

Transcultural Conflicts in Pearl S. Buck's

East Wind: West Wind

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Culture is a notoriously difficult term to define. Culture can be defined as the ways in which people relate themselves to their physical and social environment, and how they express these relationships. Culture refers to the cumulative deposit of knowledge, experience, belief, values, attitudes, meanings, hierarchies, religions, notions of time, roles, spatial relations, concepts of the universe, and material objects and possessions acquired by a group of people in the course of generations through individual and group striving. Culture is a collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another.

A culture is learned, not inherited. It derives from one's social environment, not from one's genes. Culture should be distinguished from human nature on one side, and from an individual's personality on the other, although exactly where the borders lie among human nature, culture and personality, is a matter of discussion among social scientists.

The great majority of our conscious behaviour is acquired through learning and interacting with other members of our culture. Even those responses to our purely biological needs (that is, eating, coughing, defecating) are frequently influenced by our cultures. For example, all people

share a biological need for food. Unless a minimum number of calories are consumed, starvation will occur. Therefore, all people eat. In summary, culture affects every aspects of daily life – how one thinks and feels, how one learns and teaches, or what one considers to be beautiful or ugly. However, most people are unaware of their own culture until they experience another. One doesn't usually think about our culture until somebody violates a culturally based expectation. Cultures are embedded in every conflict because conflicts arise in human relationship.

Culture conflict is a type of conflict that occurs when different culture values and beliefs clash. It has been used to explain violence and crime. Conflict as one that occurs when people's expectations of a certain behaviour coming from their cultural backgrounds are not met, as others have different cultural backgrounds and different expectations. Culture and conflict are inevitably produce conflict. When problems surface, between or within cultures, it is often a response to difficulties in dealing with differences.

Conflict is a normal part of human interaction. It is even necessary to a certain extent. It must not always presume war. It can manifest at multiple levels including behaviour, emotional, or perceptive dimensions. In conflict resolution, tolerance and patience are key factors. Learning about one another requires opening up to the possibility of difference. Only then we can move towards a true understanding and appreciation of how cultures are unique. And only then we can be encouraged towards building respect and tolerance in the face of difference.

Culture shock can be defined as “a set of emotional reactions to the loss of perceptual reinforcement from one's own culture, to new culture stimulus which have little or no meaning, and to the misunderstanding of new and diverse experiences”. It can also be defined as the expected confrontation with the unfamiliar. However, experts feel that the name “culture shock” is misleading because it makes us think of a single moment of shock rather than the more accurate idea that culture shock evolves over a longer period of time and involves mixed emotions. Although a culture can be shocking at times, the reaction to differences is usually more subtle because it is the accumulation of many experiences in a new culture that forms our opinion. For this reason, many experts in this field prefer the term “culture fatigue”.

Thus cultural misunderstanding and conflicts arise mostly out of culturally-shaped perceptions and interpretations of each other's cultural norms, values, and beliefs. The most common problems include: information overload, language barrier, generation gap, technology gap, skill interdependence, formulation dependency, home sickness(cultural), infinite regress (home sickness), boredom (job dependency), response ability (culture skill set). There is no true

way to entirely prevent culture shock, as individuals in any society are personally affected by cultural contrast differently.

Reverse culture shock (“re- entry shock” or “own culture’s shock”) may take place – returning to one’s home culture after growing accustomed to a new one can produce the same effects as described above. The problems in intercultural communication usually come from problems in message transmission. In communication between people of the same culture, the person who receives the message interprets it based on values, beliefs and expectations for behaviour similar to those of the person who sent the message. When this happens, the way the message is interpreted by the receiver is likely to be fairly similar to what the speaker intended. However when the receiver of the message is a person from a different culture, the receiver uses information from his or her own culture to interpret the message. The message that the receiver interprets maybe very different from what the speaker has intended.

East Wind: West Wind is a novel by Pearl S Buck published in 1930, it is her first novel. It focuses on a Chinese woman, Kwei – lan, and the changes that she and her family undergo. The problems in intercultural communication, culture conflict, culture shock and Reverse culture shock can be better understand when we analyze these things in *East Wind: West Wind*, because it is a story about the new experience of a women when she started to live in a foreign country. Through the story, the reader can understand two different cultures such as Chinese culture and American culture.

The international conflicts really revolve around four characters: Kwei–lan and her husband, kwei – lan’s brother and his wife .In this story , though the conflict do not erupt in violence – Kwei–lan has lot of internal suffering as she attempts to compromise her deeply-rooted traditional beliefs with the more modern values in her family. Mary has just as much difficulty adapting her modern sensibilities to traditional China, and finds that crossing borders for love is never as easy as it sounds. I will focus on these two primarily in my discussion of conflict.

