

An Analysis of Japanese-Americans' Acculturation Strategies in *And the Soul Shall Dance*

Han Yiran

School of English, Xi'an International Studies University, Xi'an, Shaanxi, China
1449702917@qq.com

Abstract: *And the Soul Shall Dance*, written by Wakako Yamauchi, depicts the psychological states of two generations of Japanese-Americans when they face with the conflicts between Japanese culture and American culture. They adopt different strategies to adapt to the new environment. These strategies are summarized by John Berry as "acculturation strategies", which are usually used in the cross-culture communication. This paper analyzes the acculturation strategies applied by Emiko, Oka, Hana and Masako, and separately explores the effects of their strategies. The description of their destinies reveals the author's sympathy for the first generation of Japanese immigrants and her reflection on the predicament of Japanese culture.

Keywords: Acculturation strategies, *And the Soul Shall Dance*, Japanese-Americans, John Berry

1. Introduction

Wakako Yamauchi is one of the most prominent 20th century Asian American Women writers. She is noted for the depiction of Japanese American history, in particular, immigration in the early 20th century. One of her representatives, *And the Soul Shall Dance* describes two generations of Japanese-Americans' struggle in their identity construction. Although all of them can't be accepted by the mainstream of American society, their different attitudes towards native culture have produced different effects.

Previous study about this play mainly focuses on the cultural identity, gender, historical background and psychological analysis. Some scholars also take this play as an example to analyze the writing style of Wakako Yamauchi. However, few research focuses on the field of cross-culture communication. So this paper analyzes the characters from the perspective of acculturation strategies.

The acculturation strategies are put forward by John W. Berry in his *Cross-Cultural Psychology: Research and Applications*. He proposed that "a model of acculturation that categorizes individual adaptation strategies along two dimensions"[1]. The first dimension concerns the retention or rejection of an individual's native culture. The second dimension concerns the adaptation or rejection of the host culture. From the above two dimensions, four acculturation strategies emerge: Assimilation, Separation, Integration and Marginalization. Assimilation refers to adopt the host culture and discard the home culture. Separation means reject the host culture and retain the home culture. Integration means individuals wish to maintain their heritage culture and also aspires to be fully engaged in the life of larger society. Marginalization, opposites to Integration, rejects the heritage culture and dominant culture at the same time. The four acculturation strategies could be reflected in the characters of *And The Soul Shall Dance* and all have different effects. Emiko's separation leads to her insanity, Oka's assimilation results in his alienation, Murata and Hana's marginalization brings about their marginalized position, and Emiko's integration, luckily, contributes to her emotional balance. At last, this paper comes to the conclusion that it is recommended to apply the integration strategy in the cross-culture communication.

2. The Applied Acculturation Strategies

According to the migration patterns, "Japanese Americans" refer to the Japanese who immigrated to the United States in the late 19th and early 20th. The first generation of Japanese Americans are known as Issei, and the second generation as Nisei. Influenced by personal experience, education and personality, two generations of Japanese-Americans have different attitudes towards their host culture

and original culture, which results in their different strategies in adapting to American society.

2.1. Emiko's Separation Strategy

John points out that when host country resists the immigrants, the immigrants will be more likely to apply separation strategy. After the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, President Roosevelt established concentration camp for Japanese immigrants in the United States and prohibited anyone from entering or leaving. Although Emiko has immigrated into the United States, all the neighbors around her are still Japanese, in this case, she has a rare chance to connect with white people. On the other hand, the prejudice against Japanese makes her more resistant to American culture. Therefore, she determinedly applies the separation Strategy.

Her arrival in America and her marriage with Oka are against her free will. After the death of her sister, Oka's first wife, Emiko marries with Oka in order to fulfill her filial piety. She leaves her beloved boyfriend and descent job in Japan and comes to America alone. Unfortunately, her marriage with Oka isn't happy. "Unlike her sister, she is unwilling to obey her husband's will, instead, she always does what she wants" [2]. She won't change her behavior, even if Oka humiliates and beats her.

