

Cultural Identity Formation in Kazuo Ishiguro's *an Artist of the Floating World* in the Realm of Jan Assmann Theory

Noshin Jamali¹, Mohammad Motiee^{2*}, Seyed Reza Ebrahimi³

¹ PhD Candidate in English Literature, Department of English Language and Literature, Central Tehran Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran.

²Assistant Professor, Department of English Language and Literature, Central Tehran Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran.

³Assistant Professor, English Language Department, Sanandaj Branch, Islamic Azad University, Sanandaj, Iran

*Corresponding author

Abstract

Kazuo Ishiguro is a modern British novelist of Japanese descent known for his poignant explorations of memory, identity, and the human experience that blends elements of Japanese and Western cultures through reflection on the complexities of the human condition. *An Artist of the Floating World* explores the intricacies of cultural identity formation in post-World War II Japan through the journey of Masuji Ono, a former artist grappling with his past amidst a society in transition. The novel delves into how personal and collective histories, as well as the interplay between memory and societal changes, shape one's cultural identity. This study utilizes Jan Assmann's cultural memory theory as a lens to delve into the formation of cultural identity within Ishiguro's novel. By analyzing how the text reflects and influences collective memory, shapes cultural identity, and engages with processes of remembering and forgetting, the research aims to uncover the novel's contribution to cultural identity formation. Through examining the representation of historical events, social narratives, and cultural values, this paper seeks to elucidate how memory impacts the construction and transmission of cultural identity. The key findings of this study reveal Ishiguro's exploration of cultural identity and memory post-World War II, emphasizing the East-West clash's influence on Japanese identity transformation. Themes of guilt, shame, and redemption underscore the war's enduring impact on individuals, while the intertwining of personal and collective histories shapes cultural identity in which memory emerges as a powerful reminder of history's role in shaping cultural identity in a dynamic world.

Keywords: Cultural identity, Collective histories, Cultural memory theory, Jan Assmann, Kazuo Ishiguro, Societal rebuilding.

Introduction

In Kazuo Ishiguro's novel, *An Artist of the Floating World*, the protagonist Ono Masuji deals with the complexities of individual and cultural identity in postwar Japan. Set against the backdrop of the Americanization of Japanese culture and the generational divide that emerged during this period of intense upheaval, Ono's internal conflict and sense of guilt as a former nationalist propagandist artist reflect larger themes of self-deception and repression. The novel explores the impact of World War II on Japanese identity, highlighting the divide between the traditional identity pre-war and the changing cultural identity post-war. Through Ono's journey of self-evaluation and reflection, Ishiguro delves into the intricacies of identity formation in a society undergoing profound cultural change (21).

This paper delves into the plot of Kazuo Ishiguro's novel, *An Artist of the Floating World*, and explores how the narrative unfolds to examine the shaping cultural identity. The themes of Japanese Identity before WWII, transformation of national and cultural identity post-war, and the dilemma caused by cultures are central to understanding the protagonist, Ono Masuji's, journey. As the nation transitions into a new political and ideological landscape post-war, Ono grapples with his past as a nationalist propagandist artist and the role his actions played in endorsing a now shameful ideology. The themes of self-deception, memory, and desire come to the forefront as Ono struggles to reconcile his past with the present reality of liberal democratic ideas. Through Ono's introspection, contradictory stories emerge, shedding light on the complexities of burying unwelcome memories. However, amidst this turmoil, Ono finds hope in the younger generation, symbolized by the cheerful young people walking across a bridge between two worlds. This optimistic outlook for the future represents a transmutation of the motifs Ono once painted, offering a glimpse of a floating world filled with hope and promise for the next generation.

This paper addresses Kazuo Ishiguro's novel, *An Artist of the Floating World*, and delves into the intricate themes of cultural identity, exploring the protagonist Ono Masuji's journey of self-discovery amidst a backdrop of post-war Japan. Two main questions that this paper aims to answer are: How does Ono Masuji's self-discovery in post-war Japan reflect the evolution of Japanese cultural identity through the lens of memory? And how do the clashes between traditional Japanese values and Western ideals impact the characters' navigation of their past involvement in nationalist propaganda, considering the role of memory? To do this, first, the novel's plot will be presented. Then, the evolution of Japanese identity before World War II, the transformative process of national and cultural identity in the aftermath of the war, and the complex dilemmas that arise from the clash of cultures will be discussed. As the nation undergoes a seismic shift in its political and ideological background, Ono contends with the repercussions of his past as a nationalist propagandist artist, forcing him to confront the role he played in promoting a now discredited ideology.

