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Tagore and Orientalism:
Tagore Studies as a Focus for East-West Debate
泰戈爾與東方主義：
聚焦於東西之辯的泰戈爾研究[§]

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關鍵詞：泰戈爾、東方主義、亞洲、東西文明、國家主義

§ This paper on Rabindranath Tagore aims to combine historical accounts, research reviews, and critical analyses. It would not have been possible without Professor Jenine Heaton's careful revisions. The comments of two anonymous scholars helped to shape the language, structure, and arguments. I am also indebted to the editor, whose attention to detail has greatly improved overall presentation of the paper.

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Abstract

This essay adopts a critical approach to the making of Tagore's (1861-1941) public image and the concomitant studies of him. By exploring the ideological premises that have undergirded the historical and interpretive narratives of the Indian poet for a century, this paper demonstrates that many of the regional, temporal, and thematic ramifications of the topic are, on a deeper theoretical level, closely related to the different ways of conceiving and projecting the East, which constitute different types of Orientalism.

The introduction discusses and lays the methodological groundwork for this Orientalism. Section 1 critically reviews the process of Tagore's rise to fame in the West, which by way of the 1913 Nobel Prize in Literature elevated him to the position of "Eastern messenger." Section 2 juxtaposes India's and the West's contrasting attitudes towards Tagore's cultural legacies; while relevant studies develop in different directions in the two parts of the world, the thread of "East-West civilizations" is common to their problematics. Section 3 depicts Tagore's interaction with Japanese and Chinese intellectuals, and indicates how the conventions of Tagore studies in the two countries have been shaped by their respective identifications with "Asia." The conclusion delves into how Orientalism as an ideology permeates the three levels of "the mythologizing of Tagore," "the crystallization of Tagore studies," and "the emergence of the East as an issue."

摘要

本文批判性地檢視泰戈爾（1861-1941）的公眾形象，以及對於他的不同研究範式的形成過程。回顧各種討論的意識型態基礎，本文試圖展示，百年來的泰戈爾研究，儘管有許多時間、空間、主題性的分化，但在深刻的理論層次上，它們大部分都與如何想像和定位亞洲有關，由此構成了多種型態的東方主義。

本文序論闡述東方主義的概念並建立本文之方法論基礎；首節回顧泰戈爾在西方的成名過程，並檢討一九一三年的諾貝爾文學獎如何將他塑造成「東方使者」；第二節將印度與西方的泰戈爾研究對舉，指出儘管泰氏在這兩個世界的文化地位有天壤之別，但雙方的問題意識卻可以「東西文明」這條線索來貫串；第三節敘述泰戈爾訪問日本與中國的經歷，以及兩國後續的泰戈爾研究，如何受到其各自對於「亞洲」的認同感的影響；結論剖析在「泰戈爾的神秘化」、「泰戈爾研究之定型」及「東方之為一思想課題」這三個層次上，東方主義意識型態之無所不在的影響。

Introduction: Tagore from the Perspective of Orientalism

This essay reviews various traditions of research on Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941). As the title suggests, the review is not a comprehensive bibliographical survey, but aims to examine the relationship between Tagore's words, knowledge about him, and Orientalism as a way of thinking and representation.

The current review is contextualized temporally: academic and cultural organizations around the world just celebrated the 150th anniversary of Tagore in 2011. Many symposia, recitation gatherings, and painting exhibitions were held to commemorate the poet's multifaceted talents and to discuss the relevance of his thought to the age of globalization. Furthermore, 2013 is the centenary of Tagore's receipt of the Nobel Prize in Literature, an event that surprised the world a century ago and made Tagore the most renowned Easterner at the time. This honor, however, was not without drawbacks. Outside of India, Tagore is mainly observed through the prism of "the East" or "Asia," which to a great extent has reduced his versatility to a "spiritual," "mystic," and "anti-Western" monochrome, although exploration of Tagore's works indicates that such epithets cannot be applied uncritically.

Against this backdrop, I argue that Orientalism is a useful concept for examining how the evaluation of Tagore has fluctuated in the past hundred years. Orientalism, which signifies not only a discipline but a European practice of ideological connotations, is defined by Edward Said (1935-2003) as follows in his 1978 *magnum opus*:

Orientalism is a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between "the Orient" and (most of the time) "the Occident."¹

In more political terms, Orientalism is "a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient."² Said drew on such ideas as Antonio Gramsci's (1891-1937) "hegemony" and Michel Foucault's (1926-1984) "discourse" to explain the Western effort to assume a cultural vantage over the non-Western world and sustain that superiority through textual exactitude and intellectual conviction. Since the process under discussion derives from a time-honored cultural endeavor that finds one of its ancient origins in Herodotus' (C.484-C.425 BCE) *Histories*, it would be methodologically improper to force an analogy between Orientalism as a large-scale project and Tagore as an individual case. Nevertheless, if we define Orientalism as essentially a way of thinking about the Orient based on its presumed differences with the Occident, Tagore certainly embodies a nexus of various practices that juxtapose East and West.

One more caveat is necessary here. Although Said fully recognized the immensity of the Orient and that much of the expanse is more or less subject to European (and later American) scrutiny and representation, he restricted his discussion to the Islamic world, as its geographical proximity to Europe has long provoked the latter's anxiety, enmity, and exotic imagination. India, in contrast, constitutes another kind of Orientalist project owing to an inherent political disorder that rendered it vulnerable to European rivalries and political control.³ In Said's subsequent exploration of the problem of image-making in the West-centric power structure, India, along with other non-Western regions, is given a more in-depth account. Said generalizes the issue as follows: "What are striking in these discourses are the rhetorical figures one keeps encountering in their

1 Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin Books, 2003), p. 2.

2 *Ibid.*, p. 3.

3 *Ibid.*, p. 75.

descriptions of 'the mysterious East,' as well as the stereotypes about 'the African [or Indian or Irish or Jamaican or Chinese] mind'.⁴ Furthermore, Tagore's criticism of nationalism has been cited as a brilliant example of "resistance culture."⁵ For Tagore, nationalism is not a convenient anti-colonialist tool, but rather is a product of Western capitalism and materialism that should be kept from. It is on this humanistic ground that Tagore differentiated a "spiritual East" from a "materialistic West." Yet he was never sparing in admiration for the West's indefatigable search for scientific and technological progress, as long as such advances remained in the service of humanity.

Despite his attack on the Western system of nation-state, Tagore was also a nationalist in the broadest sense in that he strove for an independent India. But such independence was to be premised upon harmonization of the ancient Indian spirit with modern scientific facilities, a vision of which Isaiah Berlin's (1909-1997) praise is worth quoting at some length:

A not dissimilar problem seems to me, from what I have read in Tagore, to have faced India towards the end of last century [i.e. the 19th century]; and he never showed his wisdom more clearly than in choosing the difficult middle path, drifting neither to the Scylla of radical modernism, nor to the Charybdis of proud and gloomy traditionalism. (I know that some have thought Tagore to have yielded too much to the West. I

4 Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), p. xi. The words in brackets are Said's. For a meticulous study of India and European Orientalist projects, see Raymond Schwab, *The Oriental Renaissance: Europe's Rediscovery of India and the East, 1680-1880*, trans. by Gene Patterson-Black and Victor Reinking (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984). Said does not say much about the relationship between India and Orientalism in his foreword to the English version, which might indicate that he had not yet been engaged in this topic at such an early date (prior to 1984). See pp. vii-xx.

5 Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p. 215.

confess that I did not find this so in those of his works that I could read in English. He seems to me to have kept to the centre.)⁶

Berlin and Said are among those few leading intellectuals who are not Tagore experts but regard his thought as having universal value rather than merely embodying local concerns. Berlin admired the difficult path that Tagore chose, but the parenthesized note is somewhat simplistic. Actually, Tagore was considered no less a cultural conservative than an Occidentophile, depending on the standpoints of his critics. As both the global environment and domestic situations have changed through time, the reception of Tagore in different parts of the world also has undergone transformation. Many of these transformations, nonetheless, are epistemologically connected with Orientalism: while views on Tagore are deeply grounded in local experience and change with historical conditions, what remains unaltered seems to be a division between the two hemispheres, which are claimed to be the most problematic categories of the meta-geographical imagination.⁷

Furthermore, although scholars like Berlin and Said do not reference geographical constraints when evaluating Tagore's ideas, their sole focus on his nationalist critique also betrays the fundamental Orientalist treatment that Tagore has received. This bias, however, is historically attributable to Tagore himself. This paper comprises a review of this history and the development of various conventions of Tagore studies that will reveal how the East-West debate has, explicitly or implicitly, weighed on the world's cognition of Tagore for a century.⁸

6 Isaiah Berlin, "Rabindranath Tagore and the Consciousness of Nationality," in Henry Hardy (ed.), *The Sense of Reality: Studies in Ideas and Their History* (London: Pimlico, 1997), p. 260.

