

# TRANSCULTURALITY OF LITERATURE AND PHILOSOPHY IN THE EAST AND THE WEST

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*Abstract: A fundamental difference between the Asian and the European, or the East and the West, has long been a familiar concept. However, a comparison of literary and philosophical texts provides various evidence for denying such a concept. In texts, of course, differences in imagination, expression, and speculation exist between the East and the West. Nevertheless, people in the East and the West can read and understand literary and philosophical texts in the other civilizational construct. A literary work can prevail across the globe beyond linguistic, cultural, and social differences. As Zhang Longxi points out, this means that difference is a matter of degree, not of kind. Concerning Zhang, the author argues for transculturality beyond East and West, employing various textual evidence.*

## I. Introduction

This article proposes to demonstrate how actually affinitive the Asian and the European are in imagination, speculation, conception, cognition, and expression beyond cultural and linguistic gaps and, by comparative analysis, expose transcultural traits of Eastern and Western literary and philosophical texts. Scholars are familiar with a conceptualization of fundamental differences between the Asian and the European, or the East and the West. Western intellectuals and Eastern experts have alleged a definite opposition between Eastern and Western worldviews and belief systems. Both sides conclude that the Eastern and the Western, or Asians and Europeans, cannot understand each other. If such inscrutability really existed, no literary works would prevail beyond civilizational borders: Readers espousing one perspective would not be able to understand or to empathize with texts that originated in the Other. However, the dichotomous contrast between East and West is fancy, and mystification stems from assumption. Concerning Zhang Longxi, a distinguished scholar of comparative literature with significant contributions to comparative and world literature and cross-cultural understanding, the author discusses transculturality in literature and philosophy in the East and the West. Specific readings and counterpointing of literary and philosophical texts from varied Eastern and Western regions yield the realization of affinities in imagination, speculation, conception, cognition, and expression that extend beyond cultural and linguistic gaps.

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## II. Dichotomous View

A fundamental difference between the Asian and the European, or the East and the West,<sup>1</sup> has long been a familiar concept for the intelligentsia. To take Zhang Longxi's example, Richard E. Nisbett (2004), an American psychologist, alleges in *The Geography of Thought*, "[T]he East is a cultural Other that stands for everything that the West is not" (Zhang, 2015, 37), and hence they cannot understand one another. In his book, Nisbett emphasizes a chasm in speculative, conceptual, and cognitive systems between Westerners and Asians and contends that these differences have existed for thousands of years. From his thinking, Nisbett presents many examples to support such fundamental differences:

[T]he modern Asians, like ancient Chinese, view the world in holistic terms: They see a great deal of the field, especially background events; they are skilled in observing relationships between events; they regard the world as complex and highly changeable and its components as interrelated; they feel that control over events requires coordination with others. Modern Westerners, like the ancient Greeks, see the world in analytic, atomistic terms; they see objects as discrete and separate from their environments; they see events as moving in linear fashion when they move at all; and they feel themselves to be personally in control of events even when they are not. Not only worldviews different in a conceptual way, but also the world literally *viewed* in different ways. (2004, 108–109)

Nisbett even states definitively, "Hard as it is for Westerner to understand, there were only two short-lived movements of little influence in the East that shared the spirit of logical inquiry that has always been common in the West. These were *Ming jia* [Logicians] and the Mohists, or followers of Mo-tzu, both of the classical period in antiquity" (2004, 166). Because of those fundamental differences, Nisbett concludes that he cannot expect mutual understanding between Westerners and Asians (2004, 229).

Some of Nisbett's many books have been translated into several languages, so his dichotomous view of the West and Asia has exerted significant worldwide influence. Even Sheena Iyengar, a well-known scholar of the discipline of choice and a popular speaker in TED talks in the United States, relies on Nisbett's references to fundamental differences between the East and the West to develop arguments in *The Art of Choosing*, especially in the second chapter "Stranger in Strange Lands" (Iyengar, 2011, 22–73). In Japan, Nisbett's *The Geography of Thought* is so popular that, as of June 20, 2019, the first edition's sixteenth impression was in print.

Western scholars like Nisbett and Iyengar share a dichotomous view of the East

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<sup>1</sup> The author uses *the West* repeatedly, but *the West* means areas and people that have economic and political power in the international world, in other words, a kind of hegemony. As a result, in this paper, *the West* means Europe and America, and the *East* signifies the other areas, especially Asia.

and the West, but numerous famous Asian scholars have articulated a similar view. Airing his opinion about fundamental differences between the East and the West, the great Chinese scholar Lin Yutang clearly contrasts the Chinese as representative of Asian peoples and Westerners (Lin, 1982, 139).<sup>2</sup> He asserts that the Chinese value practice, while Westerners emphasize reasoning. The Chinese value emotion; Westerners emphasize logic. The Chinese pursue success following heaven's will; Westerners value objective understanding and analysis. The Chinese value intuition and spiritual seeking; Westerners prioritize the intellectual search for truth. Lin concludes that these contrasts stem from fundamental differences in the two ways of thought and that the East and the West can never understand each other (Lin, 1982, 139).

