of strong value systems. Under such conditions, Asian continent, rich with its pluralistic cultural traits and rich cultural values, is heavily expected to lead the world. However, the present paper does not underestimate the rich cultural traditions of other countries and continents. But what it focuses exactly is how an Asian tradition of cultural values is of great help and becomes a panacea for the ailments of many of the problems that the modern world encounters.

This paper commences by describing culture which is followed by an analysis of how Japanese immigrants in America as represented in Wakako Yamauchi's play *And the Soul Shall Dance* hold firmly the cultural values, which is a rarely-found cultural activity among the immigrants. The paper examines such dimensions of culture in relation to Japanese-Americans. One learns then how Asian cultural values are observed enthusiastically by the characters in the play while living in America. Specifically the paper attempts to see how Asians are keen enough to sustain their cultural values while there is a strong pull towards a dominant culture, and which is to be taken as a commendable job in its endeavors to lead the world.

Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey describes culture as the learned beliefs, values, rules, norms, symbols, and traditions that are common to a group of people. It is these shared qualities of a group that make them unique. Culture is dynamic and transmitted to others. In short, culture is the way of life, customs, and script of a group of people (5). As Asia has been holding for ages a rich treasure of cultural values that nurture and nourish the life of its family systems and social domains, it is presumed that they could be of some help to other similar social milieus too. The present paper examines how this could be possible within the broader framework of transnational migrations and cross-border movements where there are tendencies of attractions for cultural assimilation, total immersion into new cultures and

relegation of one's cultural past. Yamauchi seeks to highlight how living abroad the individuals can be the encouraging models in spreading the message of the need of preserving one's cultural values in leading a migratory life. It also focuses that by integrating diverse religious, cultural and linguistic traditions, it does not necessarily suggest discarding totally one's own cultural traditions and value systems. Yamauchi here places emphasis on the cultural legacy and values of Asia as having a key role to play in the twenty-first century interpersonal relationships among Asian immigrants abroad. In the play *And the Soul Shall Dance* Yamauchi especially lays great importance to a life that draws on the richness of Asian culture in enabling a peaceful life. In this context, the effectiveness of Asian leadership is measured to the extent of how far Asian values and principles are sustained and practiced among its community in the transnational and multicultural conditions which in itself become a model for the entire world.

Wakako Yamauchi is one of the most prominent 20th century Asian American women writers. Originally, she was a short-story writer. Though she paints and writes prose and poetry, she is especially known as a playwright. She chose play-writing as a form of creative expression because she likes watching the audience respond to the beauty of art (Houston 1993, p. 35) and because plays "offer the opportunity to connect with human beings in the theater" (Houston 1993, p.37). Many writers consider her as a "cultural treasure" for her ability to inspire her readers through her distinct portrayals of Japanese American acculturation (Berg 2009). Her writing discusses three periods in the timeline of Japanese American history: immigration and rural farming in the early 20th century, World War II imprisonment, and postwar readjustment. She has an inborn talent for writing. It was not something that she discovered through formal training. It developed from the stories about Japanese heritage and their cultural identity as immigrants. Her mother enriches her daughter's mind with those cultural aspects. Yamauchi was also inspired by the many stories and poems she read in her youth and also by her own experiences and observations in internment camps. Her play *And the Soul Shall Dance* was "originally published as a short story and later adapted into the now-popular play" (Berg 2009). Her primary thematic concerns are about ordinary people and ordinary events. Therefore, *And the Soul Shall Dance* portrays the life of

Japanese Americans before World War II and their struggle to fix themselves between their original culture and the one received in the cultural spaces available to them.