The themes of self-deception, memory, and desire surface as Ono struggles to come to terms with his past actions in light of the new liberal democratic ideals taking hold. Through Ono's introspection, conflicting narratives emerge, highlighting the challenges of burying painful memories. However, amidst this inner turmoil, Ono finds solace and optimism in the younger generation, symbolized by the vibrant and hopeful youth bridging the gap between two worlds. This hopeful vision for the future serves as a poignant transformation of the artistic motifs Ono once painted, offering a glimpse of a floating world brimming with potential and promise for the next generation.

Plot of the Novel

An Artist of the Floating World delves into the life of Masuji Ono, a former artist, as he struggles with his past and the consequences of his career choices. The narrative shifts between various periods in Ono's life, focusing on his family, career, and the aftermath of World War II. A pivotal thread in the story revolves around Ono's efforts to arrange a marriage for his daughter, Noriko, following a previous failed negotiation. To bolster his family's reputation, Ono seeks support from old acquaintances, hoping for positive testimonials that will counteract the shadow of his controversial past.

The novel begins by exploring Ono's early struggles, including his father's opposition to his artistic ambitions and his decision to pursue his passion despite familial expectations. Ono recounts his artistic journey, from his apprenticeship under Moriyama to his eventual divergence influenced by a man named Chishu Matsuda, who introduced him to political engagement. This shift led to a rupture with Moriyama and a period of creating nationalistic art during the war, ultimately culminating in Ono's involvement in censoring unpatriotic works.

The aftermath of the war finds Ono contending with guilt, particularly regarding his betrayal of his student Kuroda, as well as the deaths of his wife and son. The narrative also delves into Ono's complex feelings towards the younger generation, his struggle with guilt, and his evolving perspective on his past actions. The story concludes with Noriko's successful marriage and Ono's gradual acceptance of his past, finding solace in his family and the changing world around him. In the end, Ono comes to terms with his past, finding comfort in the reassurance from his daughter Setsuko and the realization that his art, while not influential enough to cause harm, still held value.

His journey concludes with a newfound sense of fulfillment, as he shifts his focus towards his grandson and reconciles with the 'floating world' he once resented.

Objective of the Study

The objectives of this study encompass a comprehensive analysis of Kazuo Ishiguro's novel, *An Artist of the Floating World*, with a focus on how the narrative unfolds to examine the shaping of cultural identity in post-World War II Japan. The study aims to delve into the complexities of memory and cultural identity through the protagonist Ono Masuji's journey of self-discovery in a rapidly changing socio-political landscape. By utilizing Jan Assmann's cultural memory theory as a foundational framework, the study seeks to explore how the novel interweaves collective memory and individual experiences to illuminate the evolution of Japanese cultural identity. Central to this exploration is an investigation into how the text engages with processes of remembering and forgetting, and their profound effects on the construction and transmission of cultural identity in the aftermath of war.

Furthermore, the study endeavors to analyze the representation of historical events, social narratives, and cultural values within the novel to uncover their role in shaping post-war Japanese identity. Special attention is given to Ishiguro's exploration of themes such as guilt, shame, and redemption, highlighting their significance in understanding the enduring impact of World War II on individuals and the broader transformation of Japanese identity.

A key aspect of the study involves examining the influence of the East-West clash on Japanese identity transformation and the intricate navigation of traditional Japanese values and Western ideals by the characters, particularly in relation to their past involvement in nationalist propaganda. Through a nuanced exploration of these themes, the study aims to elucidate how memory operates as a potent force in the construction of cultural identity within the dynamic and challenging context of post-war Japan.

Research Questions

The following questions are related to the findings provided about Kazuo Ishiguro's *An Artist of the Floating World* and its exploration of cultural identity formation in post-World War II Japan through the character Masuji Ono:

1. How does Jan Assmann's cultural memory theory illuminate the formation of cultural identity in Ishiguro's novel, highlighting the interplay between personal memories, historical events, and societal influences in shaping post-war collective identities?
2. In what ways do societal expectations and historical events influence individuals' struggles to reconcile personal values with the changing cultural landscape, shedding light on the complexities of cultural identity construction?
3. How does memory and personal introspection shape collective identities in Ishiguro's portrayal of characters like Ono Masuji?
4. How does character like Ono Masuji transform as he confronts his past actions and come to terms with consequences in the context of post-war Japan's cultural identity formation?

Theoretical Framework and Methodology

The concept of collective memory was first introduced by the French sociologist Émile Durkheim in the late 19th century. Durkheim argued that collective memory refers to the shared beliefs, values, traditions, and memories that bind together a social group or society. He emphasized the role of collective memory in creating a sense of solidarity and cohesion among individuals within a group, as well as in shaping the group's identity and values.

Maurice Halbwachs expanded on Émile Durkheim's concept of collective memory by emphasizing the importance of social groups and interactions in shaping individual memories. Halbwachs argued that our memories are not just personal recollections, but are also influenced and shaped by the communities to which we belong. He posited

that individuals draw on collective memory, which is the shared memories, traditions, and experiences of a group or society, to construct and reinforce their own memories.