According to opinions expressed by Lin Yutang and Richard E. Nisbett, the Asian does not care about logic, reasoning, objective understanding, analysis, intellectual seeking, or truth. In contrast, the Western mind does not care about emotion, following heaven's will, intuition, spiritual seeking, or practicing. Besides, Nisbett states that since ancient times, neither Westerners nor Asians have changed their conceptual viewpoints. Can this opinion be correct? Can such statements be true?

First, Zhang Longxi criticizes this conceptualization, citing persuasive arguments and varied examples. Zhang indicates that although Nisbett claims Westerners see events as moving linearly when they move at all, Ralph Waldo Emerson, an American philosopher and poet, compared life to a circle in his essay "Circles" (1841) (Zhang, 2015, 39). On the other hand, in his essay *Hōjōki* (1212) or *Visions of a Torn World*, as I will argue later, Kamo-no Chōmei, a Japanese essayist of the 13th century, likens this world's events to a river's flow, that is, moving linearly.

Secondly, if people living in different cultures, traditions, and social realities were fundamentally different, learning foreign languages would be meaningless because they could not understand each other due to speculative, conceptual, and cognitive differences. No one could enjoy literary works from other regions of the world, even in translation. Nonetheless, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe referred to the concept of *Weltliteratur* (world literature) after reading German translations of a Persian poem and a Chinese novel; he was moved by his ability to understand literary texts from regions where he had never been. In fact, literary works circulate among discrete regions across the globe, primarily in translated versions. This truth alone proves people's affinities of speculation and imagination in these supposedly oppositional civilizations, despite differences between the East and the West in language, custom, tradition, culture, and social reality. Truthfully, there is affinity, indifference, and affinity, and human beings in the East and the West can understand one another because of affinities beyond their differences.

The view that fundamental differences exist between the East and the West is, as Zhang (2015) indicates by citing Henri Baudet, mystification stemming from fancy, not from reality. About Western scholars' dichotomous view, Baudet states that it emanates

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<sup>2</sup> All Chinese and Japanese names, including the author's, are written in the order of "family name, first name," according to those countries' systems.

from imaginary association “of all sorts of images of non-Western people and worlds which flourished in our culture—images derived not from observation, experience, and perceptible reality but from a psychological urge” (1988, 6; Zhang, 2015, 55). “That urge,” Baudet continues, “creates its own realities which are totally different from the political realities,” but “they are in no way subordinate in either strength or clarity since they have always possessed that absolute reality value so characteristic of the rule of myth” (1988, 6; Zhang, 2015, 55). Such myth has been created in the East as well, in the same way. For instance, in a 1987 interview with David Sexton, Kazuo Ishiguro, a Nobel Prize-winning writer, observed, “There’s a reluctance on the part of the West to think of the Japanese as human beings, and this is encouraged by the Japanese themselves who like to think that they are very different from everybody else too. Both sides are to blame for this mystification” (Shaffer & Wong, 2008, 31). In the dichotomous cultural argument, Eastern and Western scholars reverse their images of East and West “so much so that whatever” they find in the East or the West is “very predictably the opposite” of the West or the East, thus always reiterating “an unflinching confirmation of fundamental cultural differences” (Zhang, 2015, 41). In addition, when what scholars find is predetermined, their arguments become “predictably contrastive,” and they merely reaffirm their own “anticipations and prejudgments rather than an observation” (Zhang, 2015, 77). In fact, Nisbett states that since Asian Americans, for instance,

have very different social experiences from those of Asians, we would expect that their perceptions and patterns of thought would resemble those of other Westerners to a substantial degree. And in fact the perceptual patterns and reasoning styles of such participants were always intermediate between those of Asians and European Americans and sometimes were actually indistinguishable from those of European Americans. (2004, 226)

Overall, we humans should be calm observers with clear perspectives. With just a little independent thinking, we would realize that such a dichotomous contrast between the East and the West, as alleged by Lin and Nisbett, is not correct. The wrong becomes clear when we concretely exemplify texts written in discrete East and West regions and compare them to confirm the many cross-cultural finities.

### III. Linguistic Counterpoints

For definitive argument, the author begins with the handling of “emotion,” “reason,” “logic,” and “analysis,” topics that Lin Yutang and Richard E. Nisbett assert either Westerners or Easterners fail to appreciate. Both Westerners and Easterners, of course, value emotion, reason, logic, and analysis. Otherwise, Westerners would not read poems, especially mournful ones, because they do not value emotion. Nevertheless, Edgar Allan Poe, the American author regarded as the father of the detective novel, wrote the beautiful, moving, and a mournful poem “Annabel Lee” (1849) as he suffered

his beloved young wife's passing. The poem begins: "It was many and many a year ago, / In a kingdom by the sea, / That a maiden there lived whom you may know / By the name of Annabel Lee; / And this maiden she lived with no other thought / Than to love and be loved by me" (1849, 23). The narrator reminisces about this beloved young woman with whom he lived by the waters, and this beautiful poem has been very popular with Westerners. Japan has a similarly famous classic poem. Kakinomoto Hitomaro wrote "A Poem of Shedding Blood Tears," in *Man'yōshū* (750) or *The Anthology of Ten Thousand Leaves*. Like Poe, he experienced his beloved wife's death and wrote, "Leaving the mortal coil, we saw the elm on the bank together, by a swift flowing river" (Book II: 210–212). The Western and the Asian poet each composed a mournful poem originating in sorrow and anguish. Each poem has touched the hearts of countless readers, and they continue to be read today. Thus, it follows that Westerners, as well as Asians, value emotion. Besides, whether in the East or the West, a poem's composition requires not only a poet but reason, logic, and analysis, which Nisbett and Lin affirmatively deny to Asians as a way of thinking. A poem's form must configure rhyme, contrast, style, and syntax. Furthermore, Poe and Kakinomoto's poetic expressions have an unexpected affinity: the Westerner and the Easterner both imagine themselves with their much-loved wives next to an expanse of water.