*In Yamauchi's play, two Japanese families stand for most of the Asian minorities in general and the Japanese in specific. The Muratas and Okas are two Japanese immigrant families striving to settle in America during the post-world war Depression period and finding themselves caught between two cultures. Murata's family consists of Mr. Murata, Mrs. Hana (both Issei) and their daughter Masako (Nisei) whereas Oka's family consists of Mr. Oka, Mrs. Emiko (both Issei) and, later, Mr. Oka's daughter Kiyoko who arrives from Japan (daughter of Oka's first wife who is already dead). These two families have been chosen to represent almost all Japanese-American families as they struggle to exist within the cultural borders of American society while trying to maintain their original Japanese cultural heritage. Through the lives of both families, the dramatist is trying to shed light on the entire history of the life of the Japanese immigrant farmers in America. Both the families are attracted to America because of the poor living conditions in their homeland. The play takes place in Southern California in 1935, in small farms in the Imperial Valley. Portraying the life of both families during the Depression, it shows a clear view of Asian and American cultural standards and practices. It is an obvious comparison between Asian and American cultural norms and expectations. The characters in this play represent two distinct generations. The first is the Issei while the second is the Nisei. The chronological division of the family members into Issei (first generation Japanese immigrants) and Nisei (Japanese born Americans – children of the Issei) appears to be quite relevant because of the discrepancy in their attitudes towards their own culture from one side and the alien culture from other side. The title of the play *And the Soul Shall Dance* is modified from a song, which helps Emiko to temporarily escape her dull and uncomfortable life in the foreign land. Singing and dancing to this music gives her a feeling of comfort that carries her to the native land, Japan.*

The play covers the post-depression period when immigration was a dire necessity for the Asians to achieve material prosperity. But they could not have material prosperity and cultural fusion at the same time. They want to maintain and preserve their cultural heritage rather than sacrificing it just for material benefits. They face the

inevitable dilemma. Almost all the immigrants confront a situation of sacrificing their cultural values for something which they really do not intended to do. They wish for material benefits but at the same time not at the cost of their cultural values. According to Kluckhohn (1951), culture consists of traditional (i.e., historically derived and selected) ideas and especially their attached values, and there is a closeness between culture and values as values being the essential core of culture. What Yamauchi has portrayed in the characters of the Muratas and Emiko is their longing for their homeland. This conflict is embodied in an even deeper sense through the actions of Emiko who cannot embrace the lifestyle in America as vividly manifested in her speech: "Dreams are unbearable...I'll be going back one day... My home. Japan. My real home. I'm going back one day" (170-171). Considering their economic situations in Japan, they all have to stay in America for a better life. Murata with his wife Hana seem to lead an exemplary life. They are cautious not to bring up their only daughter Masako in the western style. The girl proves to share the same feelings as she refuses to have, for example, a boyfriend in the way her Americans peers do. Thus, this shows her desire to cling to her traditional beliefs and cultural identity:

EMIKO: ... Masachan, do you have a boyfriend?

MASAKO: I don't like boys. They don't like me.

EMIKO: Oh, that will change. You will change. I was like that too.

MASAKO: Besides, there's none around here . . . Japanese boys. There are some at school, but they don't like girls. (187)

Thus, maintaining one's own cultural identity and values, even while living in a country that has a totally different cultural outlook, is one of the main concerns in the play. Loss of culture can occur when people are no longer rooted in their birthplace - for example, when, as a result of migration, immigration, or forced exile, they find themselves struggling between national identities, languages, or cultures (Kowaleski-Wallace 2006). For the Muratas (Issei), assimilating to a new culture at the expense of their oriental culture is undesirable. They are not uprooted completely from their native land, at least not in spiritual terms. They are proud of their heritage and try to maintain their cultural identity. Aranda notes, "the first immigrant generations remain essentially tied to their native cultures, adapting only with difficulty to the new one...." (2000, p. 355). What Yamauchi points out here is the reluctance of the Asian immigrant groups in

relinquishing their native culture even at the great magnetic pull of the dominant cultures. The case of Muratas depicts how Asian values are more close to their life styles and living conditions.

We see through a variety of different perspectives that to simply cast tradition and family values aside, is not an easy thing to accomplish. In some cases, the circumstance of being isolated from one's culture is not a choice taken voluntarily. It is not easy to abandon one's cultural heritage easily. One of the questions raised in the play is. 'Who has the ability to carry on the past and who has adequately prepared the next generation to protect their cultural identity?' Wakako Yamauchi's play finds that it is not always people's choice to leave behind their culture. While we see some of the young generation trying hard to assimilate, we find that some of the older generation work hard to integrate by maintaining their own cultural identity while also adapting to the dominant culture. On the other hand there are those of the older generation who are determined to assimilate completely, while others refuse to let go of their original culture. Furthermore, some members of the younger generation are able to successfully integrate both cultures. So it is a question of assimilating into a new cultural identity while integrating the new one with the previous one, thereby positioning themselves around the concepts of fluid cultural identity constructions. Such problems in reconciling with one's cultural identity can be traced easily in both Hana and Emiko on one side and the young generation particularly Kiyoko, on the other. To maintain their cultural heritage, they should make a balance between both cultures, in other words they should find themselves plying between two cultures. Though living away from their native place, Hana does not totally neglect her Japanese culture or embrace new culture in America. What she uses is a survival strategy that befits the nature of a transnational migrant who makes compromises and reconciliations for a life in an alien land. Cultural integration could well be seen as a means to reconcile two conflicting values of cultural past and living abroad in a totally different cultural environment. For example, as a way to achieve integration, Hana brings up her daughter Masako the way that Japanese children are brought up as far as their attitude and appearance are concerned:

HANA: She'll like you. Japanese girls are very polite, you know.

MASAKO: We have to be or our mamas get mad at us. (181)

Hana, in her effort to maintain their culture, extends her role to Kiyoko too. She reminds Kiyoko of filial duty which is seen as an Asian value, as children have to serve their parents:

KIYOKO: I left Japan for a better life.

HANA: It isn't easy for you. But you must remember your filial duty.

KIYOKO: It's so hard. (193)

Though Hana faces an unknown future in an alien land, she still relies heavily on traditional morals and cultural bonds. She encourages her daughter to maintain a good attitude, as she reminds her of the idea that man in general should be strong to go on regardless of hardship. Hana describes Emiko's situation:

HANA: She can't adjust to this life. She can't get over the good times she had in Japan. Well, it's not easy. But one has to know when to bend . . . like the bamboo. When the winds blow, bamboo bends. You bend or crack. Remember that, Masako. (175)

On the other hand, Murata and Hana's strong cultural bonds help them to have a clear idea about their aims in American society. This helps them to live in American cultural conditions. To them, integration is only a means for basic survival and they are able to achieve it and be emotionally balanced. Murata and Hana still cherish the settling back in Japan. However, the Muratas have been occupied by the idea of coming back one day to Japan. They feel that their life will be better in Japan if they get enough money in America. This dream reflects their inner conflict and the suffering they experience living in the American society. They feel that they are luckier than Oka, who struggles to get assimilated despite the negative cultural impact of assimilation. Accordingly, the Muratas, unlike Oka, are against the idea of achieving assimilation in the American society. The Muratas are sure that one day they will go back to Japan; indeed, that is their dream:

HANA [quietly]: . . . where will it end? Will we always be like this – always at the mercy of the weather . . . prices . . . always at the mercy of the Gods?

MURATA: Things will change. Wait and see. We'll be back in Japan by . . . in two years. Guarantee. May be sooner. . .

HANA [sighing]: Kiyoko-san . . . poor Kiyoko-san. And Emiko-san . . .

MURATA: Ah, Mama. We're lucky. We're lucky, Mama. (198)

For Hana the matter is not the same. She feels sorry as the past seems to be so far away now. She dreams also of coming back one day to

Japan, but she thinks that being in Japan again will be difficult. Hana expresses her disappointment and sorrow for losing part of her cultural identity. She is reminded of this fact when her daughter tries to hang a glass wind chime on the wall – a gift that given to Masako by Kiyoko as a symbol of Japan. Hana explains that hearing such sounds from the past too often adds pain to her soul for they remind her too strongly of her life in Japan. Here, Hana expresses her disappointment as her dream of going back home and immersing herself in her own culture is no longer achievable. And yet there is something positive in Masako's response, which indicates that Japanese culture has taken root within her, and speaks to her on some instinctive level:

HANA [nodding, sighing and listening]: It brings back so much. That's the reason I never hung one before. I guess it doesn't matter much anymore . . . I didn't want to hear that sound too often . . . get used to it. Sometimes you hear something too often, after a while you don't hear it anymore. I didn't want that to happen. The same thing happens to feelings too, I guess. After a while, you don't feel anymore. You're too young to understand that yet.