Her unhappy marriage exacerbates her rejection of American culture and her longing for Japan. "She is alive only because she fosters a dream that one day she can return to Japan" [3]. "Emiko: 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. Nothing. If I let you make me believe this is all there is to my life, the dream would die. I would die"[4] Emiko's dreams of her romantic past are considered to be the source of her sustained energy. She likes to wear silken kimonos and is fond of dancing and singing. "Without her sophisticated culture of kimonos, tea ceremonies and song and dance, her life is barren --- metaphorically represented here by the California desert she lives on"[3]. Besides, there are many images in the play, like her kimono and the song "And The Soul Shall Dance", all symbolize her longing for Japan. Instead of struggling between two cultures, she chooses to immerse herself in the dream woven from memories of the past.

2.2. Oka's Assimilation Strategy

John puts forward an important concept "Attribution". "This term refers to the way in which individuals think about the causes of their own, or other people's behavior" [1]. Oka believes that he could gain dignity by shedding his Japanese identity, so he applied assimilation strategy.

"Wakako presents Oka as a figure who struggles to find a comfortable position within American rather than Japanese culture" [5]. Like all the other Japanese-Americans, Oka comes to America with a hope of returning to their homeland after acquiring prosperity. But the dream keeps unfulfilled, gradually, it fades away in Oka's heart. The dream is replaced by being assimilated into the dominant society. However, Japanese in America lead a very difficult life as they have to move from one place to another. "Oka: Next year our lease will be up and we got to move. In America, Japanese cannot own land. We lease and move every two to three years. Next year, we going to someplace where there's young fellows. There's none good for you here. You going to make a good life" [4]. He naively believes that their current predicament is the result of their Japanese identity. So he tries to erase and forget everything related to his homeland. His assimilation strategy is mainly reflected in his education to his daughter, Kiyoko. She is the child of Oka and his first wife, who has been living in Japan for the past fifteen years. He asks Masako to teach her daughter English and helps her to adapt to American society. He expects his daughter to be like an American soon. Because he clearly knows that they, as Japanese-Americans, face bitter discrimination in this society, he tells his daughter the need to assimilate and leave "Japanese" behind.

2.3. Murata and Hana's Marginalization

"Marginalization" is considered to be the least recommended acculturation strategy. Murata and Hana are forced to abandon their hope of returning to Japan, and they are unable to adjust to the life in America, which leads to their marginalization in the society. They are the first generation of Japanese-Americans, who come to America with the purpose of acquiring material success. After making enough money, they plan to go back to Japan. Murata and Hana have expressed their ardent wish to return to their homeland, but they have to stay in America for the economic reason. Though

Hana's heart is in Japan, she accepts the fact that it's almost impossible for them to return to Japan. "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 wind blows, bamboo bends. You bend or crack. Remember that, Masako"[4]. In order to adjust to the reality, she gradually gives up the idea of returning to Japan. She even doesn't want to hear Japanese songs too often, because which will arouse her homesickness. "Hana: I didn't want to hear that sound so often, after a while you don't hear it anymore.... I don't want that to happen"[4]. This suggests that she doesn't fully embrace Japanese culture anymore. At the same time, they are reluctant to accept American culture. Hana clearly knows that they are different from the white people, and they can't be accepted by the mainstream society. So she shows little interest in catering to the larger society. She brings up her daughter in the Japanese way, and she always hopes the younger generation maintain their cultural heritage.