In mournful Eastern and Western poems, this affinity of imagination and expression can also be found in bird images. Orikuchi Shinobu (1932), a well-known Japanese poet and scholar of ethnology, Japanese literature, and linguistics, explains that a white bird, a crane, a heron, and a hawk all represent the souls of the living and the dead. Kudō Yoshimi, a Japanese scholar of British literature, compares the interpretation of birds in Western and Japanese literature in a dialog with Doi Kōchi, a distinguished Japanese scholar of British and comparative literature. Kudō (Doi, 1973, 122) refers to "A white bird [...] his own soul was like that!" in the White-Nights chapter in Walter Pater's *Marius the Epicurean* (1885) and then elaborates as follows:

The *Kojiki* [*Records of Ancient Matters*] (712) in Japan also says that just after passing away, Yamato Takeru no Mikoto became Yahiro Shiro Chidori, or a large white bird, and flew away into the sky. In the West, too, for instance, the *Illiad*, Homer's epic poem in ancient Greece, reads that Patroclus, Achilles' good friend, dies and makes a slight sound, which seems to be like a little bird's cry. Anyway, the *Odyssey* clearly says that souls of dead sparks make a cry like an owl's to Penelope, Odyssey's wife. [...] It could hence be said that the comparison of life and of the soul of a human being to a bird has been widespread across nationalities since early times. (Doi, 1973, 122)

More than from pleasure, many authors worldwide have composed mournful poems after experiencing suffering or misfortune. Besides, mournful poems have deeply touched human beings' hearts regardless of their place of origin, the East or the West. Movahedeh Sadat Mousavi and Elham Maazallahi state that for Attar Neishabouri, a well-known Iranian poet, "the main source of love is pain: Even if you are of love, seek

pain, seek pain and pain” (2019, 14). Yamaori Tetsuo (2007), Yamaori and Takashi Saitō (2003), and Takeuchi Sēichi (2009) take examples of various Japanese poems and novels to draw the logical conclusion that Japanese spirit and culture are characterized by sorrow and mourning. Comparing various poems from the East and the West, Zhang states, “[T]he best and the most powerful poetry touches the heart because it is produced out of the poet’s painful lived experience” (2007, 55). Surprisingly, as a great work of literature, a mournful poem is expressed via the same metaphors by authors across cultures and eras. Zhang (2015) introduces a persuasive line of reasoning by Qian Zhongshu, a distinguished Chinese scholar of comparative literature. Qian begins his exposition with an opinion credited to Liu Xie, a great 5th-century Chinese critic. Liu “argues in his famous work, *The Literary Mind or the Carving Dragon*, that a great work of literature is often the product of the author’s painful lived experience and sorrow, just ‘like pearls that come out of the disease of suffering oysters’” (Qian, 1985, 102; Zhang, 2015, 147). Qian then confirms that the metaphor finds expression in *Huainan zi* (179 B.C.–122 B.C.) and in *The Analects of Confucius* (1985, 102; Zhang, 2015, 147). He expands the comparison to other literature to confirm Liu’s view, discovering that various authors around the world have used the same metaphor:

Franz Grillparzer remarks that poetry is like a pearl, the product of a sick and silent shell-fish (*die Perle, das Erzeugnis des kranken stillen Muscheltieres*); Flaubert observes that a pearl is formed in the illness of the oyster (*la perle est une maladie de l’huître*), while the style of a writer flows out of a deeper sorrow (*l’écoulement d’une douleur plus profonde*). Heine wonders whether poetry is to man what the pearl is to the poor oyster, the stuff of illness that makes it suffer (*wie die Perle, die Krankheitsstoff, woran das arme Austertier leidet*). A. E. Housman maintains that, poetry is a sort of “secretion; whether a natural secretion, like the turpentine in the fir, or a morbid secretion, like the pearl in the oyster.” Apparently such a metaphor is found everywhere and used by all writers independently of one another, because it expresses precisely the idea that “poetry gives vent to grievances,” and that it is “produced under the pressure of suffering or misfortune.” (Qian, 1985, 104; trans. Zhang, 2015, 147)

We can confirm this unexpected affinity of imagination across cultures and times when we make texts encounter each other and compare them. Comparing specific texts accords us with clear evidence that Westerners and Asians do not have as dichotomous a way of thinking as Nisbett and Lin have imagined.