7 Martin Lewis and Kären Wigen, *The Myth of Continents: A Critique of Metageography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), p. x.

8 Using Orientalism as a theoretical framework is not new to Tagore studies. For example, both Ana Jelnicar and Wei-lin Huang adopt Orientalist criticisms extensively in their analyses. This paper focuses on the historical process of Tagore's being "Orientalized," dealing with theorization in the conclusion. For the two references, see Ana Jelnicar, "W. B. Yeats's (Mis)Reading of Tagore: Interpreting an Alien Culture," in Kathleen M. O'Connell and Joseph T. O'Connell (eds.), *Rabindranath Tagore: Reclaiming a Cultural Icon* (Kolkata: Visva-Bharati,

1. Tagore's Global Reputation and Concomitant Issues

In the article "Restoring Rabindranath Tagore," Mary Lago (1919-2001) claims that "[t]he most persistent myth, which began to adhere from the very beginning of his Western career and has done lingering harm, is that of Tagore as latter-day Wise Man from the East."⁹ As this statement weaves together key terms that characterize Tagore's international career—not only in the West but virtually everywhere outside India—it serves as a fine start for an analysis of the formulation of Tagore's international image.

Rabindranath Tagore was born to an aristocratic family in 1861 in Kolkata (known as Calcutta before 2001). Well connected to the colonial government and the British East India Company, Tagore's family background exposed him to both traditional Indian classics and the modern Western disciplines of art, humanities, and sciences, and rooted his sensitivity in the tension between East and West. Given this intellectual cultivation, the awarding of the Nobel Prize in 1913 to Tagore made him a ready spokesperson for the East. Travelling and lecturing around the world subsequently became routine. With a sense of mission when speaking to the devastating results of WWI, Tagore eagerly preached the spiritual superiority of Eastern civilization, which in his eyes provided a remedy for a modern Western culture characterized by materialism and nationalism.

Obviously, the cultural mission on which Tagore embarked hinged on a crucial episode, that is, the surprising 1913 Nobel Prize in Literature, which followed his sensational popularity in and beyond London from 1912 and was

2009), pp. 318-344; Wei-lin Huang 黃威霖, *Wenmingchayi yu xiandaixing: Taigeer de zhengzhilixiang jiqi dui Zhongguowenming de qipan* [*Civilizational Differences and Modernity: Rabindranath Tagore's Political Ideals and His Perspective on Chinese Civilization*] 文明差異與現代性：泰戈爾的政治理想及其對中國文明的期盼 (Taipei: Department of Political Science, National Taiwan University, 2011).

⁹ Mary Lago, "Restoring Rabindranath Tagore," in Mary Lago and Ronald Warwick (eds.), *Rabindranath Tagore: Perspectives in Time* (London: Macmillan, 1989), p. 5.

claimed as "one of the genuine romances of literary history."¹⁰ According to a letter from Tagore to his niece dated May, 6, 1913, he began translating *Gitanjali* (song offerings) into English in March, 1912, when his trip to England was postponed by a sudden illness. He boarded the ship in May and continued the translation. When Tagore arrived in London and gave the manuscripts to his painter friend William Rothenstein (1872-1945), whom he had known in Kolkata years earlier, they were passed immediately and with great enthusiasm to William Butler Yeats (1865-1939). The Irish poet then wrote an introduction and edited the poems for publication in September;¹¹ "from there on you know the story"¹²—Tagore referred to the extraordinary welcome he received in the same letter. What is more, he became the first Nobel laureate from Asia half a year later. Introductory or scholarly publications on Tagore in languages other than Bengali appeared in abundance for several years after the event.

On the English translation of *Gitanjali*, Tagore admitted that "[e]ven today I cannot grasp how I wrote it and how people have liked it so much."¹³ As Tagore seems to have been unprepared for his phenomenal popularity in the West, Yeat's effusive praise in his introduction to *Gitanjali* might lend some insight into the "romance":

We write long books where no page perhaps has any quality to make writing a pleasure, being confident in some general design, just as we fight and make money and fill our heads with politics—all dull things in the doing—while Mr. Tagore, like the Indian civilization itself, has been content to discover the soul and surrender himself to its spontaneity.¹⁴

10 Ibid.

11 Rabindranath Tagore's letter to Indira Devi Chaudhurani, in Krishna Dutta and Andrew Robinson (eds.), *Selected Letters of Rabindranath Tagore* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 117-118.

12 Ibid., p. 118.

13 Ibid., p. 117.

14 W. B. Yeats, "Introduction," in Rabindranath Tagore, *Gitanjali: Song Offerings* (London:

The stark contrast between Western and Indian civilizations finds expressions in "general design" *versus* "spontaneity," and "fight and make money" *versus* "discover the soul." Yeats' appreciation for Tagore probably stemmed from his own affinity for mysticism, personal political orientation, and fatigue with modern civilization. Yet it was not uncommon for contemporary Western critics to take what they imagined as the Indian spirit to be antidotal to a Western civilization frayed with political and commercial competitions.

Soon after *Gitanjali*, a series of lectures given at Harvard in February, 1913 were published as *Sadhana*. The book bears a subtitle, *The Realisation of Life*, and contains Tagore's own interpretation of the Upanishads and the teachings of Buddha that "have ever been things of the spirit, and therefore endowed with boundless vital growth."¹⁵ Through these lectures, Tagore hoped that "western readers will have an opportunity of coming into touch with the ancient spirit of India as revealed in our sacred texts and manifested in the life of to-day,"¹⁶ a wish to reverse an observed tendency of mummifying the religious scriptures of India in Western academia. Nevertheless, the publication of *Sadhana* also brought unexpected repercussions: "Mystical poems are private balm for the restless soul, but prose exposition elicits rebuttal."¹⁷ In other words, what was implied in *Gitanjali* was made into argumentative form, thus drawing disputation. Moreover, "*Sadhana* marked Tagore as the Man with a Message,"¹⁸ which did Tagore "lingering harm" as he would never be appreciated *qua* poet ever again.

In brief, the accolades Tagore received in the West not only divided his life into two contrasting periods—from that of a locally (not even nationally) known

Macmillan, 1913), p. xx.

15 Rabindranath Tagore, *Sadhana: Realisation of Life* (New York: Macmillan, 1913), p. viii.

16 *Ibid.*, p. vii.

17 Mary Lago, "Restoring Rabindranath Tagore," in Mary Lago and Ronald Warwick (eds.), *Rabindranath Tagore: Perspectives in Time*, p. 14.

18 *Ibid.*

poet to a world-famous thinker or preacher—but also presupposed an East-West dichotomy in the world's perception of him.¹⁹ It is to this simplistic understanding that Mary Lago addressed her article, "Restoring Rabindranath Tagore." But a reasonable question is: what can we restore to Tagore if his image has long been biased? Historically, since much of Tagore's versatility, including social criticism and educational reform, found expression (and markets) after his achievement of worldwide acclaim—not to mention that Tagore half-willingly adapted himself to the niche that the West created for him—it would be difficult to construct a more polymorphous image of Tagore outside India without his primary identity as an Eastern messenger. Culturally, infatuation with Tagore's exoticism proved momentary. As Lago pointed out, Western readers soon asked for something more than the romantic mysticism of *Gitanjali*, and it was in the competition for reviews and bookshelves that Tagore unknowingly lost the race and dragged further and further behind modern writers such as T. S. Eliot (1888-1965), Ezra Pound (1885-1972), James Joyce (1882-1941), and D. H. Lawrence (1885-1930).²⁰ Indeed, as early as the 1920s, Edward Thompson (1886-1946), an early Western biographer of Tagore, had perceived a possible miscontextualization of Tagore in the contemporary cultural milieu: "I have remembered always that Tagore [...] as a writer was the contemporary of the later Tennyson and Browning and Robert Bridges. In fairness, he must be judged as the Victorian poets are judged, whose world has passed away."²¹

19 In a newly published biography that sketches Tagore's intellectual life rather than his experiences, the author still has to acknowledge the impact of the event on Tagore's public image while playing down the importance of the Nobel Prize: "For the common man, the decade 1909-1919 was, of course, chiefly remarkable because of the celebrated event, the award of the Nobel Prize in 1913. At this time Tagore was just harvesting the fruits of his work earlier and getting them translated for a foreign readership. In terms of his intellectual life, it is doubtful if this episode was significant. However, these English translations, sometimes edited by his intellectual associates in England, were significant in representing Tagore as the 'spiritual' poet of the East." Sabyasachi Bhattacharya, *Rabindranath Tagore: An Interpretation* (New Delhi: Viking, 2011), p. 13.