Maurice Halbwachs, in his theory of collective memory, proposed that social groups are essential for localizing memories. From a young age, a person is consistently in the presence of the community in which they were born. According to Halbwachs in his *On Collective Memory*, "[n]o memory is possible outside the frameworks used by people living in society to determine and retrieve their recollections." (43) Therefore, an individual is always a part of different social groups throughout their life, whether that be family, politics, religion, nationality, or others. Belonging to a group can be a choice, however, there are times when it is not up to the individual and they may not realize they are part of a social group. According to Halbwachs, these groups offer a structure for memories to be integrated into by individuals. Halbwachs contends in *The Collective Memory* that individuals can be part of multiple groups simultaneously, stating that "it is individuals as group members who remember" (48).

Jan Assmann and Aleida Assmann, German Egyptologists and cultural theorists, further developed Maurice Halbwachs' theory of collective memory by exploring the concept of cultural memory. They expanded on Halbwachs' ideas by emphasizing the role of culture and history in shaping collective memory, with a focus on how societies construct and transmit memories over time. In his "Collective Memory and Cultural Identity", Jan Assmann distances his idea from Halbwachs' "Communicative Memory" as follows:

Just as the communicative memory is characterized by its proximity to the everyday, cultural memory is characterized by its distance from the everyday. Distance from the everyday (transcendence) marks its temporal horizon. Cultural memory has its fixed point; its horizon does not change with the passing of time. These fixed points are fateful events of the past, whose memory is maintained through cultural formation (texts, rites, monuments) and institutional communication (recitation, practice, observance). We call these 'figures of memory.' (128-129)

According to Assmann, cultural memory is a dynamic process that changes over time and influences individual and group identities, as well as societal values and beliefs. He differentiates between communicative memory, which involves the casual sharing of memories within a society, and cultural memory, which refers to structured forms of memory transmission like monuments, rituals, and historical narratives. In his "Communicative and Cultural Memory", Jan Assmann defines culture memory as follows:

Cultural memory is an institution. It is exteriorized, objectified, and stored away in symbolic forms that, unlike the sounds of words or the appearance of gestures, are stable and situation-transcendent. They may be transferred from one situation to another and transmitted from one generation to another. Unlike communicative memory, cultural memory is disembodied. In order to function as memory, however, its symbolic forms must not only be preserved but also circulated and re-embodied in a society. The disembodied status of cultural memory is another reason why it was not recognized as a form of memory until recently. (17)

Memory not only serves as the foundation for constructing both individual and cultural identity but also plays a significant role in interpersonal interactions, as individuals utilize past details to authenticate the images they project. Acknowledging the vital function of memories in social relationships, Kenneth Gergen characterizes memory as a "form of social skill" (101), while Jan Assmann views memory as the "backbone of identity" (qtd. in Birke 1). Researching memory involves various disciplines and fosters collaboration between different fields, making it an interdisciplinary effort with broad scope. This paper aims to explore the contribution of cultural memory and its influence on shaping cultural identity in Kazuo Ishiguro's second novel, *An Artist of the Floating World*, within the framework of Jan Assmann's theory.

Review of Literature

An Artist of the Floating World by Kazuo Ishiguro has garnered scholarly attention for its intricate portrayal of memory and its influence on personal and collective identities. While several articles have delved into the exploration of memory in the novel, particularly in relation to characters' memory and narrative structure, a limited number have focused specifically on how memory contributes to shaping cultural identity within the text. The followings are a few related studies:

In "Construction And Deconstruction of The Nation and Nationality in Kazuo Ishiguro's *An Artist of The Floating World* and *The Remains of The Day*," Hilal Dođru Bakar emphasized the comparative manner in how the nation and nationality are foregrounded as constructs in Kazuo Ishiguro's *An Artist of the Floating World* and *The Remains of the Day*. How Ishiguro's novels construct and deconstruct "Japanese-ness" and "Englishness" will be explored in the light of the theories of Benedict Anderson and Homi Bhabha. The research investigates the imperial national identity formation of the unreliable narrators in these novels, both of which conclude with the narrators' disillusionment because of alterations in how the national community is imagined.

Silvia Tellini in "Identity and Nation in Kazuo Ishiguro's *An Artist of the Floating World*" delves into the themes of guilt, responsibility, self-deception, and generational conflict through the character of Ono in Kazuo Ishiguro's novel *An Artist of the Floating World*. The article sheds light on the challenges of reconciling personal and societal responsibilities during times of cultural upheaval, emphasizing the importance of self-reflection, acknowledgment of past mistakes, and the pursuit of redemption and understanding for individuals like Ono who grapple with the repercussions of their actions on personal and familial relationships in the aftermath of historical tumult.

