

FOREIGNNESS IN TAN TWANG ENG'S *THE GIFT OF RAIN*

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Abstract: This research is an attempt to study Tan Twang Eng's *The Gift of Rain* through the lense of Julia Kristeva's concept of foreignness. *The Gift of Rain* exposes the story Philip Hutton, a half-Chinese and half-English young man who struggles to determine where he belongs to. The aims of this study is to investigate foreignness experienced by Philip and its impacts to Philip's life. In addition, qualitative descriptive method is applied to analyze the topic. From the analysis of the protagonist, it is revealed that his sense of foreignness at home, religion as well as race emerge due to the death of his mother which leaves him to be the only Chinese in his English family. In addition, it is also influenced by the way others see and judge his multiple identities. Thus, living within two worlds—English and Chinese— makes Philip mistakenly believe that no one will accept him fully for he is just an outsider, belongs to nowhere.

Keywords: *Kristeva, foreignnes, outsider*

INTRODUCTION

In her book, "*Strangers to Ourselves*," Julia Kristeva states that "the foreigner lives inside us: he is the councealed face of our identity, the space that destroys our home, the time in which comprehension and proclivity founder" (Kristeva, 1991: 1). The foreigner is something covered up inside oneself, inconceivable, and a continuous, uncanny risk to one's home. This experience is delineated in Tan Twang Eng's *The Gift of Rain*.

Tan Twang Eng's *The Gift of Rain* is situated in Penang during the Japanese Occupation of Malaya during the second World War . It follows the life of Philip

Hutton, a half-Chinese, half-English young man who struggles to figure out where he belongs.

Kristeva's perusing of foreignness focuses on the encounters of a subject who is described as in excess of an other – the outsider is an outcast, foreigner, or settler, and it is with her perusing of Sigmund Freud's "*Das Unheimlich*" that she starts her verbalization of the outsider (Moruzzi, 1993: 137). Freud relates the uncanny with that class of the terrifying which "stimulates fear and repulsiveness" and "energizes dread when all is said in done" (Freud, 1919: 219). He proceeds to examine how the other is built through this procedure of restraint, and that when the oblivious returns, as that

which “should have been kept covered however which has by and by become known,” it stands up for itself in the person's cognizance as something uncanny - *unheimlich* (Freud, 1919: 224).

Expressions like “the foreign inside me” or “the other inside oneself,” propose that the ‘inside’ is self-clearly ensured. As though there would be an outskirts between the remote and the self that anticipates that for-ign from attacking that self, and, in the long run, from crushing it. At the end of the day, one implicitly accept that the connection between the outside and oneself (‘the remote inside me’) can be one of common regard: the other-with-in-me would regard the fringes that dole out it to the sort of spot that is motioned by the word ‘inside,’ - a sort of inward extraterritoriality. This is clearly an everything except plainly obvious supposition to make, particularly remembering that when Kristeva is discussing the outside or unusual, she implies the oblivious, of which we heard her express that it is “frightful, vacant and inconceivable” (Freud, 1991: 192).

Freud's uncanniness – which Kristeva renders as “*inquiétante étrangeté*,” discomfiting bizarreness – appears to have moved toward becoming shockingly “shrewd,” “agreeable,” practically warm. Uncanniness gets a homeopathic capacity: distinction in us turns into a precondition for us living with contrast outside of us. As though Freud had not commented that the prefix ‘un-’ in ‘uncanny’ was “the token of restraint” (Freud, 1919: 153). The uncanny, Freud had gained from Schelling, concerns those circumstances where something that should have stayed covered up and mystery, becomes known. As such, circumstances in which what is stifled, returns, - in which constraint has been ineffective and the boundary that maintains it, is “destroyed” (Freud, 1919: 152). What is so discomfiting about the abnormality Freud

is discussing is that a fringe is never again usable; and that in this manner something goes to the fore which was not intended to demonstrate to itself. What was intended to stay private abruptly shows up in broad daylight. Furthermore, rather than inclination solidarity, what Freud says we are encountering is unease, an inconvenience. We feel ‘clumsy,’ and respond to the uncanny with a (mellow) uneasiness (Visker, 2005: 429).

