

Kazuo Ishiguro's Narratives of the "Other"

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Abstract

In his two novels on Japan: *A Pale View of Hills* and *An Artist of the Floating World*, Kazuo Ishiguro not only examines the impact of war on individual lives but also illustrates how the orient is misunderstood by westerners and how women are frustrated about their repressed lives. Both the orient and women are othered by the western patriarchal context. These narratives of the "other" embody Ishiguro's attempts to empower the disempowered and to redress the misrepresented image.

Key words: Kazuo Ishiguro; Other; Orient; Japanese women

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INTRODUCTION

The notion of the "other" is shaped as a contrast and compliment to the notion of the "self." What is named as the "self" or the "other" depends on the power struggle underlying all forms of social, political and cultural relationships. Given that the western cultural hegemony wields overwhelming power on the eastern nations, the west claims the status of the dominating "self," allocating the subordinated "other" to the east. Similarly, the patriarchal context honors man as the "self," and

designates woman as the "other." While the "self" takes the dominantly ruling center, the "other" remains in the margin to be suppressed and subjugated. Accordingly, the "other's" voice is likely to be silenced and the image of the "other" be misrepresented by the "self." In literature, some writers endeavor to write from below, redressing the falsified image of the "other" and giving the voice back to the disempowered. Kazuo Ishiguro's fiction sheds some light on the images of the "other": the Orient and Japanese women.

1. THE ORIENTAL OTHER

Kazuo Ishiguro sets his first two novels in Nagasaki not only because he was born and spent his early childhood there but because Nagasaki, as one of the two bombed cities, always comes next after Hiroshima in terms of atomic damage and for the historical necessity of remembrance. There have been far more documents and literary texts on Hiroshima than on Nagasaki. It seems that Hiroshima itself can embody the atomic trauma for all *hibakusha* (the bomb victims). With *A Pale View of Hills* and *An Artist of the Floating World*, Ishiguro refreshes the reader's memory of the almost forgotten city of Nagasaki. Though Ishiguro does not intend the reader to read them as atomic books by trying to give "no place for the atomic bomb in this novel [*An Artist of the Floating World*]" (Mason, 2008, p.8), his efforts are of not much use since any reader with any knowledge about WWII will never fail to associate and identify Hiroshima and Nagasaki first with the atomic bomb.

Ishiguro's writings present a new picture of the Western reader, particularly the American reader, of the effect of the bomb. The earliest American reports of the atomic bombings showed "the carefully crafted image of a mushroom cloud spiraling heavenward ... as the ultimate symbol of victory in a 'Good War' that carried the United States to the peak of its power and prosperity" (Hein,

1997, p.3). The image of a mushroom cloud covered up all the physical, emotional, and psychological ruins the bombs had brought upon the innocent civilians. To avoid moral indictment, American officials deliberately “prevented wide distribution of most images of the bomb’s destruction, particularly of the human havoc it wrought, and suppressed information about radiation, its most terrifying effect” (Hein, 1997, p.3). In contrast to the official American story of the bombing, the Japanese formulated their story on the human victims with images of “death and fortitude amid destruction” (Hein, 1997, p.4). As American historian John W. Dower reveals, “If by chance one does glance beneath the cloud, it is the bomb’s awesome physical destructiveness that usually is emphasized. Rubble everywhere. A Silent, shattered cityscape” (Dower, 1997, p.43). But during the American occupation of Japan, the American manipulation of the censorship managed to hold back the dissemination of the Japanese stories.

The United States and Japan shaped their different stories from their different perspectives for different purposes, very much in keeping with literary historian Hayden White’s notion of the interpretative nature of history. While the United States endeavored to justify their decision to use the bomb so that there would be no further loss of American life, the Japanese focused on the suffering of the bomb’s victims, hoping to “obscure Japan’s aggressive war and the predatory character of the empire” (Hein, 1997, p.12). After the surrender, the Japanese government also censored information about the bombings. It tried to silence the people in their fears of radiation and make the people forget the past and rebuild the country. Both the American and Japanese stories of the bomb cannot find their echo in *A Pale View of Hills* and *An Artist of the Floating World*.