Comparison of linguistic counterpoints and confirmation of affinities (or differences) in varied texts present a compelling argument against a negative view of comparison itself because of unsolicited delusion and self-discovery. According to naysayers, including Eric J. Leed (1991), we read the unknown (the unfamiliar) to understand or to localize it epistemologically, using the known (the familiar) as a base. We use the known to help us understand the unknown. At this point, analogy operates. However, since the known is a value system, the known’s analogical application to the unknown is fraught with the possibility that understanding of the unknown generated

therein is ultimately conditioned and constrained by the known system and results only in “self-discovery.” Thus, the comparison is highly ideological and ethnocentric. However, such a view explains hermeneutical presupposition, especially the universal nature of fore-structure (*Vor-struktur*) in the circle of understanding to which Henri Bergson and Hans-Georg Gadamer drew attention, but cannot be a denial of comparison itself, as we have already confirmed in Henri Baudet’s explanation of the Other’s mystification. In encountering each other linguistically, texts clearly provide evidence of affinities without textual hierarchy.

#### IV. Transculturality of Philosophy and Literature

Speaking of a cultural fallacy about Japan, probably no one asserts an inference more strongly than Samuel P. Huntington (1996), who states that no close cultural links exist between Japan and any other global regions: Japan is culturally isolated. As affinities in comparisons of literary texts between Japan and other regions have illustrated above, Japan is not culturally isolated. I can even provide an example of affinity from literary writing techniques, in this case, stream-of-consciousness. When translating *Izumi Shikibu Nikki* [the *Diary of Izumi Shikibu*] (c. 1007) into English and before reading Western modernist writers’ works, Doi Kōchi discovered stream-of-consciousness in ancient Japanese diary writing literature. In the *Diary of Izumi Shikibu*, he noticed that the narrative is generally in the present progressive tense; however, “the past, the great past, and the future existed overlapping in the present.” Also, in her writings, “there are no personal pronouns, and everything written is in the mind of Shikibu” and “what happens in the world of others is as vividly depicted as what happens in her own world” (Doi, 1964, 27–28). Doi asserts these facts to claim that the past and the future exist in the present, pronouns are not differentiated, and subjectivity and objectivity and Shikibu’s own world and others’ world are not clearly separated but exist in unity. Doi translated the *Diary* around 1915. A few years later, after reading the works of such Western modernist writers like Virginia Woolf and James Joyce, he concluded that “the writings of Izumi Shikibu could also be said to express the stream of human consciousness as it is” (Doi, 1964, 28). Subsequently, he expanded his comparisons’ scope, confirming the use of stream-of-consciousness in *Kagerō Diary* (*The Gossamer Years*) [*Kagerō Nikki*] (c. 975) and *The Sarashina Diary: A Woman’s Life in Eleventh-Century Japan* [*Sarashina Nikki*] (c. 1060). He then concluded that “stream-of-consciousness is not a technique unique to Western modernism, but a universal literary technique, which was already used in Japanese classics as well” (Doi, 1973, 160).

Thus, Samuel P. Huntington’s view is inappropriate. However, Japanese scholars often express a similar misconception about their own culture. As a Japanese author, the author now presents his argument against some Japanese assumptions about their own cultural and conceptual views by evincing affinities in Japan and other areas’ literary and philosophical texts. The Japanese tend to take pride in their view of life as something transient and empty; they consider *mujōkan* (the perspective of impermanence) an admirable view of life, taking evidence of its existence from certain

literary texts, such as the poetic essay *Hōjōki* (1212) or *Visions of a Torn World* by Kamo-no Chōmei, beginning as follows:

The flowing river never stops and yet the water  
 never stays the same.  
 Foam floats upon the pools, scattering, re-forming,  
 never lingering long.  
 So it is with man and all his dwelling places here on  
 Earth. (2012, 52)

In comparing the world to a flowing river, Kamo-no characterizes everything as transient and changing over time. In an epic poem by an ancient Roman, we find a similar view expressed in similar terms: the *Metamorphoses* by Ovid. According to Ovid, Pythagoras, an ancient Greek, asserted, “I say there is nothing in the whole universe that persists. Everything flows, and is formed as a fleeting image. Time itself, also, glides, in its continual motion, no differently than a river” (Book XV: 176–198). Both the Japanese and the ancient Roman, who cites an ancient Greek, have articulated their views of life as transient and empty; they have used the metaphor of a river and water flow. Kamo-no Chōmei did not know about Ovid or Pythagoras, and *vice versa*. Thus, their visions of existence are unexpectedly affinitive. The *Rubā’iyāt*, by Omar Khayyām, a celebrated 11th-century Persian poet, can also be added to Kamo-no and Ovid’s poems in their expressed consciousness of an inconstant, transient world: The 28th and the 29th poems say, “I came like Water, and like Wind, I go.” Into this Universe, and why not knowing, nor whence, like Water willy-nilly flowing” (1922, 50-51). Furthermore, Confucius describes human existence as inconstant and transient by comparing it to a flowing river: “The Master, standing by a river, said, ‘It goes on like this, never ceasing day or night!’” (“*Zi nan*,” 9:17). Thus, the view of life as transient and empty is not exclusively Japanese but common to both the East and the West. This fact certainly contradicts Nisbett’s dichotomous view, which claims that in opposition to “the modern Asians” and the “ancient Chinese,” “Modern Westerners, like the ancient Greeks, see the world in analytic, atomistic terms” (2004, 109). On the contrary, an ancient Roman-like Ovid (or an ancient Greek-like Pythagoras) sees “everything” inflow and in “continual motion,” much in the same vein as Confucius and Kamo-no Chōmei.