20 Mary Lago, "Restoring Rabindranath Tagore," in Mary Lago and Ronald Warwick (eds.), *Rabindranath Tagore: Perspectives in Time*, p. 19.

21 Edward Thompson, *Rabindranath Tagore: Poet and Dramatist* (S.I.: Pierides Press, 2008), p. vii. This book was first published in 1926, and revised and reissued in 1946.

Of course, more complicated factors are accountable for Tagore's fall from grace in the eyes of Western readers. As widely noted, Yeats' wishful representation of Tagore as an other-worldly figure, Tagore's own omission in his translation of the parts that he considered would be difficult for Westerners to understand, and the filtering out of his modernist works (most of them novels) by Western publishers all contributed to the monochromatic image of Tagore as a mystic. With the publication in 1917 of *Nationalism*, which criticizes West-originated nationalism from the angle of humanistic universalism, "he had become a political voice that seemed to be setting East against West. To many, he was a Christ-figure turned Jeremiah."²²

Clearly, on both a cultural and political level, Tagore became characterized as a messenger from the East, an image that remains to the present day despite the vicissitudes of Tagore's reputation. But what was the East and how was it defined in contradistinction with the West? Since Tagore established himself as the representative of the East by virtue of a reputation earned in the West, this dichotomy became more a premise than a hypothesis for his thought. His views also contradicted the perceptions of other Eastern cultures, notably Japan and China. Moreover, the West itself is a problematic notion. A considerable portion of Western discussions on Tagore are of English or American origins, and Tagore's observation of the West was largely shaped by his intimacy with English culture through colonial rule. By exploring different responses to Tagore in various parts of the world, the following sections reveal how the East-West dichotomy has pervaded those discourses. Though far from being comprehensive, this examination clarifies how the idea of the East or Asia, presumably geographical and cultural, has been mainly devised for political ends, as *Orientalism* argues.

22 Mary Lago, "Restoring Rabindranath Tagore," in Mary Lago and Ronald Warwick (eds.), *Rabindranath Tagore: Perspectives in Time*, p. 16.

2. Orientalist Approach to Tagore: India and the West

Orientalism might not be the optimal approach to Tagore in India, where Tagore's fellow countrymen are more able and willing to view him in a real-life context. Nonetheless, analysis of some interrelated discussions on Tagore in India will make it clear that, in many cases, Westerners are the presumed readers of those studies that frequently address what is said about Tagore in the West. Therefore, by looking at India and the West together, this section attempts to demonstrate how contrasting images of Tagore and a continuum of views on him coexist paradoxically.

Ashis Nandy once said that "as you well know, all Bengali intellectuals are automatically Tagore scholars."²³ Though facetious, Nandy's remark is indicative of how local Bengalis are treating Tagore as an icon: familiarity with his works constitutes an essential part of cultural literacy in the Bengali-speaking region.²⁴ Such fervor is also evident in a *The Guardian* article:

No other language group reveres a writer as 250 million Bengali-speakers do Tagore. Shakespeare and Dickens don't come into the picture; the popularity of Burns in Scotland 100 years ago may be his nearest equivalent in Britain.²⁵

23 Ashis Nandy, "Violence and Creativity in the Late Twentieth Century: Rabindranath Tagore and the Problem of Testimony," in Patrick Colm Hogan and Lalita Pandit (eds.), *Rabindranath Tagore: Universality and Tradition* (Madison: Associated University Presses, 2003), p. 264.

24 Cf. "For millions of Indians and Bangladeshis, Rabindranath Tagore is at present, as he was in his lifetime, a cultural icon." See "Introduction," in Kathleen M. O'Connell and Joseph T. O'Connell (eds.), *Rabindranath Tagore: Reclaiming a Cultural Icon*, p. 11. Aware that "icon" does not always assume a positive meaning, the editors nonetheless refer readers to the cultural, religious, and political sophistication that the term can embody.

25 Ian Jack, "Rabindranath Tagore was a global phenomenon, so why is he neglected?" See: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2011/may/07/rabindranath-tagore-why-was-he-neglected>.

In sharp contrast to this zeal is the indifference to Tagore in the English-speaking world, for which there is statistical evidence: neither the Oxford nor Penguin editions of dictionaries of quotations, for example, contain anything by Tagore.²⁶ This absence appears ironic compared with Yeats' claim of *Gitanjali* that "as the generations pass, travellers will hum them on the highway and men rowing upon rivers."²⁷ Another reminder to reinforce the irony is that in 1936, Yeats still included seven of Tagore's poems in *The Oxford Book of Modern Verse*, although he was no longer as enchanted with Tagore at that time as he had been in the 1910s.

The journalist asks "why is he neglected?" on May, 7, 2011, that is, Tagore's 150th anniversary. Personally he had listened in Kolkata to some bureaucrats complain for hours about how impossible it is to approach Tagore from English translations, an anecdote that reflects an awareness among Bengalis of the cultural differences between themselves and outsiders. Revealing the opposing images of Tagore in India and in Britain, this report was partly motivated by Amartya Sen, who was giving a talk at the British Museum to remind his audiences of Tagore's legacies on the eve of the poet's birthday.

Whether Amartya Sen claims the title of Tagore scholar is dubitable. Nevertheless, there are multiple bonds between the two Bengali luminaries: Sen's grandfather shared an intellectual partnership with Tagore; he himself received secondary education at the institution established by Tagore; the 1998 Nobel Prize in Economics also obliges Sen to make critical comments on his predecessor.²⁸ In "Tagore and His India," Sen, like every concerned scholar, notes the discrepancy in publicity about Tagore in his homeland and in the rest of

26 Ibid.

27 W. B. Yeats, "Introduction," in Rabindranath Tagore, *Gitanjali: Song Offerings*, p. xv.

28 Actually, it has become an honor to have Amartya Sen contribute an introduction or piece to to-be-published volumes on Tagore. This emotion is well expressed in a 2011 volume, *Tagore and China*. One of the editors, Tan Chung, recalls in his own introduction that "when Amartya promised to contribute to our volume, my friends, especially those in China, had been overwhelmed by the good news as if we had won a big prize." See Tan Chung, Amiya Dev, Wang Bangwei and Wei Liming (eds.), *Tagore and China* (New Delhi: SAGE, 2011), p. xxvii.

the world today,²⁹ and considers the de-mythologizing of Tagore his primary task. Conscious of Tagore's complexity and inner contradictions, he seeks to demonstrate a Tagore of maximum elasticity without sacrificing fundamental principles. But, inevitably, such recognition was easily eclipsed by convenient labels such as "spiritualist" or "anti-modernist" as Amartya Sen observes.