In their study, "Cultural Identity in Kazuo Ishiguro's *An Artist of the Floating World*", Sun Yanping and Wang Fengyu from Zhejiang University highlight the clash of traditional Japanese cultural identity with American influence post-WWII. The paper discusses how the protagonist, Ono Masuji, struggles with adapting to shifting cultural identities, leading to a dilemma between Japan's "shame culture" and America's "sin culture."

Sofia Man's "Memory and Place in Kazuo Ishiguro's *An Artist of the Floating World*" has focused on the diverse narrative techniques that this novel encompasses, to show that memory serves as a medium for the narrator to understand his past in order to assimilate into the present.

Richard Pedot in "Revision of Visions Past, or" the Texture of Memory" investigates the attempt of character of Kazuo Ishiguro's *An Artist of the Floating World* in rewriting history, redeeming the past mistake by recalling them publicly by memory.

In "Culture as Industry in Kazuo Ishiguro's *An Artist of the Floating World* (1986)" Zöhre Bař Korkmaz investigates changes in Japanese society and culture depicted in Ishiguro's novel using examples from Ono's grandson Ichiro's cinematic experiences, which show us the Americanization process in occupied Japan in light of Adorno's theory of the "culture industry."

Jingxi He in "A Long Anxiety Dream: The Absence and Subversion of Identity in Kazuo Ishiguro's *An Artist of the Floating World*." discuss the theme of the absence and subversion of identity in the light of imagined post-war Japan and using unreliable narratives and the writer's own anxieties implied behind the context of his personal goal of so-called "universal values", where the United States plays a role of "the other" that cannot be ignored.

Franka řpoljarić in *Narration and Memory in Kazuo Ishiguro's An Artist of the Floating World and The Remains of the Day* studies with narration and memory in which the unreliability of the narrator is examined through conversation, speech patterns, and narrative comments, while self-deception is explored within historical and psychological contexts. The analysis also delves into the fragile nature of memory, exploring aspects such as stream of consciousness, suggestibility, bias, and repression in Ishiguro's portrayal of memory in these novels.

Masako Matsuda in a chapter titled "Between the A-Bombing and Responsibilities for World War II: Changes in the Themes of Ishiguro's Early Novels." Published in *Japanese Perspectives on Kazuo Ishiguro* book explores how Kazuo Ishiguro's early works, influenced by his family background of his mother being a victim of the Nagasaki bombing and his grandfather's role as a businessman in pre-war Shanghai, delve into themes of war, victimization, and a heightened sense of responsibility. Matsuda argues that these personal connections to historical events have shaped Ishiguro's exploration of these themes in his early stories and novels, such as "A Pale View of Hills," "An Artist of the Floating World," and "The Remains of the Day."

Kunio Shin in "'The Shame of Being on the Wrong Side of History': Defeat and the Failures of Masculinities in *An Artist of the Floating World* and *The Remains of the Day*" analyzes how the characters Masuji Ono and Mr. Stevens from navigate their sense of shame, loss of moral grounding, and failed masculinities in the aftermath of WWII, highlighting their connection to the decline of nationalism in Japan and Britain. The paper also delves into

Ishiguro's unique portrayal of post-defeat imagination and how historical and autobiographical influences shape the characterization of these protagonists.

Analysis

Shaping Cultural Identity in the Light of Post-war Collective Memory

The focus of this section is to delve into the intricate interplay between cultural identity and the collective memory of the post-war era as depicted in Kazuo Ishiguro's novel, *An Artist of the Floating World*. By honing in on the aftermath of war in Japan, the narrative unfolds against a backdrop of historical events and collective memories that profoundly shape the cultural identities of its characters. Through an exploration of how these collective memories influence individual experiences and perceptions, this section aims to unravel the complex layers of cultural identity formation in the aftermath of conflict. This discussion will illuminate the ways in which historical events and the collective memory of a nation like Japan intertwine to mold and redefine cultural identities in the post-war period.

Ishiguro's characters move between their personal experiences and historical events, generating a tension in their narratives. They recognize how historical events have impacted their personal history, while also striving to retain a sense of identity over their own stories. In *A Pale View of Hills*, the protagonist Etsuko, struggles with memories of death and loss of her daughter on a personal level. She opts to suppress some painful memories while also being reluctant to fully recall or share them. Furthermore, the novel connects the personal traumatic memory of the character with the larger historical memory of Nagasaki, forming the character's sense of self and collective identity. The conflict between individual encounters and the backdrop of history brings depth to the story and mirrors the intricacies of memory and narration.