MASAKO: I love it. I don't know anything about Japan, but it makes me feel something too. (203)

The inadvisability of abandoning the cultural tradition of the Japan and immersing into the American culture is one of the crucial points in the play. These migrants feel distanced and alienated from mainstream American life, and long for the comfort of their own homelands and cultures. There are many occasions in the play in which the characters express a longing to go back to Japan to lead a peaceful and complacent life. Occasionally, Hana and Murata express their ardent wish to return to Japan. However, for many, the dire economic situation in Japan meant that they were unable to return to their homelands. Though Hana's heart is in Japan, she accepts the fact that she, with her family, needs to stay in the foreign land for economic reasons. Thus, integration is a means to protect her cultural identity. To achieve integration, she is aware that some cultural aspects of the dominant society should be adopted like learning the language of the dominant society – especially for the young generation represented here by Masako and Kiyoko – and also adjusting to the way of dominant life – as in the case of both Hana and Emiko:

HANA: She can't adjust to this life. She can't get over the good times she had in Japan. Well, it's not easy. But one has to know when to bend . . . like the bamboo. When the winds blow, bamboo bends. You bend or crack. Remember that, Masako. (175)

Both Murata and Hana adapt to the American culture and they integrate their culture with the dominant one. Integration for them is a means of basic survival strategy and they are able to achieve it without sacrificing their cultural values – without being assimilated.

Hana encourages Kiyoko to stay in touch with their cultural background though it is so hard for them. Hana realizes that integrating into the dominant society is a difficult matter, but they have no other choice if they wish to survive in this society. Hana has realized that Oka's desire to assimilate completely into the dominant culture might also influence his daughter, so she advises Kiyoko to work at maintaining her Japanese cultural identity. But Hana focuses on the future of the younger generation's cultural identity. She realizes that the Nisei should be directed by the older generation (Issei)

Yamauchi presents Hana as the advocate of the younger generation in maintaining their cultural heritage, while she herself is trapped between two cultures. She is presented as a woman who is aware of the merits and demerits of being in such an alien society, declaring that "the place is so lonely and alien" (192). Moreover, we see her, from time to time, playing the role of an integrationist, helping others find a balance between their longing for their home and the benefits of being integrated into the dominant society. In fact she lives on the borderlines between the cultures, dealing constantly with contradictions and ironies. Hana tells Kiyoko that being in a society which puts individuals in this 'intermediate' position needs courage and patience:

HANA: That isn't easy either. Believe me. Sometimes . . . sometimes the longing for home . . . the longing fills me with despair. Will I never return again? Will I never see my mother, my father, my sisters again? But what can one do? There are responsibilities here . . . children . . . [pause] And another day passes . . . another month . . . another year. (193)

In contrast Emiko, who belongs to the Issei generation, is neither integrated nor assimilated into American society. Her arrival in America and her marriage with Oka are against her free will and

hence she has her own reasons not to like America. She has forsaken everything in Japan – her home and her happiness. Her American life does not please her in any way because she was quite happy in Japan and she will never find peace in America. She has segregated herself from anything related to American culture. She is alive only because she fosters a dream that one day she can return to Japan. As coming back home is the dream of any migrant, most often, the possibility of a return keeps the immigrant attached to their dying roots. Oscillating between her sense of longing for a home and a sense of non-belongingness suffered in America, Emiko is in a perpetual state of exile and disconnectedness. Her difficulty is to weave an identity that is constituted on the notion of a stable “home”. She finds herself hinged between two locations, one America and the other her own homeland in Japan. In a soliloquy, Emiko cherishes her dream of her past life in Japan and in a reminiscent mood she mutters that if she gives in, her dreams will die, so she will die too. She shows that clearly; “I must keep the dream alive. The dream is all I live for. I am only in exile now. If I give in, all I’ve lived before will mean nothing . . . will be for nothing. Nothing. If I let you make me believe this is all there is to my life, the dream would die. I would die.” (180)

Emiko’s dreams of her romantic past are considered to be the source of her sustained energy. In spite of her despair she keeps herself awake by revisiting her cultural past through enacting and embodying certain cultural symbols. She likes to wear silken kimonos and is fond of dancing, things that bring her back to her romantic past. Emiko has no desire to settle to life on American soil. She has dreams and her dreams are outdated yet her dreams give her meaning in life. She still dreams of going back to Japan, but inevitably finds herself in America in an inescapable situation. However, Emiko cannot endure being far away from her home. She longs for her home all the time. She is never happy living in a foreign land.