An ambitious attempt to portray Tagore as a Renaissance figure is a 1995 biography, *Rabindranath Tagore: The Myriad-Minded Man*. Indeed, the corpus of Tagore's verbal works, which comprises poems, plays, novels, lyrics, essays, lectures, and letters cannot fully represent his creativity, as he is also the composer of thousands of paintings and songs (including the national anthems of both India and Bangladesh), as well as a rural reformer and school founder. Interestingly, when it comes to the reception of *Gitanjali* in the West, the two authors claim: "Today, by contrast, his prose writings would more likely have secured him the prize than his translated poetry."³⁰ The *Guardian* article also expresses a similar view: "perhaps the time has come for us to forget Tagore was ever a poet [due to translation problems], and think of his more intelligible achievements. These are many."³¹ These many achievements start with Tagore's being "a fine essayist" and end with his being "a critical nationalist," which are precisely Tagore's two most appealing qualities for contemporary reviewers. I would argue, however, that what is needed today is exactly the opposite of the suggestion, that is, a reexamination of why Tagore was NOT primarily identified as a poet throughout his international career. This is arguably a better way to "restore" Tagore. In this regard, the 1913 Presentation Speech by the Nobel Prize Committee is historically significant but has, strangely enough, long been ignored.

29 Amartya Sen, "Tagore and His India," in *The Argumentative Indian: Writings on Indian History, Culture, and Identity* (London: Penguin Books, 2005), p. 89.

30 Krishna Dutta and Andrew Robinson, *Rabindranath Tagore: The Myriad-Minded Man* (London and New York: Tauris Parke Paperbacks, 2009), p. 185.

31 See note 25.

The Committee awarded the prize to Tagore for the following reason:

[...] because of his profoundly sensitive, fresh and beautiful verse, by which, with consummate skill, he has made his poetic thought, expressed in his own English words, a part of the literature of the West.³²

Beyond the literary perfection, the Committee recognized that "the poet's motivation extends to the effort of reconciling two spheres of civilization widely separated, which above all is the characteristic mark of our present epoch and constitutes its most important task and problem."³³ Despite the keen awareness of this hemispheric discrepancy, however, the speech ignores the imperialist causes of the poor communication between the two spheres, firmly subsuming Tagore under the Christian influence, whose proselytizing mission was thought to have inspired poetic expression in general, and to have revitalized vernacular language in particular outside the West.

Apparently, since it was the first time for the Nobel Prize to be granted to an Asian, the Committee showed much appreciation for the border-crossing initiative. Nevertheless, while expecting a mutually benefiting interaction between East and West, the Speech in many respects adopts a typical Orientalist view, which characterizes the East as a treasure house of "good tidings," "whose existence had long been conjectured."³⁴ Moreover, with which tradition Tagore should be identified also became an issue of debate. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan (1888-1975), an eminent philosopher who was later to become the Vice-President and then President of India, had already observed before 1918 that there were two views regarding Tagore's philosophy. One held that Tagore's theism was akin to, if not identical with, Christianity; the other held that Tagore was a great

32 Horst Frenz (ed.), *Nobel Lectures, Literature 1901-1967* (Amsterdam: Elsevier Publishing Company, 1969), p. 127.

33 *Ibid.*, p. 128.

34 *Ibid.*, p. 131.

student of Buddha and a fine articulator of the Upanishads in the modern era.³⁵ It is not necessary to wade into this religious dispute. Suffice it to say that, from the very outset, the historic naming of an Asian as poet laureate was emblematic of the problems—rather than the solution—inherent in the mutual recognition between East and West in the early 20th century.

Indeed, Tagore had been deeply concerned with the East-West debate from his youth. Nonetheless, it was the Nobel Prize and the cultural and political milieu then that made the issue more and more central to his writings and lectures. If Tagore was not yet aware of the reason for his Western acclaim in the 1913 letter to his niece, when he eventually went to Stockholm and gave a speech there in 1921 (he was unable to attend the awards ceremony eight years earlier), he was confident enough to claim that he "represented the East" to receive the prize,³⁶ inevitably impressing his Western audiences as more of an Eastern messenger than a poet.

Remarkably, Amartya Sen notes that "he is not much read now in the West, and already by 1937, Graham Greene was able to say: 'As for Rabindranath Tagore, I cannot believe that anyone but Mr. Yeats can still take his poems very seriously.'"³⁷ In fact, in a dedication to the volume celebrating Tagore's 70th birthday in 1931, Yeats had indirectly shown indifference to Tagore's later poems and praised his prose instead.³⁸ We can assume that Yeats was also impressed by Tagore's critiques on nationalism, as a large proportion of his English essays is on civilizational issues. Radhakrishnan also affirms in the preface of *The Philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore* that "the book would be lacking in wholeness without an

35 Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, *The Philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore* (London: Macmillan, 1919), pp. 2-6.

36 Rabindranath Tagore, "The Nobel Prize Acceptance Speech," in Mohit K. Ray (ed.), *The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore, Volume V: Essays* (New Delhi: Atlantic, 2007), p. 5.

37 Amartya Sen, "Tagore and His India," in *The Argumentative Indian: Writing on Indian History, Culture, and Identity*, p. 89.

38 W. B. Yeats, untitled, in Ramananda Chatterjee (ed.), *The Golden Book of Tagore: A Homage to Rabindranath Tagore from India and the World in Celebration of His Seventieth Birthday* (Calcutta: Rammohun Library & Free Reading Room, 1990), p. 269.

account of Rabindranath's views about Nationalism in the East and the West."³⁹ In any case, the change from Tagore the poet to Tagore the messenger or essayist is discernible. Long after Tagore fell into oblivion altogether in the West, when new voices emerged to draw fresh attention to Tagore in terms of his contemporary relevance, it was his cultural and political discourse that first became the focus of distinguished scholars such as Isaiah Berlin and Edward Said.

Publications on Tagore in the West did not actually cease during the decades after his death, but it was not until the end of the 20th century that a new research paradigm took shape, which tends to place Tagore in an anti-colonialist or postcolonial context. Here Tagore constitutes a brilliant case, for he was both a beneficiary of British rule, culturally and materially, and a fierce critic of imperialism and of the entire power structure of the modern world. Ashis Nandy, for instance, penetrates Tagore's cultural vision from three sets of contradictions that "[d]uring the last hundred and fifty years [...] Afro-Asian reformers and thinkers have tried to reconcile," namely, "that between the East and the West; that between tradition and modernity; and that between the past and the present."⁴⁰ The arguments are elaborately constructed although the author claims that he is not a Bengali turned Tagore scholar.⁴¹

In an article entitled "Rabindranath Tagore and His Contemporary Relevance," the authors delve into Tagore's ideas of humanism, nationalism, internationalism, and their articulation in cultural and political issues, which are considered deeply relevant to our age of globalization.⁴² One of the authors, Uma Das Gupta, specializes in Tagore's thought on education and nationalism. She elucidates the close connection between the two fields as follows:

39 Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, *The Philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore*, pp. viii-ix.

40 Ashis Nandy, *The Illegitimacy of Nationalism: Rabindranath Tagore and the Politics of Self* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 1.

41 See note 23.

42 Uma Das Gupta and Anandarup Ray, "Rabindranath Tagore and His Contemporary Relevance." See: <http://www.parabaas.com/rabindranath/articles/pContemporaryTagore.html>.

[Tagore] hoped to institute an education for cultural understanding at two levels, between the country's alienated urban and rural populations and between India and the West. He believed that would be the self-respecting way of countering the humiliation of colonial rule and overcoming the isolation enforced by colonization.⁴³

Das Gupta also clarifies Tagore's different attitudes towards nationalism. In most cases, "Nationalism" with a capital "N" refers to a West-originated ideology that reduces people's will to mere efficient political and commercial functions, while "nationalism" with a lowercase "n" in a non-modern-Western context provides cohesion to a community of great racial and linguistic diversity like India.⁴⁴

Admittedly, Tagore's thinking on culture, society, and nationalism is profound enough for continuous exploration, but there are two things noteworthy in relevant discussions. First, Tagore is hardly treated as a poet,⁴⁵ second, even in this field issues are largely raised by Indians who are proficient in English,⁴⁶ and they are mainly addressing British readers for obvious historical reasons. Therefore, it can be said that while the simplistic understanding of Tagore's thought is elided in the new academic environment, the research paradigm

43 Uma Das Gupta (ed.), *The Oxford India Tagore: Selected Writings on Education and Nationalism* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. xxi. The same author dedicates a short biography to the relationship between Tagore's educational ideals and his particular views on nationalism. See Uma Das Gupta, *Rabindranath Tagore: A Biography* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004). A late biography highlights similar points of Tagore's life. Uma Das Gupta, *Rabindranath Tagore: An Illustrated Life* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2013).