Ishiguro describes in both novels the massive damage to the city and the emotional and psychological trauma Nagasaki people have to live with. Etsuko and Ono’s obsession with their memories negates the Japanese government’s call for aiming at the future and dismisses any evidence as untrue that the shameful national past can be eradicated. The scars of the past are still hurt at slight provocations. And Ono’s confession of his complicity with the militarist government challenges Japanese officials’ reticence about its wartime atrocities and exposes the hypocrisy of the Japanese government to preserve its image of “a virtuous nation of innocent victims” (Hein, 1997, p.7).

But the question is why the Americans dropped bombs on Japan, and not Germany. The most direct answer is that the atomic bombing is America’s revenge on the Japanese for their atrocious attack on Pearl Harbor. President Truman made it clear after the bombing of Hiroshima that “[t]he Japanese began the war from the air at Pearl Harbor. They have been repaid many fold” (qtd. in Hein, 1997, p.5). But this may not be

the major truth. There is more to it than what meets the eye.

Another answer may have to do with the basic American and European notion of Japan as an Oriental country. In the divide between the West and the East of the hemisphere, there are not only geographical differences, but also political, social, cultural, religious, and racial differences. Western culture gained its strength and identity as a result of European expansion and domination in the east, particularly from 1815 to 1914 when “European direct colonial dominion expanded from about 35 percent of the earth’s surface to about 85 percent of it. Every continent was affected, none more so than Africa and Asia” (Said, 1978, p.41). Accordingly, the notion of Western superiority and authority was intensified, and the Orient should keep its role as “an appendage to Europe” (Said, 1978, p.86) and should be one of Europe’s “deepest and most recurring images of the Other” (Said, 1978, p.1). As Said sums up, this Oriental Other is defined by “its sensuality, its tendency to despotism, its aberrant mentality, its habits of inaccuracy, its backwardness” (Said, 1978, p.205). Because of its “natural absence” of all virtues and values possessed by the Western culture, the Oriental culture is subject to western domination and oppression. An Oriental person is consequently deprived of his or her humanity. In the eyes of a white middle-class Westerner, it is “his human prerogative not only to manage the nonwhite world but also to own it, just because by definition ‘it’ is not quite as human as ‘we’ are” (Said, 1978, p.108). In the context of Western hegemony, it is not difficult to understand why America dropped atomic bombs in Japan to demonstrate its military power.

Japanese wartime politician Kiyose Ichiro, American critic Laura Hein and American historian John W. Dower all attribute this act of inhumanity to America-Europe’s racial prejudice. Kiyose Ichiro said on the eve of Japan’s surrender that “[p]ondering the fact that so inhuman a bomb had not been used against ‘white’ Germany. ... the Americans must have deliberately reserved the atomic bomb for the Japanese, whom ... they regarded as a lower race akin to monkeys” (qtd. in Hein, 1997, p.7). Kiyose Ichiro believed that behind American use of bombs against Japan there was the strong racial hatred. Laura Hein and John W. Dower share the view that the Pacific War has always been remembered by the Americans as a victory of “American civilization over Japanese barbarism” (Hein, 1997, p.11). Dower in his article “Triumphal and Tragic Narratives of the War in Asia” reveals a fact that “the initial Anglo-American commitment to build nuclear weapons was motivated by fear that Nazi Germany might be engaged in such a project,” but by 1943 American planners had targeted at Japan for such a weapon, long before they knew that “the Germans were not attempting to make an atomic bomb, before Germany’s collapse was imminent ... before the lethal Allied military advance on Japan was clearly