Connected to anguish, the uncanny bizarreness does not converge with it. At first it is a stun, something bizarre, wonder; and regardless of whether anguish approaches, uncanniness keeps up that portion of unease that leads oneself, past anguish, toward depersonalization. Freud noticed that “the feeling of bizarreness has a place in a similar classification as depersonalization”, and numerous experts have focused on the recurrence of the *Unheimliche* influence in fear, particularly when the contours of oneself are exhausted by the conflict with something “excessively great” or “really awful”. Additionally, uncanniness happens when the limits among creative mind and the truth are eradicated. This perception strengthens the concept—which emerges out of Freud's text—of the *Unheimliche* as a scrambling of cognizant resistances, coming about because of the contentions oneself encounters with an other—the “bizarre”—with whom it keeps up a conflictual bond simultaneously “a requirement for distinguishing proof and dread of it” (Maurice Bouvet) (Kristeva, 1991: 188).

RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses qualitative research which is presented in description form. It relies on the power of words or explanatory reasoning. Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of asset of interpretive. It

means that qualitative researchers study things in the natural settings, attempting to make sense, or interpret phenomena in terms of the meaning people bring to them (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005: 3).

The data source of the study is a four hundred and thirty two pages novel entitled *The Gift of Rain* written by Tan Twang Eng in 2008. In this case, this study only focuses on the foreignness experienced by the main character and its effects. The source of data are the sentences taken from the novel.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

In *The Gift of Rain*, Philip Hutton is portrayed as a half-British and half-Chinese young man who struggles from the sense of alienation. Philip's father, Noel Hutton, is an English man who runs one of the most profitable trading companies named Hutton & Sons. Philip's mother, Khoo Yu Lian, is a Chinese and passed away when he was only seven, leaving him to augment his "fading blurring memories" of her with stories given by his older half siblings (Tan, 2008: 26). Edward, William, and Isabel are the children of Philip's father's, Noel Hutton, first marriage to Emma, a European woman who died as giving birth to Isabel.

The concept of foreignness which is taken from Kristeva is expansion of Freud's idea of uncanny (alludes to the German word "*unheimlich*"). This word seems to express that somebody to whom something 'uncanny' happens is not exactly 'at home' or 'quiet' in the circumstance concerned, that the thing is or if nothing else is by all accounts unfamiliar to him. In a word, the word proposes that an absence of direction is bound up with the impression of the uncanniness of a thing or occurrence. Further, the expand of foreignness experienced by Phillip Hutton will be divided into three; foreignness at home, at race and at religion.

Foreign at Home

The *unheimlich* experienced by Philip happens because of his hybrid ethnicities—Chinese on his mo's side, English on his father's. He communicates a solid feeling of uprooting when he minds that, "on account of my blended parentage I was never totally acknowledged by either the Chinese or the English of Penang, each race trusting itself to be prevalent" (Tan, 2008: 28). He portrays himself as "half" of each race that makes him feel as though he is being pulled separated, seen as a bizarre creature rather than an entire individual.

In endeavoring to explore a space for himself between Chinese and English, Philip distances himself from his family. His relationship with his English father, Noel Hutton, is formal. Noel has little persistence for Philip's struggles at school, encouraging him not to be "silly" and "sensitive" in reacting to insults about his mixed parentage. The demise of Philip's mother and the absence of a close relationship with his half-siblings leave Philip with nobody else to swing to.

In the weeks after the funeral my father spent more time with his children—especially me— and Isabel and William tried to include me in outings with their friends. but some children never feel at home in the family they were born to, and I was one of such. I found more solace in the unnameable openness of the sea, on the little beach on the island that Endo-san would one day make his home. (Tan, 2008: 70)

The quotation depicts how hard Philip's life after the death of his mother. The fact that he becomes the only "Chinese" within his family is resulting in self-estrangement. He does not find the sense of belonging even when he is at home. To him, his home does not seem as a snug place to

stay in. Therefore, he attempts to find the comfy one, which is the sea on the little beach on the island owned by his family. He finds the joy and peace he is looking for within the sea. He has a greater love for the sea. He assumes that he hears the sea whispers and speaks to him in a language only he understands. It calms him as he is mad at the world. At the end, the sea, the sky and the wind are the only friends he has to pass the toughness of the universe.