44 Uma Das Gupta (ed.), *The Oxford India Tagore: Selected Writings on Education and Nationalism*, p. xxiii.

45 While the image of Tagore the poet is rather obscure in cultural and political issues, Tagore the novelist has received critical evaluation for unveiling conflicts in Indian nationalist movements and social problems. *Gora* (1910) and *The Home and the World* (1916) are his two most discussed novels.

46 For example, Amartya Mukhopadhyay, *Politics, Society and Colonialism: An Alternative Understanding of Tagore's Responses* (New Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 2010). A recent publication on this issue by a non-Indian author is Michael Collins' *Empire, Nationalism and the Postcolonial World: Rabindranath Tagore's Writings on History, Politics and Society* (London and New York: Routledge, 2011).

remains shaped by an Orientalist premise that addresses the problems of identity and representation.

Nearly all mentions above of the West are clearly equivalent to Britain. Tagore's last public lecture made shortly before his death, "Crisis in Civilisation," is a disillusioned indictment against the Western, chiefly English, manipulation of world politics.⁴⁷ While this illegitimate equivalence of the West with Britain is historically understandable, it also reinforces the dominance of the English language over the international forum on Tagore. As a consequence, discussions on colonialism and nationalism will likely remain mainstream for some time to come.

An interesting attribute of Tagore studies is their periodic or even spasmodic nature. Since Tagore's death in 1941, renewed interest in him is usually concomitant to commemorative events such as Tagore's centenary in 1961, his 125th anniversary in 1986 and, most recently, his 150th anniversary in 2011. Publications on Tagore cluster in the years around those events and the medium is primarily, although not exclusively, English. Amid this English literature, nevertheless, a considerable portion examines the reception of Tagore in different areas, thus providing a convenient way to observe Tagore's image in the non-British West. Responses are diverse indeed, given particular historical contexts in which different countries received the Indian luminary. For instance, we are told that post-WWI Germany was seeking a message from the Eastern "savior," Bulgarians were strongly sympathetic to Tagore's search for national dignity, West-oriented Hungarian intellectuals were quite aware of the Orientalist implications of Tagore's Nobel Prize, etc.⁴⁸ Significantly, from these periodic

47 Rabindranath Tagore, "Crisis in Civilisation," in Mohit K. Ray (ed.), *The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore, Volume VII: Lectures, Addresses*, pp. 980-986.

48 Martin Kämpchen, "Tagore's Receptions in Germany: The Story of a Rise from Rejection to World Literature Status," in Kathleen M. O'Connell and Joseph T. O'Connell (eds.), *Rabindranath Tagore: Reclaiming a Cultural Icon*, pp. 259-279; Alexander Shurbanov, "Tagore in Bulgaria," in *Rabindranath Tagore in Perspective* (Calcutta: Visva-Bharati, 1989), pp. 207-216; Imre Bangha, "Five Responses to Rabindranath Tagore in Hungary 1913-1914," in Amalendu Biswas, Christine Marsh, Kalyan Kundu (eds.), *Rabindranath Tagore: A Timeless*

tributes it can be discerned that publication of Tagore's works resurges towards the end of the 20th century in many countries, but that in not one of them has a new research paradigm crystallized as in the English-speaking world. For these countries, Tagore is a memory passed down from the 1910s and 1920s and inevitably identified with a mystic East.

3. Orientalist Approach to Tagore: Japan and China

In a Tagore-centered context, the West is often identified with Britain, while India occupies a pivotal role in relevant depictions of the East. Nonetheless, for geographical and historical reasons, Tagore was passionate in calling for Japan and China to make a unified Asia. Unique perspectives on Tagore's cultural vision have also formed in the two countries.

Tagore became known in Japan and China through his acclaim in the West, which means they, like Western countries, approached Tagore mainly through his mystic lyricism in English translation. Tagore's name first appeared in Japan because of the Nobel Prize;⁴⁹ in China, the earliest introduction to Tagore was published even before announcement of the Prize.⁵⁰ Nevertheless, since Tagore became an Eastern messenger from the beginning of his international career, when he headed for Japan and China in 1916 and 1924 respectively, what he tacitly assumed was this identity, although he always claimed himself foremost to be a poet.⁵¹

Mind (London: The Tagore Centre UK, 2011), pp. 1-15.

49 "Indo shijin no eiyo 印度詩人の榮譽," in *Yomiuri shinbun* 讀賣新聞 on November 16, 1913.

50 Qian Zhixiu 錢智修, "Taicer shi zhi renshengguan 台義爾氏之人生觀," in *Dongfang zazhi* 東方雜誌, 10, 4 (Oct., 1913), pp. 1-4.

51 Tagore paid several visits to both Japan and China, but the 1916 stay in Japan and 1924 stay in China were decisive in shaping his opinions of the two Asian neighbors and their responses to him.

Tagore's experiences in Japan helped sharpen his views on the East-West dichotomy, which for him was also the old-new division:

In that country the old world presents itself with some ideal of perfection [...]. And side by side, in the same soil, stands the modern world, which is stupendously big and powerful, but inhospitable.⁵²

The duality of Japanese society was a topic that Tagore dwelled on in his 1916 speeches delivered in Japan, and that later became one of the sections of *Nationalism*. Without much protest, Tagore referred to the negative image of Asia in modern Western eyes:

We have been repeatedly told, with some justification, that Asia lives in the past [...]. It was said of Asia that it could never move in the path of progress, its face was so inevitably turned backwards.⁵³

In the rather subdued atmosphere, "[o]ne morning the whole world looked up in surprise, when Japan broke through her walls of old habits in a night and came out triumphant."⁵⁴ However, Tagore refused to believe that Japan was able to modernize by imitating the West, and he made a critical distinction between modern as self-renewing and modern as alienating. While the former draws inspiration from tradition, the latter becomes subordinated to inhuman utility. Through this dialectic, the old and the new acquired meaning in terms of cultural resources rather than of technological advancement, which challenged the normative definition of modernity shaped by the view of linear progress. Therefore, Tagore appealed to the responsibility of Japan as pioneer in the East:

52 Rabindranath Tagore, "East and West," in *Creative Unity* (London: Macmillan, 1922), p. 97.

53 Rabindranath Tagore, "Nationalism in Japan," in *Nationalism* (San Francisco: The Book Club of California, 1917), p. 65.

54 *Ibid.*, p. 68.

"She must infuse the sap of a fuller humanity into the heart of modern civilization."⁵⁵ Of course, he did not forget that the West had its great tradition of humanity, but the profit-seeking nationalism largely crowded out the ideal, a tendency that Tagore also observed growing in Japan:

What is dangerous for Japan is, not the imitation of the outer features of the West, but the acceptance of the motive force of the Western nationalism as her own. Her social ideals are already showing signs of defeat at the hands of politics.⁵⁶

Tagore's message was not well received in Japan, which in 1916 was enjoying a rise in international status and developing a militarist pan-Asianism that sought to annex China after having acquired Taiwan and Korea. Taking a longer view, there were two important interlocutors who marked the beginning and end of Tagore's direct dialogue with the Japanese. The intervening forty years witnessed a change in Japan's Asian sentiments and policies.

Tagore's friendship with Okakura Kakuzō 岡倉覺三 (Okakura Tenshin 岡倉天心, 1863-1913), the author of *The Ideals of the East* and who coined the slogan of "Asia is one,"⁵⁷ began when the latter stayed in India for the year from 1901 to 1902. Although no documentation of their correspondence or conversations is available, Tagore remembered his Japanese friend cordially in a 1929 speech in Tokyo:

The voice of the East came from him to our young men. That was a significant fact, a memorable one in my own life. And he asked them to

55 *Ibid.*, p. 86.

56 *Ibid.*, p. 96.