underway" (Dower, 1997, p.42). According to Dower, the element of vengeance and pragmatic considerations may have explained the shift of targets from Germany to Japan, but the factors of race and ethnicity should not be ignored in the bombing. It was a common perception with Americans during the wartime that "Japanese were vastly more despised than the Germans" (Dower, 1997, p.42). In his book *War Without Mercy*, John Dower further maintains that American wartime propaganda highlighted "the innate treachery and inhumanity of the Japanese far more than their undemocratic political system or colonial oppression" (qtd. in Hein, 1997, p.11). This representation of Japanese as being vicious and savage serves as a foil to the humanity and civilization of American culture. American racial discrimination and military revenge altogether killed 210,000 civilians in Hiroshima and Nagasaki and left thousands of *hibakusha* suffering from the long-term effects of radiation.

The image of the Oriental Other is vaguely alluded to in *A Pale View of Hills*. At the very beginning of the novel, when Etsuko and her younger daughter Niki talk about Keiko's suicide, Etsuko remembers clearly how British newspaper reports it:

Keiko, unlike Niki, was pure Japanese, and more than one newspaper was quick to pick up on this fact. The English are fond of their idea that our race has an instinct for suicide, as if further explanations are unnecessary; for that was all they reported, that she was Japanese and that she had hung herself in her room. (*PVH*, 1988, p.10)

To British, Japanese have a predilection for suicide. Such a self-destructive behavior cannot be accepted or understood by the rational Westerners whose Christian faith regards suicide as a sin. In the novel, Ishiguro mentions three suicides: the Tokyo woman, Keiko and, by implication, Mariko. And in *An Artist of the Floating World*, Ono makes comments on two suicide cases. In Ishiguro's much earlier short story, "A Family Supper," the narrator has ominous worries that the fish his father prepares for him and his sister is poisonous when he learns over the dinner that a bankrupt manager has murdered his whole family and then takes his own life. The narrator's worry is intensified when he starts to question the death of his mother who eats the poisonous puffer fish. All these cases might speak to the Western reader that Japanese culture does not condemn self-destruction. As Barry Lewis states, suicide is seen in Japan as "a mark of pride and virtue" because of the old "*samurai* [Japanese warrior] tradition of *seppuku* [belly-cutting], or *harakiri* [a form of seppuku, a ritual suicide by disembowelment]" (Lewis, 2000, p.28). Cho-Cho-San in *Madame Butterfly* performs the act of cutting her neck after she realizes that she has been deserted by her American lover Lieutenant Pinkerton. Before her suicide, she reads the inscription on the sword, "To die with honor . . . when one can no longer live with honor" (Long, 1953, p.636). In these suicide cases, they would rather die with honor than live with disgrace and loss.

Etsuko questions the British media's generalization about suicide being rooted in the texture of the Japanese character when she mentions that the media does not feel the need for "further explanations" in the report of Keiko's suicide. Etsuko finds that the West misjudges the east, as exemplified in the way of her English husband Mr. Sheringham misjudges her ex-husband Jiro and Keiko. Despite the fact that he has written many "impressive articles" about Japan, Etsuko does not think that Sheringham understands Japanese culture and the Japanese people. In his mind, Jiro is an "oafish man" and Keiko is a "difficult person by nature" and inherits her personality from her father (*PVH*, 1988, p.90, 94). On the contrary, Etsuko feels that Jiro is a dutiful husband and a good father, and Keiko's character is shared by her half-sister, Niki. But Mr. Sheringham does not recognize these facts, and does not make any effort to understand Keiko. Mr. Sheringham's neglect of Keiko is partly responsible for her isolated life. Niki also realizes after Keiko's death that her father should have given more care to Keiko. Obviously, what drives Keiko to suicide is the sense of "familial and cultural displacement rather than anything identifiably autochthonous" (Sim, 2006, p.43).