2.4. Kiyoko and Masako's Integration Strategy

Cross-Cultural Psychology Research and Applications mentioned that "Adolescence is a biologically and socially determined life stage"[1]. Masako, as a Nisei, is the daughter of Murata and Hana. Exposed to western culture at the young age, so she is more likely to adapt to American society than her parents. She studies in American school and speaks fluent English. Exposed to western culture as a child, she integrates into American society more easily. Kiyoko is the daughter of Oka and his first wife, who is a rustic country girl from Japan. Although she grows up in Japan, she actively learns English to adapt to the society. With Masako's assistance, she overcomes the linguistic barrier within only a few months. She would like to buy American clothes and tries the curly hairstyle. "The acquisition of a new language becomes a decisive factor in moving her more towards one particular culture, within the in-between space of two cultures"[6].

Besides, both of them would like to maintain their own cultural heritage. As Kiyoko grows up in Japan, it's doubtless that she totally accepts Japanese culture. She is as polite as most Japanese girls. When it comes to Masako, she is brought up in the Japanese way, so she still preserves the traits of Japanese girls. She doesn't have a boyfriend like most American girls. It suggests that she is still as conservative as most Japanese girls. Also, she shows a great interest in things related to Japan. When they play the song "And The Soul Shall Dance", Masako responds that "I love it. I don't know anything about Japan, but it makes me feel something too"[4]. It suggests that Hana's education has the positive response, as Japanese culture has taken root in the younger generation.

3. The Effects of the Acculturation Strategies

Different attitudes towards the American culture could generate different effects. Though all the Japanese-Americans can't be accepted by the mainstream society, some of them can find the comfortable living zone in this alien land, and some just choose to immerse in the dream of the past.

3.1. The Insanity of Emiko

Emiko is the most reluctant of all Japanese-Americans to integrate into American society. She immerses in the dream of her good old days in Japan, and that's what all she lives for, gradually, the excessive immersion in the dream keeps her from the real life. Once her dream of going back to Japan breaks, she will lose her hope of life and becomes insane.

The immediate trigger for her insanity is her husband taking away the money she has saved to return to Japan. She has been saving this amount of money for a long time. The more money she has saved, the closer she gets to going back to Japan. But her husband takes all her money, which means he dashes her last hope. "Accustomed to crying alone, she doesn't utter a sound. Her shoulders begin to shake, her dry soundless sobs turn to a silent laugh"[4]. Emiko totally loses her mind. In the last scene, she sings the song "And the Soul Shall Dance" alone in the desert. "She breaks into a dance, laughs mysteriously, turns round and round, acting out a fantasy"[4]. She doesn't act like a normal person anymore. It suggests that she completely loses her mind and immerses herself in the fantasy.

3.2. Oka's Alienation

Oka is a figure who always wants to assert his manhood. He actively integrates into American society is also because he wants to prove himself. "But he naively believes that he can't be accepted by

mainstream society because of his Japanese identity”[7]. The truth tells him that his Japanese identity can’t be erased and the mainstream society can’t accept him either.

When he introduces his daughter Kiyoko to Hana and Murata, he said “Kiyoko comes from the country...backwoods. Nothing changes much there from century to century”[4].His words show his contempt for his hometown. In his view, Japan is like a wasteland, while America is a thriving land where everyone desires to go. A false sense of his ethnic identity prevents him from being accepted by his fellows in Japan.

At the same time, he can’t be accepted by American society. As a Japanese, he can’t own his land, so they have to move from one place to another. Not having a permanent place to live, they are like leaves without roots. They face racism all the time in their daily lives. “Oka: Guess they don’t see Japanese much, Stare?Terrible! Took them a long time to wait on us. Dumb waitress practically threw the food at us. Kiyoko felt bad”[4]. Both Americans and Japanese regard him as “the other”, which leads to the alienation of his identity.

3.3. Marginalized Murata and Hana

They are the first generation who want to return to Japan after gaining a good amount of money in America. They don’t want to embrace white culture, so they only associate with Japanese. On one hand, they don’t want to integrate into American society, on the other hand, they can’t go back to Japan. In the result, they become the marginalized figures who live at the bottom of society.