57 Okakura Kakuzō, *The Ideals of the East*, in *Okakura Kakuzo: Collected English Writings* (Tokyo: Heibonsha Limited, Publishers, 1984), Vol. 1, p. 13.

make it their mission in life to give some great expression of the human spirit worthy of the East.⁵⁸

Tagore invoked the memory of Okakura here not for nostalgia's sake, but to engage in another round of preaching against imperialist Japan, which was deviating further and further from Okakura's ideal. Noguchi Yonejirō 野口米次郎 (1875-1947) was one of the "converts" from idealism to militarism. Being a member of the welcoming committee for Tagore's 1916 tour,⁵⁹ by 1938, Noguchi's pan-Asianism had grown so aggressive that he tried to convince Tagore of the necessity of the war against China:

But if you take the present war in China for the criminal outcome of Japan's surrender to the West, you are wrong, because, not being a slaughtering madness, it is, I believe, the inevitable means, terrible it is though, for establishing a new great world in the Asiatic continent [...].⁶⁰

Needless to say, their relationship soured, and thus ended Tagore's four-decade effort to appeal to Japan for Asian unity.

Slightly earlier than the correspondence with Noguchi, Tagore sent in 1937 a message of consolation to the Chinese people, whose country had been invaded by the Japanese. Tagore claimed that, by submitting itself to Western "scientific effrontery," Japan had lost its legitimacy to lead Asia into the modern era.⁶¹ In fact, as early as 1920 when Tagore had a conversation with the young Feng

58 Rabindranath Tagore, "On Oriental Culture and Japan's Mission," in Mohit K. Ray (ed.), *The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore, Volume VII: Lectures & Addresses*, p. 822.

59 This fact is made clear in Yamasaki Nobuko's "The Letters between Tagore and Noguchi, 1938," in Patrick Colm Hogan and Lalita Pandit (eds.), *Rabindranath Tagore: Universality and Tradition*, p. 41.

60 "Tagore and Noguchi," in Mohit K. Ray (ed.), *The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore, Volume VIII: Miscellaneous Writings*, p. 1135.

61 Rabindranath Tagore, "To the People of China," in Mohit K. Ray (ed.), *The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore, Volume VIII: Miscellaneous Writings*, p.1132.

Youlan 馮友蘭 (1895-1990) in New York, he had suggested that Chinese learn science quickly but be wary of the jingoism that was rising in Japan.⁶² Therefore, it was almost natural for Tagore to turn to China for a true unity of Asia, a journey he was to embark on a few years later, in 1924.

On this tour, Tagore kept reminding his Chinese audiences of the difficulty his Indian ancestors endured in bringing the philosophy of love to their land. This bond was even stronger than the one with Japan, as the Japanese received Buddhism mainly through China and Korea, not from India directly. He also often praised China's humanistic tradition:

You are the most long-lived race, because you have had centuries of wisdom nourished by your faith in goodness, not in the merely strong. This has given you your great past.⁶³

But the cruel fact remained that both India and China seemed to be overburdened with the past, to which Tagore had nothing to offer but spiritual consolation:

Let the morning of this new age dawn in the East, from which the great streams of idealism have sprung in the past [...]. Prove how, through the heroism of suffering and sacrifice—not weak submission—we can demonstrate our best wealth and strength.⁶⁴

Such a stance involved Tagore in a heated cultural dispute in early-twentieth-century China. There were three approaches being debated for China's

62 Feng Youlan 馮友蘭, "Yu Indu Taiguer tanhua: dongxiwenming zhi bijiaoguan 與印度泰谷爾談話——東西文明之比較觀," in Sansongtang quanji 三松堂全集 (Zhengzhou: Henan People's Publishing House, 2001), Vol. 11, pp. 6-7.

63 Rabindranath Tagore, "Talks in China," in Mohit K. Ray (ed.), *The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore, Volume IV: Essays*, p. 758.

64 *Ibid.*, p. 750.

future: pro-Westernization, anti-Westernization, and various combinations of eclecticism. While Tagore was largely ignorant of this situation, as an Asian celebrity he was easily idolized on the one hand, and became a convenient target of criticism on the other.⁶⁵ When some Chinese admirers celebrated Tagore's 64th birthday in Beijing on May, 8, 1924, Liang Qichao 梁啟超 (1873-1929) presented him with a Chinese name, "Zhu Zhendan" (竺震旦), which was a combination of the old appellations of India and China and most symbolic of the ancient East. The joy of this celebration, however, was not shared by many people. Politically, both leftists and rightists found Tagore's "heroism of suffering and sacrifice" unacceptable. What they did not understand was that Tagore had once been an activist in the Indian independence movement. But this aspect found little place in his admirers' eulogies and in his own grand narrative of East-West civilizations.⁶⁶ Culturally, Tagore's tendency to dress everything in idealism caused much dissatisfaction. For example, Chen Duxiu 陳獨秀 (1879-1942) pointed out that there were two fundamental mistakes in Tagore's argument: "First, he misunderstands the value of science and material civilization; second, he leads Eastern countries the wrong way for liberation."⁶⁷ In brief, what most concerned the Chinese people in the early-twentieth-century was physical power and national independence.

Complementary to the experiences in the West, where Tagore faced a Eurocentric version of Orientalism, Japan and China provided him with necessary instances to base his own version of Orientalism on spiritual

65 A contemporary report referred to this unhealthy phenomenon. See Dong Fengming 董鳳鳴, "Taigeer zhi zai Nanjing 泰戈爾之在南京," in Sun Yixue 孫宜學 (ed.), *Shiren de jingshen: Taigeer zai Zhongguo 詩人的精神：泰戈爾在中國* (Nanchang: Jiangxi Higher Education Press, 2009), pp. 29-30.

66 Lu Xun 魯迅 (1881-1936), a leading leftist writer, came to realize only a decade later that Tagore was sufficiently politically-minded. See his "Masha yu pengsha 罵殺與捧殺," in *Lu Xun quanji 魯迅全集* (Beijing: People's Literature Publishing House, 2005), Vol. 5, pp. 615-617.

67 Chen Duxiu 陳獨秀, "Ping Taigeer zai Hangzhou Shanghai de yanshuo 評太戈爾在杭州上海的演說," in Ren Jianshu 任建樹 et al. (eds.), *Chen Duxiu zhuzhuxuan 陳獨秀著作選* (Shanghai: Shanghai People's Publishing House, 1993), Vol.2, pp. 663-667.

superiority. Tagore's controversial visits to Japan and China have been examined at length by Stephen Hay in his 1970 monograph, which astutely indicates how Tagore inherited and revamped the East-West paradigm that was *de facto* of Western origin.⁶⁸ Critically, while Edward Said did not mention Tagore's arguments in his *Orientalism*, the issue of the West's biased representation of the East was raised in an international forum by Tagore more than half a century before Said's groundbreaking work.

Actually, Tagore did not possess genuine knowledge of either Japan or China; he simply adapted his notions of them to an overarching framework:

Tagore and other Bengali religious leaders had answered this question [of East-West dichotomy] by stressing modernized traditions of Indian religious and philosophical thought, leaving the direction of political, economic, and military affairs to Westerners, many of whom readily acknowledged the superior spirituality of India's sages and seers [...]. Such a division of labor seemed to Tagore to work so well that he visualized the whole of Asia concentrating its energies on cultural and spiritual pursuits.⁶⁹

Nevertheless, as an engaged observer, Tagore differentiated his messages to Japan and China, testifying to the structure of modern world history in which Japan and China lay on the opposite sides of "modernization." More importantly,

68 Stephen Hay, "Introduction," in *Asian Ideas of East and West: Tagore and His Critics in Japan, China, and India* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1970), pp. 1-11. Some of the interpretations of this book are disputable, but its narrative structure and focus of analysis become normative for many ensuing studies. Apart from being a monograph of Tagore studies, Hay's book is also known as one of the earliest works that deal with the historic pan-Asianist ideology. See "Introduction," in Sven Saaler and Christopher W. A. Szpilman (eds.), *Pan-Asianism: A Documentary History, Volume 1: 1850-1920* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2011), p. 3.

69 Stephen Hay, *Asian Ideas of East and West: Tagore and His Critics in Japan, China, and India*, p. 82.

some thought-provoking issues that can be addressed from an Orientalist viewpoint derive from his interaction with the two Asian countries.

Firstly, in most biographies of Tagore written by Indians or Westerners, his Eastern journeys constitute nothing more than passing episodes. This treatment is almost inevitable since Tagore emerged as an Eastern prophet through Western acclaim and imagination. The Japanese and Chinese episodes became possible owing to the laurels from the West, against which Tagore kept revising his cultural perspective throughout his life. Neither Japan nor China critically influenced Tagore's worldview or mainstream studies on him.