Another case of the Manichean division between the "inferior" East and the "superior" West is reflected in Sachiko's relationship with her American boyfriend Frank and her conversation with an American woman named Suzie. The death of her husband and the loss of her family fortune during the war impact Sachiko so much that she is anxious to immigrate to America with Frank. To cater to him, she has to leave her ten-year-old daughter Mariko alone in the derelict cottage. Yet Frank is a drunkard who always squanders Sachiko's hard-earned money but goes away with other saloon girls when Sachiko does not have money for him. Though Sachiko later tells Etsuko that Frank has arranged their departure, she feels uncertain whether she and Mariko can really go to America because Frank asks them to wait at Kobe till the day he can mail them enough money from America. As to what has become of Sachiko and Mariko, Etsuko's narration does not tell, and it can be deduced from Frank's behavior that he has deceived and deserted them.

What happens between Sachiko and Frank reminds the reader of the story between Cho-Cho-San and Mr. Pinkerton in *Madame Butterfly*. In the eyes of Frank and Mr. Pinkerton, both the two Japanese women are nothing more than a plaything with which they can idle their time away. In Edward Said's way of putting it, two American men deprive Sachiko and Cho-Cho-San of their subjectivity by orientalizing them as the other.

The Western perception of Japanese is not confined to Western men only. The conversation between Sachiko and Suzie-San, the American woman, reveals that the latter tries to exhibit her privileged status before the native Sachiko. This episode occurs during Etsuko, Sachiko and Mariko's trip to Inasa, where they meet three

times another group of three composed of an American woman, a Japanese woman and her son. According to Ruth Forsythe, this random encounter contains three tensions:

An American woman is culturally insensitive, which suggests cultural tension; the bully [the boy] criticizes Mariko's artistic perspective, suggesting gender tension; the boy's mother brags that her husband is a "Head Director of Mitsubishi Corporation", suggesting class tension. (Forsythe, 2005, p.106)

The American woman, Suzie-San, however, is not merely culturally insensitive to Mariko's butterfly drawing when she uses the Japanese word "delicious" to mean "beautiful." She holds herself high above the Japanese women, as Etsuko notices for three times that she speaks and laughs "loudly", a manner Japanese women regard as being offensive. And Sachiko's eagerness to talk with her in English reinforces the American woman's cultural superiority. The American woman's sense of self-importance reflects Western women's racial discrimination against non-Western women. Critic Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak explains this feeling as follows:

Chromatism seems to have something like a hold on the official philosophy of U.S. anti-racist feminism. When it is not "third world women", the buzzword is "women of color." This leads to absurdities. Japanese women, for instance, have to be coded as "third world women!" Hispanics must be seen as "women of color"... This nomenclature is based on the implicit acceptance of "white" as "transparent" or "no-color", and is therefore reactive upon the self-representation of the white. (Spivak, 1999, p.165)

Spivak, in her study of Third World women, discovers that colonial discourse shapes Western women's understanding of their identity as contrasting to that of non-Western women. In the cultural encounter, Sachiko, Etsuko, and the unnamed Japanese mother are projected as the secondary Other by Suzie-San so that she can define her cultural and racial superiority with impunity. As Takeuchi Yoshimi states, "Japan must present herself as Asian in order to convince the West that she is the best representative of Asia" (qtd. in Spivak, 1999, p.340). To the Westerners, Japan or the Japanese people should always maintain her or their image as the Oriental other to justify the domination of the Occident over the Orient.

2. THE JAPANESE WOMEN

It is commonly acknowledged among the feminists like Simone de Beauvoir, Luce Irigaray, Judith Butler and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak that feminine identity is socially or culturally constructed. The relationship between man and woman is determined by the power structure as in the cases of white/black, the occident/the orient, and the capitalist/the proletariat. The powerful patriarchy designates woman as the "incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject,

he is the Absolute—she is the Other" (Beauvoir, 1972, p.16). In *A Pale View of Hills*, both Etsuko and Sachiko are aware of their subordinate status and the limitation of their life in Japan.