In addition, Philip feels that his appearance as a half-Chinese, half-English does not suit with the other family members. The lack of self-esteem forces him to decrease in working on developing relationship with his family. He keeps pulling himself and preferring not to get involved when his family go to London.

I had elected not to go this time. My father had been annoyed, for he had planned the journey to coincide with the start of my school....But I suspected my siblings were relieved: I often felt that explaining a half-Chinese relation to their English friends and distant relations was not attractive to them at all. (Tan, 2008: 30)

Even though his decision not to go to London infuriates his father, he keeps doing that for a reason. It is because he always assumes that he is just a burden for his family especially when they meet their English colleagues and friends. He tends to make a distance with his family as he is exhausted of keep expounding about his relation with the Hutton. He believes by staying at home instead of joining his family will relieve due to his absence. The otherness of Philip keeps blooming and perpetually living within him. A family can be regarded as a home yet still, he does not feel the sense of belonging toward it. He is at home but everything feels alien. He finds nothing but emptiness. Kristeva points out that “a

mystery twisted, regularly obscure to himself, drives the outsider to meandering. Ineffectively adored, be that as it may, he doesn't recognize it: with him, the test quiet the grievance” (Kristeva, 1991: 5).

The repetition of the statement “the half-Chinese child” signifies the bitterness of the sense of foreignness endured by Philip. The young Philip continually reckons that being the unlikeness and having no kinship in an English family has already been predicted before he was born. Thus, he regards himself as an offscouring.

“Your family will be worried,”

“There’s no one to worry,” I answered. “My family is in London.”

“And yet you are here.”

I smiled, without much humor. “I’m the outcast. The half-Chinese child of my father. No, that’s unfair,” I said, trying to clarify my reasons for not following my family without sounding resentful. How to explain to this stranger the sense of not being connected to anything? It struck at that moment that, while other children became orphans when their parents died, my future as an orphan had been cast the night my parents met and fell in love. Finally I said, “I just don’t like London, that’s all. I was there five years ago... (Tan, 2008: 34)

The assumption of being the outcast just merely because he is a mixed child of his English father exposes how Philip has no self-acceptance. He judges himself as the one who should not have been born since his existence will only bother his family. He, further distances himself from his father and half-siblings as he does not get the sense of connection with the other family members. The intimacy of family that he looks for seems hard to be reached as he has already created a distance with his family. He tends

to hold everything alone than to share it to his family. He is afraid of being rejected and heedless. In addition, when Philip is being called a mongrel half-breed by his friends at school and trying to explain this problem to his father, his father has dismissed his words and said he is being silly and too sensitive. This leads Philip to mistakenly bears that he is also relegated by his family, he “had no real option except to solidify [himself] against the affront and murmured remarks, and to discover [his] possess place in the plan of life” (Tan, 2008: 28). To many people a home is a comfort place to release sadness and sorrow. A place that is full of joy and peace. A medium to reveal the stories of life yet it does not work that well on Philip. He opines that life has never taken side on him. It does not go as he wants. He, as he believes, just a foreignner in an unfamiliar world.

Philip contends that his half-kin will not probably fathom his circumstance since they have been sure of their situation throughout everyday life, from the snapshot of they birth. They have never needed to battle their schoolmates for their personality, never needed to get the look at prevalence according to the individuals around them, from the workers to their father’s companions and associates. They have never needed to feel like an impostor in their own home. Moreover, Philip expresses that what aggravates it is that he goes to a similar school his siblings attended. A significant number of his teachers used to teach them and everybody knows who his sibling are. However, rather than making him feel nearer to them, it has just augmented the contrasts between them. The dread of being contrasted with his siblings is molded by his very own brain. He is worried about the possibility that that he is not at the same level as his siblings. He stresses if his scholarly is more awful and influenced the name of the Hutton.