For them, America is a “prairie” where they can’t get the sense of belonging.Different from the white immigrants, they are from the “Far Far East”,which means it’s harder for them to integrate into American society[8]. Hana said “We are nobodies here”[4].They are the most alien people for most of the Americans, so they are more likely to be pushed aside by others. Though Hana teaches her children they should bend like the bamboo, but she is stuck between the two cultures.

3.4. Kiyoko and Masako’s Emotional Balance

Kiyoko and Masako are the second generation of Japanese-Americans. They are willing to learn American culture, and they also want to maintain their own cultural heritage. Different from their parents, they don’t want to return to Japan, instead, they find a comfortable living space in American society.

Influenced by her mother, Masako keeps the Japanese manners and loves to listen Japanese songs. She can not only adapts to the life in America, but also maintains her Japanese identity. As for Kiyoko, she quickly overcomes the linguistic barriers with the help of Masako. “She’s good in arithmetic. She skipped a grade already” [4]. It suggests that she adapts to the school life and gets good grades. Unlike their parents, the second generation of Japanese-Americans don’t reject or embrace American culture too much, and they are good at handling the contradictions between two cultures.

4. Conclusion

Japanese-Americans, rootless in the desert of America, struggle between Japanese and American cultures. They can neither return to Japan nor be accepted by the mainstream American society. Influenced by personal experience, family education and other factors, two generations of Japanese-Americans in *And the Soul Shall Dance* adopt different acculturation strategies to adapt to American society.

Given the effects of the above four strategies, it seems that the integration strategy is the best method in cross-culture communication. Wakako Yamauchi reveals the predicament of Issei. At the beginning, all of them want to go back to Japan, but in the end they have to compromise with reality. In the process of adapting to the American society, they either cling too tightly to their own culture, or try to erase it altogether. It suggests that most of the Issei can’t handle the conflicts of two cultures well, whereas Nisei could easily integrate into a new environment. The strategy of integration helps them find a balance between two cultures, so it is also the most recommended strategy in the cross-culture communication. However, the application of acculturation strategy is influenced by many factors. Issei, as the native born Japanese, are more at loss when they face with foreign culture and serious racial prejudice. Through the description of the difficult situation of the Japanese Americans, the author

expresses more sympathy for the Issei, so as to arouse the attention of society to the Asian people. It to some extent alleviates the discrimination against the Japanese Americans in the society, and at the same time reflects on the construction of Japanese Americans' cultural identity.

References

- [1] John W. Berry, Ype H. Poortinga etc. *Cross-Cultural Psychology: Research and Applications*. [M]. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002.
- [2] Osumi, Dick. *Jungian and Mythological Patterns in Wakako Yamauchi's And the Soul Shall Dance*. [J]. *Amerasia Journal* 27.1(2001):87-98. Print.
- [3] Sulaiman, Nahidh F, *Cultural Identities at the Liminal Space: A Study of Wakako Yamauchi's And the Soul Shall Dance*. [J]. *Pertanika Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*. 22, 4(2014): 1101-1114. Print.
- [4] Berson, Misha. *Between worlds : contemporary Asian-American plays*[J]. *TDR* 37 (1993): 173.
- [5] Gelt, Jessica. *Wakako Yamauchi, a pioneer playwright of the Japanese American experience, dies at 93*. [J]. *Los Angeles Times*, 24 Agu. 2018:39-45. Print.
- [6] Hara, Eriko. *Memory in Silence: Wakako Yamauchi's And the Soul Shall Dance and The Music Lessons*. [J]. *American Literature*. 41.4(207-213). Print.
- [7] Guo Yingjian Wang huigang. *Calling for "in-between: Wakako Yamauchi's national community writing."* [J] *Journal of the Central Academy of Drama* 04(2022):104-114.
- [8] John W. Berry, *Cultural interaction in a pluralistic society—A Study of Multiculturalism Policy in Canada*. [J] *Journal of Guangxi University for Nationalities* 37.02(2015):2-8.