Sachiko expresses explicitly that it is a misery to be a woman in Japan. More than once, she complains to Etsuko that, as Japan offers no hope for a woman, she can only realize her dream of a successful profession in a democratic country like America:

America is a far better place for a young girl to grow up. Out there, she could do all kinds of things with her life. She could become a business girl. Or she could study painting at college and become an artist. All these things are much easier in America, Etsuko. Japan is no place for a girl. What can she look forward to here? (*PVH*, 1988, p.170)

Sachiko is not exaggerating the situation of women in Japan where a traditional family has the woman maintaining the household and the man giving total attention to his career. Many Japanese women with higher education have to devote their talents and abilities to "making a real profession of parenthood" (Diggs, 1998, p.50). The unavailability of high-paid job, the worshipping of Confucian value of family as being essential for social prosperity and stability, and the social pressure of conforming to the expected gender role steer women out of the public sphere and they have to dedicate themselves to domestic life. Though such a life offers relative ease from work pressure, it brings certain problems for Japanese women to tackle. For instance, as the working husband always returns home too late and too tired to want to talk with the wife, there appears the communication problem, which may be the reason for the "recent phenomenon of the sexless marriage" (Diggs, 1998, p.43). In consideration of social pressure on divorced women and other practical factors, many couples keep the "masked marriage," pretending to be happy before the outsiders.

This is the social context from which Sachiko has been hoping to escape. She does this for the sake of Mariko's future, but also for the fulfillment of her girlhood dream of going to America. Born into a highly distinguished family, with her father working in Europe and America, Sachiko was exposed to Western culture at an early age. She dreamed of going to America and becoming a movie actress. Unfortunately, her dream evaporated with her marriage. Her husband, a "strict and patriotic" man from a similarly distinguished family, forbade Sachiko to continue learning English. Even so, after many years, she can quickly pick up her English in her interactions with Frank and the American woman. Sachiko still cherishes her American dream of stardom, but now she transfers it onto Mariko. Though she knows that Frank might not keep his promise of taking them to America, she would rather follow his arrangement and wait with Mariko at Kobe than move to live with her uncle and cousin and grow old in a big house with nothing except empty rooms.

She thinks that at least she can try her luck for a change for both Mariko and herself.

In comparison with Sachiko's direct indictment of Japanese women's subjugated life, Etsuko does not make any open comment on it. Given the fact that Sachiko is Etsuko's alter-ego, Sachiko's post-war experience mirrors that of Etsuko's: the mother-daughter tension between Sachiko and Mariko prefigures that of Etsuko and Keiko; Sachiko's probably failed dream of immigration to America is realized in Etsuko's living in England after her second marriage. It can be inferred that Etsuko secretly hopes to immigrate to a democratic country, too. And that explains why Sachiko feels that Etsuko seems to be "envious" of her chance to go to America with Frank. The question arises here why Etsuko harbors the idea of leaving Japan when she tells Mrs. Fujiwara that "I'm not unhappy in the least" (*PVH*, 1988, p.77). Is she really happy? Definitely not. As she says to Niki about the anticipated happiness of a father about the new-born baby, "But people always pretend to be delighted. It's like that film we saw on the television last night" (*PVH*, 1988, p.49). This statement betrays the underlying unhappiness beneath her social mask. For years she has been suppressing her true emotions, impressing others that she is contented with her life and with her role as a mother and a wife. Yet her confessional-like narrative of the traumatic past brings to surface her disturbed psychological world.

Etsuko's disappointment with Japan directly derives from her failed marriage with Jiro. First of all, their marriage is not a love match, but an exigency for them to overcome the shock of the bomb. At the bottom of the drawer, Etsuko has been keeping a "black lacquer gift-box ... with two or three small photographs" (*PVH*, 1988, p.71). Due to the narrative gap in Etsuko's fragmented memory, the reader does not know who is in these photographs. But her attempt to keep them from Jiro's knowledge suggests that there must be a man she has loved dearly. Her communication with Mrs. Fujiwara confirms her love for a young man named Nakamura. Only pitifully Nakamura was killed in the bomb. Though Etsuko does not love Jiro passionately, she marries him out of her gratitude to Ogata-San who has taken her in after the bomb and out of her desire for a family when the bombing has made her an orphan.