Philip does not only see the sense of not being connected to his English but also his Chinese family. Because he is a half-Chinese and English, he does not think he can be accepted by the two families well. Besides, the marriage of his parents is rejected by his grandfather due to the ethnicity of his father. His grandfather does not want his daughter–Khoo Yu Lian–married to another race but Chinese. However, his mother ignores the excuse and chooses to marry Noel Hutton. This makes Philip’s grandfather gets mad and decides not to see his daughter although when she is passed away. He does not even visit Philip. Hence, what his grandfather has done to him and his mother leads him to foreignness. “When [he] thought of the grandfather [he] had never met, [he] examined [his] feelings for him and found [he] felt barely nothing, except a glimmer of obstinate dislike that seemed to originate more from a sense of rejection than anything else” (Tan,2008: 84). Being abandoned by his grandfather hurts Philip and results in hatred. He has never felt the love from his grandfather that leaves him in wonder why he has never seen him even once.

Foreign at Religion

Religion takes a big role in each culture and life. Yet, to Philip who lives within the two world–Chinese and English–, it does not work as it is supposed to be. It is as seen as Kristeva is talking about the foreign, she means the unconscious, that she states it is “fearful, empty and impossible”. Philip does not have a connection with religion for it feels empty to him. Moreover, his Chinese and English families have different religious background. The Chinese family practices Buddhism while the other one follows the Christian teaching. Additionally, Philip’s ambiguous identity affects him for he should choose between the two religions to be followed. He cannot put himself within each of them

fully since he is also flustered about his identity.

Religion had never played a large part in my life. My mother had been a lapsed Buddhist, but I attended the weekly service at St. George's church with my family. This temple, with its intricate writings and large wooden plaques-their lacquer chipped and faded-felt strange to me. (Tan, 2008: 49)

In spite of the fact that his mom is a Buddhist, Philip feels new when he demonstrates the Temple of Azure Cloud to Endo-san. He watches each and every thing in the sanctuary. The joss sticks, plates of eggs left on the tables as contributions for the snakes, even the different divine beings and goddesses housed in various special raised areas do not give a solid association towards him. In addition, as Endo-san is indicating a gigantic old psychic and requesting to be perused, Philip feels constrained to pursue Endo's will since he does not have confidence in such thing. Endo-san contends that since Philip is a devotee of Christ, he would not know about the Wheel of Becoming in which Buddhists accept (Tan, 2008: 51). He goes on by addressing Philip what will occur after he kicks the bucket. Philip responds to the inquiry by saying "You go to heaven-if you are great", but that isn't Endo's normal answer. Endo, also discloses to Philip on how the Wheel of Life shows the cycle of birth and resurrection to Buddhists. Yet at the same time, both the crystal gazer's words and Endo-san's clarification look bad to him and he doesn't harp on them.

Every year, at the Festival of Cheng Beng, Aunt Yu Mei would request that he pays his respects to his mother at the temple. It is the Clear and Brilliant Festival when families gather to tidy the graves of their parents and ancestors and place offerings of food and paper money. When Philip enters

the temple, he thinks again of the day he had visited the snake temple with Endo-san. He declares how strange religion is. He is used to the austerity of the Anglican Church, and to him temples and their rituals-thick with incense smoke and smells and bright with color, and with their enigmatic words and vague pronouncements-belonged to disquieting, unfamiliar world. Equally important, the sense of alienation occurs when Aunt Yu Mei nudges Philip to pray to the reclining Buddha, he clasps his palms together and tries to appear prayerful. Conversely, by imitating what the Buddhist does and pretending seem prayerful indicates that he is being compelled to do so merely to respect his Chinese family. Thus, it can be seen clearly that Philip does not find the intimate relationship with religion.

Foreign at Race

Race is the basic problem that is faced by Philip. He cannot deal with the fact that he is from the two different races. It is because he argues that each race is believing itself to be superior. Therefore, he claims that due to his mixed parentage, he is never completely accepted by either the Chinese or the English of Penang. The thing gets worse as he is being bullied by his friends at school. He has been called a mongrel half-breed. These experiences, nevertheless, suit with what Kristeva declares that is "the foreigner comes in when the consciousness of my difference arises, and he disappears when we all acknowledge ourselves as foreigners, unamenable to bonds and communities" (Kristeva, 1991: 192).

