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This is to certify that Prof./Dr/Mr/Mrs/MS N. REGULIN..... JERIN..... KUMAR.....
..... Assistant..... Professor..... of..... English..... has participated / presented a research paper
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..... *East..Mind... West..Mind*....., in the National
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PORTRAYAL OF IDENTITY CRISIS IN PEARL S. BUCK'S *EAST WIND: WEST WIND*

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Abstract

Identity crisis is a recurrent theme in the Chinese novels of Pearl S. Buck. According to the theory of Third Space, the collision of elements of different cultures leave people in utter confusion and result in the formation of hybrid identities. The conflict of identity arises when a person struggles to locate his or her identity in one particular culture. People with hybrid identities exist in a space of liminality where they do not entirely belong to any of the existing culture. The twentieth century Chinese society was an era of chaos due to the nation's exposure to the Western influences. The conflict between tradition and modernity made the period extremely problematic. In *East Wind: West Wind*, Buck tells the story of a young Chinese woman who struggles to locate her identity in the country's transitional era. The bewilderment of the woman leaves her in a tough spot where she faces severe identity crisis. As the two cultures restlessly collide with each other, the woman gradually arrives at the conclusion to keep an open mind in dealing with the new culture rather than repulsing it. The woman's wise decision helps her to evolve as a new person as her exposure to the foreign culture changes her whole perspective of life.

Keywords: Identity crisis, tradition, modernity, Western influences.

Portrayal of Identity Crisis in Pearl S. Buck's *East Wind: West Wind*

Pearl S. Buck is the first American woman writer to have won the Nobel Prize in Literature. She is mostly known for her fictions set in China. *East Wind: West Wind*, published in 1931, is her first novel. The whole novel is narrated by the central character, Kwei-lan. The novel is conveniently divided into two parts which shed light on Kwei-lan's conflict between tradition and modernity. The first part of the novel discusses Kwei-lan's struggle in coping up with the Western ideologies, as she is married to a doctor educated in abroad. The second part mainly concentrates on the character of Mary, who is an American woman, married to Kwei-lan's brother. A thorough discussion on the few instances of the novel reveals the identity crisis faced by the protagonist.

Kwei-lan's traditional upbringing makes her completely unaware of the Western culture. Her blind belief in Chinese traditions almost destroys her marriage, as her husband prefers modernity to tradition. As per the Chinese traditions, a woman is bound to obey her husband and in-laws at any circumstances. But, Kwei-lan's husband is completely against China's meaningless traditions. Kwei-lan's confusion leaves her in the Third Space, as she struggles to figure out her identity. As all the aspects of her marriage are strange to her, she suffers terribly from alienation and isolation. Later, she decides to view the Western culture with an open mind, as advised by her acquaintance, Mrs. Liu: "See, my white is all inside—linings which can be taken out and washed. Learn the good that you can of the foreign people and reject the unsuitable" (Buck 109).

Even when Kwei-lan takes up the decision of understanding and accepting the Western culture, her husband's demand to unbind her small bound feet comes as a massive shock to her. Foot binding was an age old tradition that has been practised in China till the twentieth century. As small feet were considered beautiful, the traditional Chinese women were extremely proud of their bound feet. But, Kwei-lan's husband succeeds in convincing her to unbind her feet. For the husband, the procedure is a step towards freedom from the meaningless traditions upheld by the old generation. Though Kwei-lan is initially reluctant in unbinding her feet, she enjoys the freedom of movement the procedure offers her. Thus, the unbinding

process of her feet is a turning point in Kwei-lan's life, as it makes her realise the good side of the Western culture.

And indeed, as the flesh grew more healthy, I began to know a new freedom. I was young, and my feet were yet sound. Often in older women bound feet will mortify and sometimes even drop away. But mine were only numbed. Now I began to walk more freely, and the stairs were not so difficult. I felt stronger all over my body. One evening I ran without thinking into the room where my husband was writing. (85)

Kwei-lan's whole perspective of the world changes, after being exposed to the Western culture. Upon developing a passion for science, she takes initiative in enlightening her Chinese servants with facts and logics. But, Kwei-lan seldom succeeds in her efforts as none of them believe her. The Western cultural influence also changes Kwei-lan's opinion on child rearing. As opposed to the Chinese tradition, Kwei-lan chooses to nurse her son on her own without the help of a female slave.

Though Kwei-lan accepts and follows several Western practices, she still finds certain elements repulsive and unacceptable. She is disgusted at the American practice of using a handkerchief multiple times a day, as it is highly unhygienic. Also, she simply cannot accept the practice of dressing babies in white. China is a country which celebrates colours. Children are always clad with colourful clothes to represent happiness. So, Kwei-lan follows the Chinese tradition as far as the dressing of her son is concerned.

While Kwei-lan supports Western culture to a great extent, she still decides to preserve certain aspects of the Chinese traditional practices which she finds more reasonable. Thus, Kwei-lan is a perfect example of people with hybrid identities who exist in the Third Space. In the seminal work *The Location of Culture*, Homi K. Bhabha says:

To that end we should remember that it is the 'inter' – the cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the *in-between* space – that carries the burden of the meaning of culture. It makes it possible to begin envisaging national, anti-nationalist histories of the 'people'. And by exploring this Third Space, we may elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the others of our selves. (38-39)

Another important aspect which clearly indicates Kwei-lan's cultural conflict is her relationship with her foreign sister-in-law, Mary. Though Kwei-lan has come a long way in understanding the Western culture, she still could not help but judge Mary based on her Western origin and looks. Just like any other typical Chinese woman, Kwei-lan also criticises her facial and bodily features. She calls Mary ugly and perceives her behaviour as explicit and uncultured. But, after getting close to Mary, Kwei-lan recognises her for her genuine nature. Mary's arrival and its impact on the family greatly affect Kwei-lan. Her parents are completely against the interracial union of their son and Mary. Kwei-lan finds herself in a dilemma, as she could not figure out whether to support her parents or Mary. Eventually, Kwei-lan makes her choice and decides to do everything to help her only brother and his lover, Mary at all cost. Kwei-lan's initial rejection of Mary foreshadows the racial and the cultural superiority of people in the twentieth century Chinese society. As explained in *My Country and My People*:

Such a well-organized and religiously conceived family system was of tremendous force when the Chinese race was thrown into contact with a foreign people with a less well-defined family consciousness. Barbaric tribes or children of mixed parentage were all too anxious to join the family and claim part of the family immortality, indulging in the luxurious feeling that when one dies one does not die, but one's self lives on in the great stream of the family life. (Lin 32-33)

Pearl S. Buck successfully portrays the cultural conflict and identity crisis faced by the traditional Chinese in the twentieth century through the character of Kwei-lan. Though she initially struggles a great deal wavering between two entirely different cultures, she skilfully resolves the issue by accepting the necessary and rejecting the meaningless aspects of both cultures she is exposed to. The solution, however, creates a hybrid identity, which she wholeheartedly accepts.

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