The belief that everything flows and continual motion underlies the Japanese view of life and death. Thus, the distinction between life and death is ambiguous, and reincarnation and eternal life are part of this incessant evanescence. The human soul is neither in heaven nor hell but forever becoming something else in this world. Moreover, Japanese scholars repeatedly elucidate this essential principle. Umehara Takeshi (1976), a famous scholar of Japanese culture, claims that this view forms the core of Japanese spiritual culture. Indeed, the perspective is continually manifested in Japanese literature, from Sugawara no Takasue no Musume’s *The Tale of Hamamatsu Chūnagon* (11 A.D.) to Mishima Yukio’s *The Sea of Fertility* (1969–71). In all these literary texts, a



protagonist becomes another being after death and continues to exist in the world. However, the West's literary texts express the belief in eternal life through reincarnation and the unclear distinction between life and death. Again, in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Pythagoras says:

Everything changes, nothing dies: the spirit wanders, arriving here or there, and occupying whatever body it pleases, passing from a wild beast into a human being, from our body into a beast, but is never destroyed. As pliable wax, stamped with new designs, is no longer what it was; does not keep the same form; but is still one and the same; I teach that the soul is always the same, but migrates into different forms. (Book XV: 143–175)

In other lines, Pythagoras similarly explains the nature of a being and the world:

Nothing keeps its own form, and Nature, the renewer of things, refreshes one shape from another. Believe me, nothing dies in the universe as a whole, but it varies and changes its aspect, and what we call 'being born' is a beginning to be, of something other, than what was before, and 'dying' is, likewise, ending a former state. Though, 'that' perhaps is transferred here, and 'this,' there, the total sum is constant. (Book XV: 237–258)

Here, Ovid (or his narrator Pythagoras) presents a holistic view of the world. According to this Western logic, everything changes into anything, the total sum is constant, and Nature thus refreshes itself. We should compare Ovid or Pythagoras's view of the world with Nisbett's dichotomous opinions about the East and the West. As quoted earlier, Nisbett says that "modern Asians, like ancient Chinese, view the world in holistic terms," while modern "Westerners, like the ancient Greeks, see the world in analytic, atomistic terms; they see objects as discrete and separate from their environments." However, Ovid (or Pythagoras) sees objects as continuous and as everything; he believes that every worldly being is unified as the configurative elements of "Nature." As mentioned previously, Japanese writers such as Kamo-no, Fujiwara, and Mishima have expressed beliefs congruent with Ovid's (or Pythagoras'). In Nisbett's terms, both Ovid and Pythagoras should have been Asian.

Thus, definitively contrasting Eastern and Western worldviews or conceptual traditions is impossible. Of course, the East and the West differ in languages, customs, social realities, and so on. In Japan, the doctrine of traditional Japanese Buddhism might have influenced the perspective of impermanence. However, this principle is also familiar to the Japanese people because of a plant that is cultivated and grows wild: the Japanese stewartia, or the *Stewartia pseudocamellia*, commonly known in Japan by the name *sala souju* or the *sala* tree. This tree's flower bursts into bloom in the morning but falls to earth by evening; it is thus regarded as a symbol of impermanence. The celebrated Japanese classic *The Tale of the Heike* (Anon., 13 A.D.) also begins concerning the *sala* flower: "The sound of the Gion Shōja bells echoes the impermanence of all things; the color of sala flowers reveals the truth that the

prosperous must decline” (Anon., 1988, 23). Thus, in Japan, the perspective of impermanence likely appeared due to traditional and geographical realities. Additionally, the post-battle vista of the devastation of Kyoto, Japan’s metropolitan city of the past, caused Kamo-no to write the essay *Hōjōki*. At the same time, the context of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* is an inducement to battle. However, Kamo-no and Ovid’s (or Pythagoras’s) perspective of impermanence, expressed similarly, thoroughly discounts the argument that the East and the West are differing fundamentally.

Moreover, Chinese literature presents an ambiguous worldview in distinguishing between life and death and articulates consequent belief in reincarnation and eternal life. *Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out* (2006), a novel by Mo Yan, a Nobel Prize-winning Chinese writer, is written according to the grounding concept of eternal life and reincarnation—from a human being through a donkey to an ox, a pig, and so on. Such a view of life and death can be found in Indian religious and literary texts as well. Certainly, different cultures have affinities, as is clearly demonstrated by Mo Yan’s receiving the Nobel Prize, established by a (Western) Swedish engineer, chemist, industrialist, and philanthropist, for the universal human value represented by Yan’s literary efforts.

The famous Japanese philosopher Suzuki Daisetsu’s analysis of Japanese culture created great global impact on authors, thinkers, and lay readers across the world when he lived in the United States. Suzuki also asserted his assumption of fundamental differences between the East and the West and between China and Japan. In his essay “On Occidental ‘philosophy,’” Suzuki alleged, “In cultures of East and West there is a fundamental difference” (1961, 37). Such a difference, in his mind, is true of even a speculative gap between China and Japan. “Han Chinese is not good at abstractly thinking,” says Suzuki. “They always concretely think of anything,” and the philosopher continues, claiming that “Their way of thinking is quite different from that of ‘philosopher,’ or dialectics. A philosopher’s way of thinking always goes from positive through negative to a solution that includes them both. But Han Chinese tries to transcend both positive and negative from the beginning” (1961, 37).