Metaphorically Yamauchi uses a couple of images that stand for the tradition of Japanese culture. The song, “And the Soul shall Dance”, Kimonos, dances and the tea parties all become a symbol of their deepest love for their country: Speaking of Emiko, for example, a critic notes that “Without her sophisticated culture of kimonos, tea ceremonies and song and dance, her life is barren – metaphorically represented here by the Californian desert she lives in” (Aranda 2000, p. 353). For the Japanese Americans, music was an important

means for creating cohesion, resistance, hope, and a sense of identity. The Japanese-Americans struggled a lot to restate good relationship with their cultural values. While struggling for a place in American society, they sought through music some energy to retain ties with Japan, foster ethnic traditions, and teach their American-born children those cultural traditions. Hana displays high regard for this music, as an element of their cultural identity which they also need to maintain. Accordingly, such music is embraced also by Masako. Hana knows that giving attention to their music is to enlighten the others about the value of their cultural identity. For an immigrant, listening to the country's music helps create a feeling of being at home. This is highlighted by Murata who accentuates the importance of being in touch with one's cultural background. Through his love of Japanese music, he refers to the power of such cultural connection. In a conversation about music, Murata tells Oka and Emiko that listening to Japanese music is a way through which he can be close to his cultural background: "They [Japanese records] take me back home. The only way I can get there. In my mind" (167). In addition to that his wife Hana seems happy and announces proudly that their daughter loves Japanese music. Hana says "our Masako loves to play records. I like records too, and Papa [Murata]" (167). Masako's love of this music reflects the influence of her parents in encouraging her to maintain her Japanese cultural identity. The song offers fleeting comfort for the unhappy wife, Emiko. Unable to adjust, she dances as if transported from the alien desert back to her beloved Japan. Cultural symbols remind one of one's cultural past giving pleasure while at the same time causing pain because of what has been lost in the process of migration.

And the Soul Shall Dance thus reflects how adherence to one's cultural values becomes a model for those who live in the multicultural locations and for those who immigrate to developed parts of the world. In a world of hypocrisy and duplicity where people are prone to downgrade and relinquish one's own culture as disgraceful and dishonourable while living in multicultural locations, holding one's cultural values and memories as integral to their life is of great importance. Wakako Yamauchi depicts in *And the Soul Shall Dance* this tendency of the modern world and shows how in Japanese-Americans' social and personal lives, cultural values of their tradition become vital in defining their identity. This is one of the ways that

could be presented before the world as a model for the life of immigrants abroad.

الترابط بين القيم الثقافية والقيادة الاسيوية

دراسة في مضمون مسرحية والروح يجب ان ترقص.

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الملخص

في القرن الحادي عشر، اصبحت القيادة الاسيوية على قدر كبير من الاهمية لاسباب عديدة من اهمها الاقتصاد المتزايد، القوة الفردية المحتملة، التطور التكنولوجي، وبشكل اخص التاريخ الثقافي الغني ونظام القيم. من بين هؤلاء العوامل، يتميز الاخير بالاهمية وذلك للدراك الكبير بان العالم يتداخل في شبكة من المعايير المادية والذي يتهاون في ادراك مغزى التاريخ الثقافي والقيم لمجمل الحياة اليومية للانسان. يهدف هذا البحث الى التركيز على التاريخ الثقافي الغني وانظمة القيم في اسيا كدور اساسي في انظمة القيادة الاسيوية في القرن الحادي والعشرون، كما يهدف الى تسليط الضوء على الافراد الذين يعيشون خارج حدود بلادهم بعيدا ان يكونوا وساءل الهامية وتفاعلية في نقل الصور الحقيقة لحفظ التاريخ الثقافي كوسيلة للحفاظ على قيم الحياة. ولتحقيق هذا الغرض يتناول البحث احدى الكاتبات الاسيويين-الامريكيين، واكاكو ياموجي، والتي تستعرض في احدى مسرحياتها (والروح يجب ان ترقص) كيف ان الالتزام بالتاريخ الثقافي للفرد يمكن ان يكون عاملا مشاركا في قيادة حياة صحية وسط رتابة الحياة الحديثة. ان الدور الاسيوي في الحياة السريعة يجب ان يكون مرآة التاريخ الغني للثقافة حين يجد الترياق للعديد من التبعات التي يعاني منها العالم. ولهذا، فان البحث يركز على حاجة الدور الاسيوي بالتمسك بنظام القيم المتمثلة بالتاريخ الغني للثقافة .

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