Secondly, that Tagore's message was not taken seriously in his time in either Japan or China does not imply that those countries were not interested in a pan-Asian project. Just as Tagore fervently celebrated the Japanese victory over Russia in 1905, his being awarded of the Nobel Prize in 1913 also aroused a sense of pride in Japan and China. What alienated Tagore from Japanese and Chinese intellectuals was his idealist conception of Asia, which was against Japan's offensive pan-Asianism on the one hand, and adverse to the doubly defensive version of China's Asianism against both Japan and the West on the other.

Thirdly, the change of world politics gradually made Tagore's previously unheeded message relevant to post-war Japan and China. Japan's ruinous defeat in WWII reminded some scholars of Tagore's fierce criticism of nationalism, which was revisited as early as 1961 in the commemorative volume celebrating Tagore's 100th anniversary.⁷⁰ Furthermore, as devastating defeat brought with it the conviction in the Japanese mind that peace must be maintained at any cost, Tagore in his role as a messenger of Eastern humanity has become a frequent

70 Tagōru kinenkai タゴール記念會 (ed.), *Tagōru seitan hyakunensai kinen ronbunshū* [*Rabindranath Tagore: Commemorative Essays to Rabindranath Centenary Festival*] タゴール生誕百年祭記念論文集 (Tokyo: Tagore Memorial Association, 1961).

subject.⁷¹ China, too, has its own convention of Tagore studies. While a great deal of discussion is on the controversial 1924 trip that was deeply related to modern Chinese intellectual history,⁷² more and more scholars are reviewing the great impact Tagore had on the New Literature Movement of China in the 1910s and 1920s, as well as his contribution to revitalizing cultural interaction between China and India. With the rise of both countries on the world stage towards the end of the 20th century, there have been some attempts to reexamine Tagore's proposition of an Eastern civilization in the context of globalization, which aims to counter the long-prevalent Western paradigm of modernity.⁷³ Undeniably, Tagore's multifaceted relevance to the contemporary world finds strong evidence in Japan and China, but concerns there are chiefly locally or regionally oriented, with the identity and implication of the East lingering in scholars' minds.⁷⁴

Last but not least, just as the West refers to a much wider domain than Britain, Tagore's Asian experiences were by no means exhausted by Japan and China. Nine years earlier than Stephen Hay's work, there was a 1961 volume

71 Also visible in the 1961 commemorative volume. A recent example is the 2001 symposium on "Rediscovering Tagore and Gandhi" held in Tokyo, whose records are published under the same title. See Sōsō no jiyū o susumeru kai 葬送の自由をすすめる會 (ed.), *Tagōru to Gandi saihakken* タゴールとガンディー再発見 (Kyoto: Hōzōkan, 2001). From August 2011, the monthly *Todai* 灯台 also publishes in installments a dialogue between Ikeda Daisaku 池田大作 and Bharati Mukerjee, which is entitled "Arata na chikyū bunmei no uta o: Tagōru to sekai shimin o kataru 新たな地球文明の詩を—タゴールと世界市民を語る," *Todai* 灯台, 611 (Aug., 2011), pp. 44-59.

72 Ji Xianlin 季羨林 (1911-2009) had touched upon this topic in a 1961 article. See "Taigeer yu Zhongguo: jinian Taigeer dansheng yibai zhounian 泰戈爾與中國：紀念泰戈爾誕生一百周年," in *Ji Xianlin Wenji* 季羨林文集 (Jiangxi: Jiangxi Education Publishing House, 1996), Vol. 5, pp. 180-213. Stephen Hay's 1970 monograph contains a detailed account of Tagore's 1924 visit to China, but this issue continues to attract Chinese scholars. Ai Dan's 艾丹 *Taigeer yu Zhongguo wusishiqi sixiangwenhua lunzheng* [Debating and Discussing: Tagore and China] 泰戈爾與中國五四時期思想文化論爭 (Beijing: People's Publishing House, 2010) is a latest example.

73 Some articles collected in a 2011 volume, *Tagore and China*, take this approach. See note 28. Tagore also features in such books as Tang Chung 譚中 (ed.), *Zhongyin datong: Lixiang yu shixian* [CHINDIA: Idealism and Realization] 中印大同：理想與實現 (Yinchuan: Ningxia People's Publishing House, 2007).

74 This paper reviews the general trends of Tagore studies in both Japan and China; greater details are provided in separate articles.

discussing Tagore's Asian ideal from the viewpoint of his visit to Thailand.⁷⁵ Tagore's travelogues composed during the Southeast and West Asia trips also provide an alternative to reviewing his own East-West paradigm. Furthermore, although the poet never visited Taiwan or Korea, people in the two Japanese colonies found great inspiration from his anti-colonialist thought. For contemporary Tagore studies, his Eastern experiences have not yet been fully explored, and fewer critiques of him have been collected from Eastern than from Western sources. This asymmetry is, perhaps, more evidence of the so-called Euro-centrism that informs Orientalism.

Conclusion: Orientalism as an Omnipresent Factor

This paper delves into Tagore's thinking, public image, and studies on him from the perspective of Orientalism, contextualizing him not as a cultural figure representing the East during his time, but as a case in modern intellectual history that witnessed different approaches to the East.

As specified in the introduction, what Orientalism entails is an epistemological distinction between the East and the West, with the latter usually assuming an active role. Following this broad definition, the first section delineates the process of Tagore's becoming (represented as) an Eastern mystic, which laid the backdrop for most concomitant discussions on the Indian poet. While the second section contrasts the diametrically opposed attitudes towards Tagore in India and in the West today, the third section also presupposes a Western "other" against which early-twentieth-century Japan and China adjusted their respective views of the East or Asia. In this concluding section, I will summarize the complicated function of Orientalism on three interconnected

75 Shakti Das Gupta, *Tagore's Asian Outlook* (Calcutta: Nava Bharati, 1961).

levels, that is, the mythologizing of Tagore, the crystallization of problematics of Tagore studies, and the emergence of the East as an issue.

The first level. In 1913, the West observed Tagore as a figure who "in conformity with the express wording of Alfred Nobel's last will and testament, had during the current year, written the finest poems 'of an idealistic tendency'."⁷⁶ By 1961, nevertheless, one scholar had already indicated that "[s]tudies of Tagore's poetry have been less numerous and less valuable than studies of his mysticism, of his educational ideal and of his humanistic philosophy,"⁷⁷ which testifies to the change from Tagore the poet to Tagore the messenger delineated above.

According to Amartya Sen, central to Tagore's educational ideals and humanistic philosophy was his belief in freedom and reasoning. It was out of aversion to forced discipline that Tagore dropped school in his early teens; such an experience inspired him to create an environment for pupils to enjoy open-air lessons—a method he claimed inherited the spirit of the ancient forest civilization of India—and to cultivate their genuine affinity to both Nature and the human world.⁷⁸ Furthermore, contrary to common impressions, Tagore was an enthusiastic defender of reasoning. What distinguished him from optimistic scientists was his awareness of and even appreciation for the limits of human reason, which were all too often mistaken as uncritical mysticism.⁷⁹ Imaginably, in the most unfavorable situation, which was often the case, Tagore tended to infuriate both Indians and non-Indians at the same time. Viewed from one end,

76 Horst Frenz (ed.), *Nobel Lectures, Literature 1901-1967*, p. 127.

77 Pierre Fallion, "Tagore in the West," in *A Centenary Volume: Rabindranath Tagore 1861-1961* (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1961), p. 319. This commemorative volume is not to be confused with another one published in Japan in the same year (see note 70).

78 Tagore expressed this ideal frequently. A complete explanation can be found in his introduction to W. W. Pearson's *Shantiniketan: The Bolpur School of Rabindranath Tagore* (London: Macmillan, 1916), pp. 17-24.

79 In addition to "Tagore and His India," Amartya Sen also discusses this issue in his introduction to the newly translated autobiography of Tagore, *Boyhood Days* (Delhi: Puffin, 2006), pp. xii-xvi.