In addition, to his separation from the distinctive cultural communities in Penang, Philip exhibits an unbiased internal conflict towards the two nations that speak to his mixed heritage. He observes that, while the Chinese servants claim that he was thoughtful to the predicament of those in China enduring on the attacking Japanese powers, he himself feels no connection with

China, or with England. He is, as he expresses it, a child born between two worlds, belonging to neither. To him, being a mixed comes with its own plus and minus. He feels “too foreign” to be comfortable within the Chinese society, and “too oriental” to be comfortable in his British school. He finds a constant pressure to choose a side yet he just cannot. He feels even more pressure not to let either race down. Everyone expects him to be a certain thing. He has been told multiple times that he is not Chinese as well as English enough to the each race. No one asks him who he is. They just tell him who he is. What is more all of the identity only makes thing horrible.

...but they never knew that I felt no connection with China, or with England. I was a child born between two worlds, belonging to neither. From the very beginning I treated Endo-san not as a Japanese, not as a member of a hated race, but as a man, and that was why we forged an instant bond. (Tan, 2008: 36-37)

He finds himself in an unfamiliar world. He is then unable to deal with the world around him as well as with his inner world. Moreover, he continues to feel like an outsider who is not part of a certain group. It infuriates him how his racial identity is always being questioned and cut off his self-esteem. It is not easy to assimilate among the cultures or communities which do not seem to embrace one's existence.

Being a mixed child results in the great state of fear. Philip is afraid of being abandoned and rejected by his both races, Chinese and British. He keeps showing his feelings towards them and stating that he does not link to any of them. This is the result of the absence of his mother, the one who shares the same ethnicity which is Chinese in the Hutton family. After the death of his mother, he has no one to comfort him when he gets bullied by his

classmates because he looks different. Telling his father about his problem will only bring bitterness for Philip believes his father does not attempt to put himself in Philip's shoes.

The sense of alienation can be seen as Philip states that [his] home is here [Penang], never England. England, to [him] is as strange as Japan (Tan, 2008: 49). The fact that he is a Hutton does not give a huge impact on the way he sees England. Moreover, being a product of two cultures forces him to live behind a mask of disappointment and sadness. When Endo asks him where he fits in, [he] shrugged [his] shoulder; “The half-Chinese, youngest child in an English family? I don't think I fit in anywhere at all” (Tan, 2008: 59). Affirming his identity becomes a tenuous affair; he knows that he belongs to nowhere. It is stated repeatedly that although half of him is English and yet he has never craved for England. To him England is a foreign land, cold, and gloomy. There is nothing of England that hooks him to be proud of. He prefers Penang to be his home since it is the place where he is born in and grew up. He experiences an identity crisis through the way people label him not fully part of them according to his appearance, which is leaving him with a feeling of alienation.

Philip's physical appearance amplifies his lack of belonging: “I looked too foreign for the Chinese, and too Oriental for the Europeans. I was not the only one – there was a whole society of so-called Eurasians in Malaya – but even then I felt I would not belong among them” (Tan, 2008: 96). It portrays the sense of foreignness hits him so hard that he believes everyone thinks he is weird for being undetectable race. For him, it is a really strong sense of othering expressed through the way people look at him. He has never felt so neither Chinese nor English. Furthermore, he is confusingly adrift between his Chinese and English

identities. He carries an appearance and origins he cannot even define himself. He does not know what it is like to feel he belongs to a group people in the first place. The feeling like he is perpetually a foreigner or seen as a foreigner slaps him. This lack of roots results in an unknown confused void to fill up.

CONCLUSION

After exploring Philip's foreignness in Tan Twang Eng's *The Gift of Rain*, it can be concluded that his sense of foreignness emerges since the death of his mother that leaves him to be the only Chinese in his English family. Additionally, the lack of intimacy between him and his grandfather leads him to mistakenly believe that he is just an outcast who deserves to be alienated.

Furthermore, living within two cultures—Chinese and English—flusters him especially when it comes to religion. He does not put religion on his priority list for it does not play a big role in his life. Moreover, the sense of foreignness can be seen within

Philip as he draws the conclusion that he will not be accepted fully by both cultures due to his mixed parentage. He gets bullied by his classmates and treated differently by others because he is too foreign for the Chinese and too oriental for the English.

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