An Artist of the Floating World looks back to Ishiguro's first novel, *A Pale View of Hills* and they are similar in many terms. Both *A Pale View of Hills* and *An Artist of the Floating World* explore themes of memory, loss, and the impact of history on personal lives. In both novels, the narrators are elderly people who reflect on their experiences and the choices they made in the context of larger historical events. Etsuko in *A Pale View of Hills* and Masuji Ono in *An Artist of the Floating World* both struggle with their memories and the ways in which their personal histories intersect with the political and social upheavals of their respective countries, post-war Japan in *A Pale View of Hills* and pre-war and post-war Japan in *An Artist of the Floating World*.

Additionally, both novels feature narrators who struggle to fully confront and disclose their pasts. The narrators in both novels also deal with themes of guilt, regret, and the complexities of human relationships. The crucial similarity between these two novels lies in their exploration of memory, history, and the ways in which personal experiences are shaped by larger societal forces and in turn contributes to shape the characters' individual and collective identity.

Previous studies on Kazuo Ishiguro's *An Artist of the Floating World* have primarily focused on aspects such as narrative style, trauma theory, historical analysis, and thematic exploration, with relatively less attention given to the theme of identity. Building on the exploration of individual identity formation in *A Pale View of Hills* in the preceding chapter, it becomes apparent that personal identity is intricately intertwined with collective identity. Therefore, the objective of this section is to delve into the formation of cultural identity, particularly in the context of Japan (representing the Eastern perspective) and America (representing the Western perspective).

This discussion aims to analyze how the collective memories of war and cultural heritage of these nations influence the shaping of a unified cultural identity. It will explore the complexities of cultural identity formation when characters relocate to a different country, carrying with them the memories of their past and the cultural narratives of their homeland. By examining the interplay between Eastern and Western cultural influences and the impact of historical memory on present-day experiences, this section seeks to uncover the intricate dynamics of cultural identity construction in a globalized world.

Shaping Collective/Cultural Identity

In Kazuo Ishiguro's *An Artist of the Floating World*, the themes of cultural identity and the confrontation between East and West play a significant role in shaping the narrative. This section aims to delve into the complexities of cultural identity in Ishiguro's work, highlighting the interconnectedness between personal and collective identity and the dynamic nature of cultural identity as it undergoes constant transformation under historical and cultural influences. Cultural identity, as discussed in this section, is portrayed as a collective common identity shaped by shared historical and cultural backgrounds, yet also subject to change and evolution over time.

Through the lens of *An Artist of the Floating World*, the text examines the Japanese cultural and traditional cultural and collective identity and confrontation between Japanese and American cultures post-World War II, illustrating how the intrusion of American culture has a profound impact on the Japanese cultural identity, leading to a division between traditional and hybrid identities. Additionally, the section explores the spatial dimension of identity, emphasizing how changes in physical borders and spaces can influence one's sense of self and belonging, further complicating the intricate web of cultural identity formation.

In their paper, "Cultural Identity in Kazuo Ishiguro's *An Artist of the Floating World*", Sun Yanping and Wang Fengyu explore the traditional Japanese cultural identity, which is influenced by aspects such as love for nature and pleasure-seeking from Shinto beliefs, as well as loyalty and Bushido spirit from Confucianism and Buddhism. They also discuss how this traditional identity undergoes a transformation into a new hybrid identity due to the intrusion of American culture after World War II, as they assert: "The protagonist of the novel, Ono Masuji, struggles to adapt to these identity transformations and faces a cultural dilemma stemming from the clash between Japanese "shame culture" and American "sin culture" (154).

Drawing on Jan Assmann's *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization*, who states "myth and identity are linked by the fact that they both answer questions about who we are, where we come from, and what our place in the cosmos is" (123), they discuss how cultural identity in *An Artist of the Floating World* is shaped by a combination of factors including aboriginal Shinto beliefs, foreign-introduced Confucianism, and Zen Buddhism (Yanping and Fengyu 154-5). Their idea revolves around the way various cultural beliefs and values, both indigenous and foreign, contribute to shaping the cultural identity of the characters in the novel, as well as how external influences can challenge and change Japanese cultural and collective identity over time.

The discussion in this section highlights the significant changes that occurred in Japanese cultural factors after the war, as depicted in the novel. The text aims to demonstrate the emergence of a new cultural identity imposed on Japan by Western influences. While Yanping and Fengyu argue that a new hybrid identity is formed in Japan as a result of the American invasion following WWII, the novel suggests that the present consciousness of cultural identity remains rooted in the past. The characters in the novel are portrayed as navigating a shifting cultural elements by reflecting on their past memories and adapting to the present circumstances. Through this process of navigating from the past to the present, the characters in the novel are depicted as dealing with the complexities of a changing cultural environment and seeking to redefine their sense of identity in the face of external influences contribute to shape the cultural and collective identity of Japan.