Isaiah Berlin was correct in pointing out "some have thought Tagore to have yielded too much to the West;" viewed from the other, Tagore could barely rid himself of the label of an ultra-conservative. In a 1924 lecture in Beijing, Tagore said that "[f]or your people I am obsolete, and therefore useless, and for mine, newfangled and therefore obnoxious. I do not know which is true."⁸⁰

Politically speaking, insistence on freedom and reasoning also characterized Tagore's pursuit of an independent India: he maintained that national liberation must be earned through dignity, intellect, and cooperation, rather than through begging for mercy or through violence, a stance that earned him the title of "dissenter among dissenters."⁸¹ In contrast to this complexity was the lustrous guise of Eastern mysticism that was demanded by temporary Western sentiment. In this capacity Tagore once enjoyed unprecedented popularity. Although not as remarkable as his overnight rise, his reputation had clearly faded away on the global setting before his death in 1941.

The second level. As Edward Thompson indicated in the 1920s, Tagore's romanticism—much diluted in translation—was bound to succumb to a modernist mode. Tagore the poet never resumed his past glory; nonetheless, the continual flow of Tagore studies since his death, albeit sometimes sparse, has witnessed recurrent interest in his humanism and idealism. A brief survey of the publications on Tagore in recent decades shows that many of these works elaborate on "the multiform ways in which Tagore's life and work relate to the challenges of today."⁸²

80 Rabindranath Tagore, "Talks in China," in Mohit K. Ray (ed.), *The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore, Volume IV: Essays*, p. 773.

81 Ashis Nandy, *The Illegitimacy of Nationalism: Rabindranath Tagore and the Politics of Self*, p. xi.

82 Margaret Chatterjee, "Welcome Address," in Bhudeb Chaudhuri and K. G. Subramanyan (eds.), *Rabindranath Tagore and the Challenges of Today* (Shimla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 1988), p. 3.

There are some chief categories among these studies of Tagore's relevance. Firstly, Tagore is portrayed as a "myriad-minded man," profound but full of contradictions. Such an image of Tagore invites studies from different viewpoints, mainly by Indian authors, accompanied by a growing global interest in Tagore. Secondly, complementary to Tagore the writer and thinker, his career as an educator and village reformer also attracts discussion. What is in question is less the result of these activities than the philosophy embodied therein, which Tagore claimed was passed down from ancient India. Thirdly, Tagore constitutes a focus in postcolonial discourse. The above three categories form a continuum of inquiries, with Indians often stressing Tagore's versatility and practical actions and Westerners mainly observing him through a cultural veil or theoretical prism. While the Indians are the closest to Tagore's multiple legacies, the long history of colonial rule obliges them to address the issue in terms of dialogue or even debate with Western countries, especially Britain. Paradoxically, as Tagore owed his status as national icon to the West, when Indians try to reclaim his profound relevance from general oblivion, they must also repeatedly grapple with the East-West bottleneck. Lastly, approaching the East-West paradigm from another angle, many Japanese and Chinese today show a renewed interest in Tagore's appeal for preservation of cultural identity, which was made a century ago when East Asia as a whole had just embarked on the journey of modernization.

The third level. Actually, the rise of Asia in our global village is a result of information technology, strategic deployment, and market mechanisms. Genuine consideration of cultural diversity does not seem to occupy a position high on the agenda. It was to break through this sloganized Asia that one author attempts to review the Asian ideals shared by Tagore and Okakura Kakuzō in the first years of the 20th century.⁸³ As Okakura died in 1913, before Tagore's Nobel Prize, their interaction was highly intellectual and spiritual, with only slight political

83 Rustom Bharucha, *Another Asia: Rabindranath Tagore & Okakura Tenshin* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. xv-xvii.

interference. But a critical question is: how much did Tagore know about the Asia outside of India?

For instance, East Asia, the part of Asia dearest to Tagore, contains China and Japan as its two main agents; Korea, Vietnam, and Taiwan are also indispensable to the making of its regional history. Gaining increasing prominence today, this region is assumed to have shared a common cultural inheritance, thereby forming an organic entity. While not denying the historical relationship, it is also evident that East Asia became a rather artificial slogan proposed by imperial Japan from the 1920s, with a view to tightening its control over neighboring areas to compete with Western powers. However, twists and turns of this history were largely unknown to Tagore, who was born in a colonized India and whose cultural vision entailed an elite Indian-style demarcation between spiritual and material affairs, leaving the right of the latter to the West. Given the different historical backgrounds of India, Japan, and China, it was only natural that Tagore's overarching appeal to an Eastern spirituality could hardly win general sympathy.

Despite his lack of specific knowledge of other Asian countries, Tagore was keenly aware of the problem of Asia as an idea. In the 1929 Tokyo speech he claimed that:

When we talk about European civilization, we use a term which is real in its meaning, it is an undoubted fact. But when they glibly talk of the Oriental mind and culture, they do not realize that we have not yet been able to develop a universal mind, a great background of Oriental cultures. Our cultures are too scattered.⁸⁴

84 Rabindranath Tagore, "On Oriental Culture and Japan's Mission," in Mohit K. Ray (ed.), *The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore, Volume VII: Lectures & Addresses*, p. 826.

It is unclear why Tagore chose the title "On Oriental Cultures and Japan's mission." The word "oriental" appeared only sporadically in his English writings; the expressions Tagore preferred were "Asian" or "Eastern" as previously shown. In any case, it might be safe to conclude that "Asia," "the East," and "the Orient" were all synonymous to Tagore, and the choice between them was stylistic. But what is clear is the dichotomy between "we"—the Asians—and "they"—the Europeans. Although this distinction is traceable to Tagore's early life, his sudden rise to fame helped crystallize his view in more irreconcilable terms. He clearly told Feng Youlan in 1920 that the difference between Eastern and Western civilizations is "a difference of kind, rather than of degree."⁸⁵

As Krishna Kripalani in his biography of Tagore says: "To the Western world Tagore's chief significance lies in the new dimension he gave to its understanding of the East [...]. Now and again a western thinker or scholar drew attention to some old literary classic or religious teacher and tributes were generously offered to the ancient wisdom of the East. But the general attitude was one of superiority and the basic incentive of exploitation."⁸⁶ The extent to which Tagore "enlightened" Westerners concerning the East should not be exaggerated, but this 1962 biography poignantly reveals the essential Orientalist bias embedded in East-West exchanges prior to the early 20th century, if not after. All in all, Tagore in his international career contributed to making Asia a topic. In categorizing India, China, and Japan together as "eastern Asia," and categorizing Persia and Arabia together as "western Asia," what he had in mind for contrast was an integrated West, a West that qualified him to speak for the East.⁸⁷

It is striking to find how limited in terms of subjects and content Tagore's Japan and China speeches were—two countries he wanted the most to

85 Feng Youlan, "Yu Indu Taiguer tanhua: dongxiwenming zhi bijiaoguan 與印度泰谷爾談話——東西文明之比較觀," in *Sansongtang quanji* 三松堂全集, Vol. 11, p. 4.

86 Krishna Kripalani, *Rabindranath Tagore: A Biography* (Kolkata: Visva-Bharati, 2008), p. xx.

87 Feng Youlan, "Yu Indu Taiguer tanhua: dongxiwenming zhi bijiaoguan 與印度泰谷爾談話——東西文明之比較觀," in *Sansongtang quanji* 三松堂全集, Vol.11, p. 4.

incorporate into a unity of Asia. Tagore's versatility is only visible through his conversations with Western thinkers such as Albert Einstein (1879-1955) and Romain Rolland (1866-1944). While these dialogues rambled from topic to topic including the arts, education, sciences, philosophy, and logic, Tagore's message to Japan and China frequently repeated the motif of East-West dichotomy. Perhaps one can say that, at least for Tagore, Asia was created in the process of discourse, which was a strategy of self-Orientalism to counter Western hegemony in the early 20th century.^{88♦}

88 With the resurgence of Tagore studies in recent years, comparisons of his Asian project to those of other Asian intellectuals have increased. See Adam K. Webb, "The Countermodern Moment: A World-Historical Perspective on the Thought of Rabindranath Tagore, Muhammad Iqbal, and Liang Shuming," in *Journal of World History*, 19, 2 (June, 2008), pp. 189-212; Pankaj Mishra, *From the Ruins of Empire: The Revolt Against the West and the Remaking of Asia* (London: Allen Lane, 2012).

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