Despite his confident statement, Suzuki expresses an incorrect idea. The philosopher’s way of thinking to which Suzuki refers is equivalent to German philosopher G. W. F. Hegel’s *Aufheben*. However, according to Qian Zhongshu, chapter 40 of the classic Chinese *Laozi* contains an equivalent philosophical word, “*fan*,” as expressed in the phrase “Turning back (*fan*) is the way the *tao* moves” (Qian, 1986, 445). According to Zhang’s English explanation of Quan’s argument, “the word ‘turn back’ or *fan*” is “a case of bisemy with opposite meanings, just like Hegel’s favorite *Aufheben*,” for “the first is the *fan* as in *zheng fan* (positive and negative), that is, negation; the second is the *fan* as in *wang fan* (go out and come back), that is, return” (Zhang, 2015, 137). Additionally, Zhang elucidates Quan’s best explanation of the way of the *tao* from Quan’s commentary on chapter 25 of the *Laozi*. In Zhang’s English translation, the section says, “I would constrainedly name it ‘Great.’ Being great, it is said to vanish. Vanishing, it is said to move far away. Being far away, it is said to return” (Zhang, 2015, 137). Quan elucidates the passage thusly:

“Great” is the positive (*zheng*); to “vanish” is to depart from it, to run counter to Great in self-alienation, and that is the negation. “To move far away” is the end result of departure, the extreme of negation, and it is said to “return” because moving far away will reverse the course, that is, the negation of the negation (*dénégation*), and the “ultimate conformity” will “harmonize” (*he*) with the positive. Therefore, the word *fan* means both countering (*weifan*) in its negative sense, and return (*huifan*) in its positive sense. What Hegel calls “the negation of the negation” (*Das zweite Negative das Negative des Negation, ist jenes Aufheben des Widerspruchs*) characterizes the same principle. (1986, 446; Zhang, 2015, 137–38)

*Fan* and the movement of the *tao* as written in the *Laozi* are equivalent to Hegel’s dialectics.

In contradiction to Suzuki’s statement about fundamental differences between the East and the West and between the Chinese and the Japanese, these arguments prove they are instead affinitive. Dialectics is not unique to the Japanese or the West because the Chinese, the West, and the Japanese share this thought process. In this sense, Nisbett’s view that since “the classical period in antiquity,” there have been “only two short-lived movements of little influence in the East that shared the spirit of logical inquiry that has always been common in the West” is wrong. Beyond language and culture differences, both Easterners and Westerners can join dialectical arguments and understand philosophical texts dialectically.

Therefore, the *Bildungsroman*, a novel genre focused on a protagonist’s psychological and moral growth, has been written and read everywhere in the world, whether in an original text or translation. The basic concept of the *Bildungsroman* is rooted in dialectics. These novels’ protagonists grow up by experiencing individual desires (positive) and social norms (negative), leading to a resolution that includes both aspects. Moreover, the following are but a few examples of the *Bildungsroman*: Ibn Tufail’s *Hayy Ibn Yaqdhan* (12 A.D.), an Arabic philosophical novel; *The Life of Lazarillo de Tormes* (Spain, 1554); François Fénelon’s *The Adventures of Telemachus* (France, 1699); Henry Fielding’s *The History of Tom Jones, A Foundling* (the United Kingdom, 1749); Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship* (German, 1795–96); Charles Dickens’s *David Copperfield* (the United Kingdom, 1850); William Somerset Maugham’s *Of Human Bondage* (the United Kingdom, 1915); Ye Shengtao’s *Nihuamzi* (China, 1929); Shimomura Kōjin’s *The Tale of Jirō* (Japan, 1941–54); Clarice Lispector’s *Near to the Wild Heart* (Brazil, 1943); John Irving’s *The Cider House Rules* (the United States, 1985); and Esi Edugyan’s *Washington Black* (Canada, 2018).

Many more examples of transcultural philosophy and literary works exist between the East and the West, but the author briefly mentions only a few. First, Japanese Buddhism incorporates the *hongaku* philosophy, which asserts that a Buddhist nature dwells in all beings. In other words, all human beings are saved by nature. *Hongaku* philosophy defines sin as a human illusion, like a cloud or a shadow

that people watch in their minds. The West is familiar with St. Augustine's doctrine that a human being embodies original sin. However, the New Thought, which developed under the influence of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Phineas Quimby, and others in the 19th-century United States, holds that divinity dwells within every person. This thought, allegedly, might be heterodoxical from a Christianity-centric viewpoint, but it shares similarities with *hongaku* philosophy regarding human nature. Second, the notion of "carpe diem" or "seize the day" is well-known through Horace's phrase "*Carpe diem quam minimum credula postero*" in his *Odes* (Book I. 11, 23 BCE; 1860, p. 52) where he insisted that a wise person is not concerned about the distant future but lives today, in the here and now, in fleeting human life. Horace's *carpe diem* exerted substantial influence on Western authors. Robert Herrick (1648; 1900, p. 54), a 17th-century British Cavalier poet, wrote the famous line "Gather ye rosebuds while ye may" in his poem "To the Virgins, To Make Much of Time." Saul Bellow, a 20th-century American Nobel Prize-winner, wrote a novel titled *Seize the Day* (1956) in which Tamkin says, "Seize the day" to the protagonist Tommy who struggles in life and waits for help or good luck. In *Essays in Idleness* (1330–32?), Yoshida Kenkō, a Japanese poet and essayist, also insisted on the importance of living in the here and now. In chapter 108 (2013), he wrote, "No one begrudges the passing moment. Is this because they are wise, or because they are fools? [...] [O]ne dedicated to the way must not concern himself over the distant future. His only care should be not to let the present moment slip vainly through his fingers." In chapter 92, Yoshida (2013) explains:

A man engaged in Buddhist practice will tell himself at night that there is always the morning, or in the morning will anticipate the night, always intending to make more effort later. And if such are your days, how much less aware must you be of a passing moment's indolence. Why should it be so difficult to carry something out right now when you think of it, to seize the instant? It is said to be born from the perspective of impermanence.

"Seize the instant" in Yoshida's essay is equivalent to "Seize the day" in Horace's and Herrick's poems and Bellow's novel; the notion "seize the day" commonly exists beyond the gap between philosophical backgrounds of Greek thought, Christianity, and Buddhism.

Importantly, finding specific affinity in texts from varied contexts denies ethnocentrism, Orientalism, and Occidentalism and leads toward the promotion of global peace. As far as dialectics goes, as Quan clarifies (1986, 1–2), in *Wissenschaft der Logik*, Hegel took pride in Germany and all things German when he argued *Aufheben*, saying, that only Germany had such intellectual words for expressing deep thought. Hegel's finding is excellent, but that does not mean only Germany is excellent. With disdain for the Chinese thought process, Suzuki Daisetsu praised Japanese thinking as highly valuable. Truthfully, however, people both in the East and the West are capable of dialectical thinking.

### V. Stylistic and Cognitive Limits

The author has argued the affinity of human beings in imagination, conception, and worldview beyond visible differences in culture, language, and tradition. He cites specific texts from several world regions to evidence that people in the East and the West can read and understand literary texts borne in the Other. Although Zhang refers to “the consensus of cognitive scientists about some general commonality among all human beings” (2015, 37), the author mentions cognitive and stylistic limits of reading original and translated texts in this section.

So long as Eastern and Western people have affinities in their speculative, conceptual, and cognitive systems, as the author contends, translatability exists between an Eastern literary text and a Western work. Hence, people in both spaces can understand translated texts on speculative, conceptual, and cognitive levels. However, every Easterner or Westerner cannot read a translated text similarly to the Other. Grammatical differences complicate capturing the original’s form and style. For instance, many European languages have grammatical gender. Ellen Moers (1976) observes that celebrated female writers, such as Anne Louise Germaine de Staël, George Sand, and Simone Weil in France, intentionally choose grammatical gender when they express oppression of a woman’s agency and represent the self-consciousness of sex. For instance, in a love scene, authors can write female and male nouns in an alternative order, like *personne* (feminine; person), *cœur* (masculine; heart), *âme* (feminine; soul), *esprit* (masculine; mind). However, such expressive effect disappears in texts translated into Asian or other languages with no grammatical gender. Similarly, in reading a text translated from an Asian to a European language, a Western reader may find meaning not conveyed by the original. The author takes as another example the indefinite article, which Asian languages essentially do not include. This lack affects a literary text’s meaning in translation. A well-known example is Matsuo Bashō’s Frog *haiku* (Japanese seventeen-syllable poem). Satō Hiroaki (1995) presents various translations. One of them is “*Furu ike ya/ kawazu tobikomu/ mizu no oto.*” Satō (1995) introduces Donald Kean’s translation: “The ancient pond/ A frog leaps in/ The sound of the water.”

According to Satō (1995), Lafcadio Hearn imagined plural frogs jumping into the pond and translated the *haiku* as “Old pond–frogs jumped in–sound of water.” The difference in the number of frogs affects the splashing sound that readers imagine. The point lies not in which translation is correct, but in that, a reader may freely imagine the water’s sound without an indefinite article attached to the Japanese noun “*kawazu*” (“frog”). Translation into a language that requires an indefinite article somewhat curtails a reader’s power of imagination. Similarly, differences in lexical connotations can also change an original text into another, independent work. For instance, in the last scene of Bernard Friot’s “*Personne*” in *Histoires Presses* (2007), a story for children, the narrator goes to the bathroom and looks at his or her own figure in the mirror. The narrative ends with one word, “*Personne*,” which has a deconstructive, double image: In French, “*personne*” means “a person” and also signifies “no one.” If “*personne*”

cannot be translated into another language with a word that encompasses the double image, the story becomes another narrative.

Apart from translation, linguistic cognition also affects readers' understanding, even in the reading of an original text. The author takes William Blake's English poem "The Sick Rose" (1794) as an example.

O Rose thou art sick.  
The invisible worm,  
That flies in the night  
In the howling storm:

Has found out thy bed  
Of crimson joy:  
And his dark secret love  
Does thy life destroy.