Both memory and history play a crucial role in adopting the new cultural identity in flux. In her paper, "Between Memory and History", Nora Pierre states:

Memory and history, far from being synonymous, appear now to be in fundamental opposition. Memory is life, borne by living societies founded in their name. It remains in permanent evolution, open to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting, unconscious of its successive deformations, vulnerable to manipulation and appropriation, susceptible to dormancy and periodically revived. History, on the other hand, is the reconstruction, always problematic and incomplete, of what is no longer. Memory is a perpetually current phenomenon, a bond tying us to the eternal present; history is a representation of the past. Memory, insofar, since it is affective and magical, only accommodates those facts that suit it [...]. History, because it is an intellectual and secular production, calls for analysis and criticism. Memory installs remembrance within the sacred; history, always prosaic, releases it again [...] memory is by nature multiple and yet specific; collective, plural, and yet individual. History, on the other hand, belongs to everyone and to no one, whence its claim to universal authority. (8,20)

Nora's exploration centers on the enduring influence of memory and history on individuals and society. While history strives for universality and objectivity, memory is deeply personal and subjective. Ishiguro skillfully captures the intricate relationship and tension between memory and history in *An Artist of the Floating World*. Through Ono's reflections on his past and personal history, readers are granted a broader perspective on themes such as artistic expression, the impact of art on culture, solitude, identity, the role of memory, and the significance of the past. Ishiguro masterfully delves into how memory and history intersect, illuminating the complexities of personal recollections and broader historical narratives. Through the lens of Ono's introspection and reminiscences, Ishiguro invites readers to contemplate the enduring effects of the past on individual lives and collective consciousness.

In the novel, the character Ono's introspective monologues provide insight into his personal journey as an artist and nationalist before and after World War II. Before the war, Ono was deeply involved in promoting Japanese nationalism and the militaristic agenda through his art and teachings. He believed he was contributing positively to his country and its people, acting in what he perceived to be good faith. However, post-war reflections reveal a shift in his perspective as he comes to terms with the consequences of his actions.

Through his monologue, Ono meticulously recounts the bygone years, inviting the audience to step into his shoes and experience the events of the past alongside him. The narrative flow unveils Ono's personal history and memory, his active role in Japan's wartime propaganda as both an artist and a devoted public servant, and his subsequent withdrawal following Japan's surrender to America. Despite the devastating impact of the war on Japan, one might anticipate a bitter tone in Ono's reflections. However, he adeptly navigates these challenges, demonstrating a remarkable ability to confront his past with honesty and humility. In acknowledging any potential missteps, Ono candidly admits:

There are some, Mrs Saito,' I said, perhaps a little loudly, 'who believe my career to have been a negative influence. An influence now best erased and forgotten. I am not aware of this viewpoint. There are some who would say it is people like myself who are responsible for the terrible things that happened to this nation of ours. As far as I am concerned, I freely admit that I made many mistakes. I accept that much of what I did was ultimately harmful to our nation, that mine was part of an influence that resulted in untold suffering for our own people. I admit this. You see, Dr Saito, I admit this quite readily. My paintings. My teachings. As you see, Dr Saito, I admit this quite readily. All I can say is that at the time I acted in good faith. I believed in all sincerity I was achieving good for my fellow countrymen. But as you see, I am not now afraid to admit I was mistaken. (123-124)

Ono's admission of making mistakes and acknowledging the harm caused by his past influence demonstrates a sense of responsibility and a desire to confront his past deeds. This introspection signifies a transition in his collective identity and cultural identity formation. Before the war, he was a dedicated nationalist artist, but post-war, he grapples with the realization that his actions may have contributed to the suffering of his own people.

Through Ono's monologues, the readers witness his internal struggle to reconcile his past beliefs with the harsh realities of war. His willingness to admit his mistakes and accept responsibility for his actions reflects a deeper understanding of the complexities of his role as an artist and nationalist. This transformation in his perspective highlights the evolution of his collective identity, showing a shift from blind loyalty to critical self-reflection and a sense of accountability. Ono further echoes on what he has gone through in the prospect of the war:

Of course I do not pretend certain moments of that evening were not painful for me; nor do I claim I would so easily have made that sort of declaration I did concerning the past had circumstances not impressed upon me the prudence of doing so. Having said this, I must say I find it hard to understand how any man who values his self-respect would wish for long to avoid responsibility for his past deeds; it may not always be an easy thing, but there is certainly a satisfaction and dignity to be gained in coming to terms with the mistakes one has made in the course of one's life. In any case, there is surely no great shame in mistakes made in the best of faith. It is surely a thing far more shameful to be unable or unwilling to acknowledge them. (124-125)

Ono's personal journey intricately weaves together the complexities of individual identity within the broader context of cultural and national identity formation, particularly in the aftermath of war. Through his introspective

reflections and private memories, Ono unveils the intricate tapestry of Japan's history and his unwavering dedication to contributing to his homeland.