However, the marital life does not assuage but aggravates her pains of loss. In her relationship with Jiro, she finds that Jiro has completely denied her subjectivity as an independent woman. According to the description of Nancy Brown Diggs, the typical Japanese man is "a stalwart silent samurai. He bears everything without complaint and never reveals his personal thoughts and feelings, especially to his wife" (Diggs, 1998, pp.43-4). A commonplace evening scene in a Japanese family is like this:

the husband briefly acknowledges the wife's remarks, and, if he hears something that displeases him, is quick to criticize, reproach, or to blame her for bad judgment. He rarely listens

attentively or offers advice or support, simply grunting assent or approval. "Mssh! Furo! Neru!"—"Food! Bath! Sleep!"—might be the only words he says to his wife. (Diggs, 1998, p.44)

Such is Jiro, always wearing "a stern expression," and such is the repeated scene that occurs in Etsuko and Jiro's life. Communication is rare. If there is, it never takes the light-hearted note as that between Etsuko and her father-in-law, with whom Etsuko feels more relaxed, making fun of his "hideous" playing of the violin, his intention to learn cooking and his child-like behavior. Most of the time, Jiro talks to Etsuko through glances. For instance, when two colleagues of his come for a visit, Jiro and Ogata-San are playing chess while Etsuko is doing some sewing work. Hearing the knock at the door, Jiro "looked up and threw me [Etsuko] a glance" (*PVH*, 1988, p. 60), beckoning her to open the door. Then Jiro gives order to Etsuko that she should get some tea for them regardless of the fact that Etsuko is already on her way to the kitchen. At this point, one of the visitors stops her, saying that they are leaving in a moment and there is no need for such trouble. Just when Etsuko is about to take his words seriously, Jiro casts her "an angry look" (*PVH*, 1988, p.62). In silence, Etsuko makes her way into the kitchen. From that moment on, she is expected to become a quiet listener only, while men are joking about one colleague's beating his wife with a golf club because she would not vote the way he wants during the elections. This kind of order-obedience conjugal life distresses Etsuko, yet she can do nothing but to accept it. Unable to establish an equal conjugal relationship and lead a self-fulfilled life, Etsuko kills her time by standing before the apartment window, "gazing emptily at the view":

On clearer days, I could see far beyond the trees on the opposite bank of the river, a pale outline of hills visible against the clouds. It was not an unpleasant view, and on occasions it brought me a rare sense of relief from the emptiness of those long afternoons I spent in that apartment. (*PVH*, 1988, p.99)

This sense of emptiness is also sharply felt by Sachiko when she talks about her oppressive life in her uncle's mansion, "Just empty rooms, that's all. You know that yourself, Etsuko" (*PVH*, 1988, p.171). Though Etsuko's situation appears more promising than hers, Sachiko, from her knowledge of traditional Japanese family pattern, knows that both of their lives are enveloped in emptiness and loneliness.

Etsuko's disillusionment with the conjugal life shows that she does not accept the socially prescribed gender roles. In some sense, Etsuko and Sachiko represent the new women embracing the ideas of independence and self-autonomy. As Chu-chueh Cheng puts it, "Japanese women of Etsuko's generation wish for something other than the material comfort that American products give; they seek the freedom and opportunities that America promises" (Cheng, 2010, p.164). Unlike Sachiko who does not care much about social gossip and denunciation, Etsuko is seen divided "between her desire for fulfillment and independence as a woman, and her responsibilities,

socially defined within a conservative and patriarchal environment, as a wife and mother” (Baillie, 2009, p.50). Etsuko’s divided self is reflected in her attitude toward her pregnancy and motherhood. She is more ambivalent than expectant toward her upcoming baby. The first encounter with Mariko arouses in her “every kind of misgiving about motherhood” (PVH, 1988, p.17). As critic Ruth Forsythe explains, Etsuko’s fear of motherhood arises from her worry that she may be another Sachiko in ignoring her maternal duty toward Mariko/Keiko. Forsythe then argues that Etsuko’s failed motherhood in her treating Keiko affects her younger daughter Niki’s notion of marriage so that she refuses to get married and to have kids as other girls do (Forsythe, 2005, p.105). Forsythe’s view does not take into account Etsuko’s wish for self-construction. To Etsuko, motherhood will become another kind of bondage for her freedom in addition to her unhappy marriage.