Critics familiar with the *Bible* have read "The sick rose" as a poem that expresses the human condition (Riffaterre, 1973; Okuda, 1999), referring to the "worm" in *The Book of Job* 25:5–6, *the Book of the Prophet Isaiah* 66:24, and *the Gospel* According to St. Mark 9:44; to *Isaiah* 1:18 for the allusion to "crimson"; and to *Paradise Lost* for the poem as a whole. However, general readers, whether from the East or the West, who are familiar with British society but not with the *Bible* may interpret the "worm" as a social evil or corrupt power in the United Kingdom and "the sick rose" as a prostitute, a hurt beautiful woman, the socially vulnerable, or a disorganized society, associating the rose with the British national flower.

The mode of reading also matters. Suzuki (2014) refers to discrete interpretations of *The Great Gatsby* from his Chinese, Korean, American, and Japanese students. Japanese students tend to read the novel as a story of pure love. American students interpret it as an account of the American dream or as a story about the oppression of the female gender. Some Chinese and Korean students criticize the novel for its portrayal of illicit love and thus cannot accept it. For them, *Gatsby* is a story about ethics. Perhaps such a reading may be shaped by Confucian thought. On the other hand, Japanese students, who live in a society where the Confucian way of being is not as influential as previously, notice *Gatsby's* single-minded passion for Daisy. Americans, who value self-actualization in a capitalistic world, attend class identity and liberation from gender-based oppression. Which is the right interpretation of the novel and which is not cannot be asserted. As David Damrosch states, "when a text goes beyond a national border, the text itself transforms" (2003, 281).

Goethe was impressed by a Persian poem and a Chinese novel, causing him to conceptualize *Weltliteratur*. However, he could not have responded to the poem or the novel in a manner identical to a Persian or a Chinese reader because the translation from, for instance, Chinese to German would not have fully captured the novel's original form and style. Furthermore, an original text changes depending on any

reader's linguistic, intellectual, and socio-cultural context. Indeed, according to Jacques Lacan, the agency of "I" is structured by *le symbolique*. In addition, the brain scientist A. R. Damasio asserts, "Emotion, feeling and biological regulation all play a role in human reasoning" (2005, 8). Humankind can feel something and thus think of it and can think of something and thus feel it, and humans express both feeling and thought in language.

However, a different response to a literary text does not imply the impossibility of understanding text or signify the unfeasibility of a literary text to transcend cultures. Certainly, a text's entirety cannot be absolutely represented in translation, but to support better understanding, a translator can add notes or use thick translation. Still, to some degree, a literary text itself accepts several interpretations. As Umberto Eco (1992) remarked on the intention of the text, a word should and can be understood within the whole structure of the text. As Zhang emphasizes, it is not the text that changes, but that "the reader's initial conjecture is continually adjusted and modified so that a more adequate understanding may arise in the process of reading" (2005, 126). This feat is also possible through discussion by readers who read a text within its whole structure from multidimensional viewpoints. As mentioned, American, Chinese, Korean, and Japanese students responded differently to *The Great Gatsby*, but none of the students read the novel as a happy story or merely criticized Gatsby. Also, all the readers from varied backgrounds unanimously empathized with Gatsby's loss of love and censured those who benefited from Gatsby but failed to attend his funeral. Besides, despite having developed their readings from multidimensional viewpoints, all the students understood each interpretation and achieved adequate elucidation of the novel.

This understanding is possible because of affinities that transcend linguistic and cultural gaps between readers. Indeed, when we read a poem or a story about a beloved person's death, it evokes sadness, not laughter. We can share these feelings with others. Additionally, when we read a novel in which people do not mourn a person's death despite being indebted to him, our anger and pity are evoked, not appreciation. We can share problems. Empathy with pure love or single-minded passion, strife to attain one's dream, resistance against the oppression of agency, understanding of illicit love's immorality: These are common to all humankind. People in the East and the West are not so fundamentally different that they cannot understand each other; they are, instead, affinitive in imagination, concept, worldview, and feeling in ways that transcend differences in culture, language, and tradition. Therefore, a literary text surpasses dissimilarities of cultures and societies and can be adequately understood by human readers across civilizations.

## VI. Conclusion

As the author mentioned in the introduction, the view of fundamental differences between the East and the West, or between Asians and Europeans, is familiar and widespread. Certainly, differences exist between worldviews. However, even family members have differences: One might say at one moment, "As family members, we

have a similar way of thinking” and in the next moment, claim, “We are quite different in the way we see things.” In other words, people draw arbitrary boundaries between affinity and disparity. Hence, we need particular texts to confirm speculative, conceptual, and cognitive affinities and differences. Counterpointing literary texts clearly demonstrate affinities. Specific examples from texts across eras and civilizations prove the affinity of human imagination, speculation, conception, cognition, and expression. Of course, affinity does not mean sameness, and particular textual examples sometimes evidence significant differences. However, a person’s understanding of dissimilarities itself signifies familiarity with each disparity compared. Otherwise, a reader cannot recognize differences. If a person is familiar with two compared aspects, their difference is not so unfathomable that the individual cannot grasp it. As Zhang clarifies, “Differences are a matter of degree, however, not of kind, and more or less understanding and communication have always worked across linguistic and cultural gaps” (2015, 42). Therefore, people in the East and the West can read and understand literary texts born in the Other’s space. Certainly, a literary work can prevail throughout the world beyond linguistic, cultural, and social differences.

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