However, as the repercussions of the war unfold, Ono's collective identity is called into question by his family and society, leading to his alienation and exclusion. This societal rejection serves as a stark reminder of the impact of historical events on personal identity, as Ono grapples with the shifting values and perceptions that shape his sense of self. In his quest to reconcile his past actions and beliefs with the changing historical setting, Ono navigates a delicate balance between memory and societal expectations. His struggle to come to terms with his own values and identity in the face of historical upheaval highlights the profound influence of history on shaping individual and collective identities. Through Ono's journey, Kazuo Ishiguro masterfully explores the intricate interplay between personal memory, cultural heritage, and the evolving dynamics of post-war Japan, offering a poignant reflection on the enduring impact of history on shaping one's sense of self in the light of new cultural identity formation.

Conceding Cultural Shifts: Shaping Collective Identity

In *An Artist of the Floating World*, Ono's journey showcases how he shapes his collective identity by embracing and adjusting to cultural shifts. Faced with the aftermath of war and social alienation, Ono reevaluates his values and beliefs, recognizing the impact of changing societal norms on his sense of self. Through introspection and reminiscence, Ono grapples with the complex relationship between his personal identity and the evolving historical backdrop, underscoring the significance of adapting to change and reconciling one's values within shifting cultural contexts.

Silvia Tellini in "Identity and Nation in Kazuo Ishiguro's *An Artist of the Floating World*" highlights the contrast in Ono's narrative against a society undergoing significant historical transformation. Previously aligned with the autocratic regime as a painter, Ono now grapples with adapting to post-war Japan's new reality. Caught between his personal journey and societal shifts, he navigates the tensions arising from the country's forced acceptance and adaptation to a changed landscape. Tellini underscores Ono's perspective as he witnesses conflicting ideologies amidst Japan's political turmoil, where characters reveal their divergent values in the face of transitioning from a colonial empire to embracing a democratic system imposed by the victorious powers.

Taro Saito, Noriko's fiancé, is a character in the novel that plays a significant role in the life of the protagonist, Masuji Ono. Taro San is a young artist who was once a student of Ono and is now a successful painter in his own right. Taro San represents the next generation of artists in post-war Japan and serves as a symbol of the changing artistic landscape and values in the country. Ono's interactions with Taro San reflect his own struggles to come to terms with his past actions and beliefs, as well as his attempts to reconcile his artistic legacy with the evolving cultural and political climate of Japan.

In the novel, Taro Saito stands as a representation of the evolving cultural values and identity in post-war Japan. As Noriko's forward-thinking fiancé, he hails from a family that encourages female participation and rejects deference. Ono shares a more comfortable relationship with Taro, confiding in him about the wartime composer's suicide, a topic he struggles to discuss with his son, Suichi. Taro embraces the American-induced changes, advocating for a gradual implementation of democracy. His eventual marriage to Noriko signifies the culmination of these shifting cultural values and the acceptance of a new identity within the novel's narrative, as he says:

The changes we made after the war are now beginning to bear fruit at all levels of the company. We feel very optimistic about the future. At times, I'm sure, we have been a little hasty. But by and large, the Americans have an immense amount to teach us. Just in these few years, for instance, we Japanese have already come a long way in understanding such things as democracy and individual rights. Indeed, Father I have a feeling Japan has finally established a foundation on which to build a brilliant future. In fact, Father, just the other week I attended a reunion dinner of my school graduation year and for the first time since the surrender, all those present from every walk of life were expressing optimism for the future. And while I fully understand Father's worries, I'm confident that by and large the lessons of these past years have been good ones and will lead us all on to a splendid future. (184)

In this statement by Taro Saito, he expresses optimism about the changes that have taken place in Japan after the war. He acknowledges the influence of American values and the progress Japan has made in understanding concepts like democracy and individual rights. Taro's belief in the positive impact of these changes reflects a shift in cultural values and a reevaluation of Japan's collective identity. Taro's words suggest a willingness to embrace new ideas and ways of thinking, even if they come from a different cultural context. He sees the lessons learned from the post-war period as valuable and essential for shaping a brighter future for Japan. Taro's optimism for the future indicates a sense of openness to change and adaptation, highlighting the evolving cultural landscape in Japan as it navigates the aftermath of the war and strives for progress and prosperity. Timothy Wright in "No Homelike Place" writes:

No doubt Ishiguro leaves out this historical context due partly to his minimalist aesthetic and partly to a novelistic intention to explore Ono's psychological situation without the screen of moral judgment. Yet there is also a more profound reason for the historical elision that the lives, values, and beliefs of individuals and entire societies are determined by historical processes of which they are barely aware, or whose true nature is too sinister to be acknowledged. The dated entries of Ono's narrative should be read not as guiding us through Ono's progressive reconciliation with his past, but as yielding a record of the changing historical situation of the nation. (16,19)

The text suggests that Kazuo Ishiguro intentionally omits historical context in the novel in order to focus on exploring the psychological state of the protagonist, Ono, without passing moral judgment. However, the absence of historical context also serves to highlight the idea that individuals and societies are shaped by historical processes that they may not fully understand or may be too uncomfortable to acknowledge. The dated entries in Ono's narrative are not meant to show his personal growth or reconciliation with his past, but rather to reflect the changing historical landscape of the nation. This concept is connected to the theme of accepting cultural identity in the novel, as it suggests that individuals must come to terms with their past actions and the larger historical forces that have shaped their identities. By recognizing and acknowledging these influences, characters like Ono can begin to understand and accept their cultural identity.