In Japan, motherhood means “a hardship,” and “a mother is expected to suffer” (Diggs, 1998, p.52). Usually a Japanese mother attends to every detail of the child’s life and education without much help from her husband who lives for work. Complete devotion to children’s welfare and to the house chores deprives Japanese women of their chance for self-fulfillment. So what disturbs Etsuko about her pregnancy might be her fear of burying her life in the day-to-day household duties. Etsuko’s hidden aspiration for freedom is finally realized in her divorce with Jiro and marriage with Mr. Sheringham. Her narrative does not specify the marital crisis which propels her toward a divorce, nor does she say anything about how she meets her second husband except that she claims, “My motives for leaving Japan were justifiable” (PVH, 1988, p.91). However, Niki’s version of her mother’s past casts Etsuko as a “feminist role model” (Baillie, 2009, p.51). Niki has been trying to dissuade Etsuko from blaming herself for Keiko’s suicide:

You did everything you could for her. You’re the last person anyone could blame. ... You did exactly the right thing. You can’t just watch your life wasting away. ... It would have been so stupid...if you’d just accepted everything the way it was and just stayed where you were. At least you made an effort. (PVH, 1988, p.176)

In Niki’s eyes, Etsuko’s act of divorcing and immigrating should be honored and deserves praise. It is possibly because of Etsuko’s influence that Niki chooses to go to live in London and pursue her own freedom. Niki’s acknowledgement of Etsuko’s divorce and remarriage demonstrates that both mother and daughter endeavor to carve out a new life and reconstruct their gender identity against the dominant male culture.

CONCLUSION

Through Etsuko’s reflection of her Nagasaki past after Keiko’s death, Kazuo Ishiguro displays Western imperialist treatment of Japan as “the Other,” and the

predominating patriarchal institutions’ treatment of women as “the Other.” Ishiguro’s concern about the marginalized is also evident in his other novels. In the case of “othering” the Orient, *When We Were Orphans* describes how China is viewed and “othered” as an incompetent nation unable to forestall the war and prevent the spread of war evils to Europe, and how the Chinese people are degraded as being stupid, ignorant and even atrocious. For example, Christopher Banks and his Japanese friend Akira mystify Ling Tien, a Chinese servant, and see him as a wizard in their childhood, and Banks witnesses some Chinese people’s “atrocious” in maltreating a wounded Japanese soldier whom he rescues and recognizes as his old friend “Akira,” but he conveniently forgets how inconceivably atrocious the Japanese have been to the Chinese nation as barbaric invaders.

In the case of women being subjugated as the second sex, Ishiguro highlights Japanese women’s passivity in marriage negotiations in *An Artist of the Floating World*, Miss Kenton’s unrequited love with profession-oriented Stevens in *The Remains of the Day*, Sarah’s failed ambition of achieving something in her life through marrying Sir Cecil Medhurst in *When We Were Orphans*, and Sophie’s unrecognized sacrifice for the child and the family in her marriage with Mr. Ryder, who is preoccupied with his own artistic career in *The Unconsoled*. Ishiguro portrays his female characters as people who exist only as shadows of and burdens to the male characters because Ishigurian male protagonists are dedicated to a public and professional life and are inclined to ignore women in their pursuit of success and greatness. The fact that Ishiguro stresses, at the end of his writings, the sense of loss and loneliness that the male characters suffer seems to demonstrate the harmful effects that the patriarchal control and Western domination have brought to humanity.

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