Kwei–lan and her husband were in love with each other. The problems aroused between these couples were only because of the differences in culture. Both were belonged to China, Kwei–lan was born and was raised within China with all traditional things, where as her husband was born in China but educated in America and who was influenced by modern culture. For both, the culture differences acted as a barrier for understanding the ideas, views, opinion of another. Kwei – lan’s husband was a doctor and who was the follower of western tradition and life style, who wanted to treat his wife as his friend. He just wanted to share everything and wished to live

happily by treating his wife as an equal being, whereas Kwei-lan was unable to understand this concept and she asked herself that if she was a friend then was she not his wife?

According to Kwei-lan, a wife cannot be a friend and she should be a servant to her husband. But her husband doesn't want her to be a servant. Here their culture conflict starts. Once both attended a dinner with the new foreign wife of a neighbor; she felt a shock because of the handshake tradition. According to Chinese tradition, she wanted to bow before them whereas they wished to handshake with each other as a greeting. She didn't want to give her hand to anyone except her husband and not even to the lady of that house. Her husband doesn't welcome this.

Kwei-la, is unable to understand the conversation which was going on between her husband and the foreign girl because of language problem. So she started to observe the things arrangement of the house, where she was shocked by noticing white colour everywhere in the house. Chinese usually prefers bright colours like red and according to Chinese culture white symbolizes sad hue due to mourning and death, where as foreigners consider white as a symbol of clean and pure. Kwei-lan understood that foreign women were speaking frankly and they were treating their partner as an equal being. After that she understood everything and started to change herself according to her husband's wish.

Kwei-lan's husband asked her to unbind her foot because as a doctor, he knew that it was not good for bones and asked her to look at modern women's leg. But according to Chinese tradition, every woman should bind her foot as a sacrifice to get good life and when she saw the unbound legs of foreign girls she felt culture shock. Even she could not imagine unbinding her foot. In traditional Chinese society, it was the woman's responsibility to ensure her husband's happiness. Ensuring that happiness is used to be a relatively simple thing; a woman had only to be attentive to her husband's happiness.

The costume of the foreigners also shocked her because her leg was visible and that was unacceptable for her. Kwei-lan used to make up herself as per Chinese tradition where as foreign women were preferring natural look. Kwei-lan could not imagine herself living without proper makeup, where as her husband as a man of preferring western culture, he wanted to stop this practice of Kwei-lan. In the middle of the story, Kwei-lan's brother and his wife stayed temporally in Kwei-lan's house. Mary and Kwei-lan because of language problem spoke only a little.

Mary prepared tea for all and while distributing the green tea, she gave it first to Kwei-lan and secondly to Kwei-lan's husband. Kwei-lan felt bad and uncomfortable because according to Chinese culture, first preference should be given to man and secondly to woman. And also woman

should use two hands while giving tea as per Chinese tradition. Kwei-lan understood that Mary's love with her brother was just like her love with her husband. But Kwei-lan hated the open display of love in public place; love should be expressed within home. Mary openly sat close with her husband and it was not good as per Chinese tradition.

Kwei-lan's brother said that before his marriage with Mary, many men tried to impress and wished to marry her. But Mary loved him and married him. While hearing this, Kwei-lan felt bad because if a woman has been loved by many men it is considered for none but a harlot, according to Chinese culture. Slowly Kwei-lan became a friend to Mary and Kwei-lan started to teach Chinese tradition to Mary. But after having reached mother-in-law's house Mary understood that she didn't know anything about Chinese home.

In the beginning, Kwei-lan thought that science knowledge is unnecessary for one in position whereas after learned something about machines from her husband, she started to change her opinion. At first she considered all machines as magic but she understood the truth after getting teaching from her husband. Kwei-lan gave birth to a son, she wanted to raise him according to Chinese tradition, but her husband wanted to keep his son away from Chinese superstitions. Kwei-lan tied ear rings in the ears of her son using thread to satisfy her mother-in-law's wish as per Chinese tradition. Once Kwei-lan's husband looked at that he threw it away and warned her for doing such superstitious things.

Kwei-lan bought huge varieties of dress with embroidery in red, yellow and blue color. Because bright colors are especially red, yellow and blue is good for kids. But the foreign woman who was neighbor to kwei lan advices to use white color cloths for kids. Kwei-lan's husband also preferred western culture whereas she was not ready to use white colour. Kwei-lan without considering anyone's word, she preferred only colored cloths, that too with embroidery. Kwei-lan started to follow the ideologies of her husband. And at last she understood the sufferings and pains of Mary, who was struggling to adapt herself in her mother-in-law's house. Kwei-lan understood that the foreign woman could not manage with Chinese tradition.

At first Kwei-lan disliked to stay alone with her husband in a single home and she wanted to live in mother-in-law's house. But later she understood that her nuclear family alone provided her more time to spend with her son and she said her husband was correct all the time. And she didn't want to go to mother in law's house. There one can find reverse culture shock. Thus Pearl S Buck's *East Wind: West Wind* is a novel packed with culture conflicts and cultural shocks.

Works Cited

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