Within the novel, characters like Ono grapple with seeking atonement for past actions that evoke feelings of shame and nostalgia, reflecting on a time that now seems distant and foreign. Through Ono's memories, the post-war years are vividly depicted, portraying a period of societal upheaval and dissolution. These recollections serve as a lens through which historical events are explored, shedding light on the collective backdrop of Japan that Ono once served with earnest intentions, only to be condemned by future generations. Ono's narrative becomes a journey of self-understanding, where his memories shape a broader understanding of the nation's identity. The novel intricately weaves together personal memories with historical context, emphasizing Ono's struggle at the fringes of existence. While history forms a crucial backdrop, it subtly recedes into the background as Ono's personal battles take center stage.

The novel concludes on an optimistic note, suggesting that both the characters and the nation can come to terms with their past and move forward with renewed hope. This optimistic outlook hints at a collective ability to confront and reconcile with the shadows of history, ultimately shaping a brighter future:

It must have been approaching the lunch hour by then, for across the road I could see groups of employees in their bright white shirtsleeves emerging from the glass fronted building where Mrs Kawakami used to be. And as I watched, I was struck by how full of optimism and enthusiasm these young people were. I smiled to myself as I watched these young office workers from my bench. Of course, at times, when I remember those brightly-lit bars and all those people gathered beneath the lamps, laughing a little more boisterously perhaps than those young men yesterday, but with much the same good heartedness, I feel a certain nostalgia for the past and the district as it used to be. But to see how our city has been rebuilt, how things have recovered so rapidly over these years, fills me with genuine gladness. Our nation, it seems, whatever mistakes it may have made in the past, has now another chance to make a better go of things. One can only wish these young people well. (205-6)

Ono's nostalgia for the past is tempered by a sense of appreciation for the city's rapid rebuilding and recovery. There is a genuine gladness in witnessing the progress and growth of the nation, despite acknowledging past mistakes. He expresses a hopeful sentiment for the future, recognizing that the younger generation has a chance

to shape a better path forward. a mix of nostalgia, optimism, and a belief in the resilience and potential of the city and its people are reflected on the passage of time, the evolution of society, and the enduring spirit of renewal and progress.

Conclusion

Kazuo Ishiguro's *An Artist of the Floating World* offers a rich exploration of cultural identity, memory, and the confrontation between East and West in post-World War II Japan. The novel delves deep into the complexities of personal and collective identity, illustrating the dynamic nature of cultural identity influenced by historical, societal, and cultural factors. Through the lens of the protagonist Masuji Ono, Ishiguro navigates the intricate interplay between individual identity, societal expectations, and the evolving landscape of post-war Japan.

The intrusion of American culture post-World War II and the clash between traditional Japanese values and Western influences shape a narrative that highlights the transformation of Japanese cultural identity into a hybrid form. This clash between "shame culture" and "sin culture" underscores the ongoing evolution of Japanese identity under external influences. Characters like Ono grapple with the consequences of their past actions, engaging in critical self-reflection and a deeper understanding of their roles within the cultural and national context.

In *An Artist of the Floating World*, the protagonist Masuji Ono embarks on a journey of self-reflection and reconciliation with his past as a nationalist propagandist artist in post-World War II Japan. The novel intricately weaves together themes of war, memory, identity, and societal change, exploring the complexities of personal and cultural identity in the aftermath of conflict. Ono's struggles with guilt, shame, and self-deception reflect broader issues of national self-deception and concealment, highlighting the lasting impact of war on individuals and society. Through Ono's evolution and conflicts with his past actions, Ishiguro offers a poignant reflection on the enduring legacy of war and the ongoing quest for truth and redemption in a changing world.

Consequently, In Kazuo Ishiguro's *An Artist of the Floating World*, the characters grapple with the complexities of memory, grief, and identity formation in the aftermath of personal tragedies and historical events. The themes of loss, guilt, and the search for identity resonate throughout Ishiguro's narratives, highlighting the intricate interplay between memory and the construction of cultural identity. As character like Ono confronts his past and strive to make sense of their experiences, Ishiguro's exploration of memory serves as a poignant reminder of the enduring effects of personal and collective histories on cultural identity formation.

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