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## Transculturalism in Tan Twan Eng's *The Gift of Rain*

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**Abstract.** While the growing body of research on Tan Twan Eng's *The Gift of Rain* (2009) focuses on the protagonist, Philip Hutton's traumatic condition, his Chinese identity, and his ambiguous identity, this study devotes particular attention to the complexity of interactions between various cultures practised by Philip. This study aims to address this gap by applying the concept of transculturalism to analyse the processes of acquiring a foreign culture and incorporating the foreign culture into traditional cultures experienced by Philip. In other words, this study employs the concept of transculturalism to examine multicultural depictions in the novel. Scholars, such as Khan, Tiwari, Sheoran and Tan C. S. who have examined multicultural depictions in various literary texts, have found that multicultural circumstances cause certain ethnic groups to lose their cultures and identities. Hence, the multicultural circumstances depicted are perceived as negative phenomena. However, this study has found that by examining the interactions between various cultures, rather than focusing on the end products such as portrayals of hybridity, the positive sides of multicultural depictions could be revealed. The transculturation process experienced by Philip shows that the new cultural practices he has created are made up of both his traditional cultures and the foreign culture he has acquired. This means that Philip does not totally lose his traditional cultures and identities. Therefore, this study concludes that multicultural depictions in *The Gift of Rain* could be read positively, provided that the interactions between various cultures, which resulted in the incorporation of a foreign culture into traditional cultures, are examined.

### 1. Introduction

*The Gift of Rain* is set from shortly before the Japanese occupation of Malaya begins (1939) until fifty years after the Japanese occupation ends (1995). It is the story of a half-British, half-Chinese protagonist, Philip Hutton, and the suffering he experiences during the Japanese occupation of Malaya. The author of the novel, Tan Twan Eng declares in an interview, he wrote about the trauma and painful aftermath of the occupation because he believes that the Japanese occupation is the "biggest thing that happened to us [Malaysians] since being colonized" [1]. In another interview, he clarifies that, although it was a period of upheaval, he was more interested in the masses' daily lives and how they coped with forgetting and remembering [2]. As a result, the protagonist's, Philip, traumatic condition is one of the most prominent issues debated by scholars.

Goh, for instance, has analysed Philip's traumatic condition in relation to his memories, the narrative style of the novel as well as the element of reincarnation [3,4]. However, Goh does not study the effects of trauma on Philip's cultures and identities. Although Philip's identities are examined by Tan C. S., he only focuses on how Philip defends his Chinese identity under Japanese hegemony. Tan C. S. finds that Philip revisits his ancestral roots, Chinese culture, religion and history to defend his Chinese identity against Japanese hegemony ([5], p. 243). This shows that even though Tan C. S. examines Philip's Chinese identity and culture, he only perceives these as Philip's act of defending his Chinese identity. This study proposes to investigate Philip's cultures and identities in a different perspective, which is to examine how Japanese culture drives Philip to rediscover his Chinese culture as well as Chinese and British identities. More importantly, this study argues that it is crucial to discover why Philip continues to practise Chinese, British and Japanese cultures when he is resisting Japanese hegemony. Such ambiguity in Philip's cultures and identities

has been pointed out by Holden. Since Philip is a half-British, half-Chinese, Holden states that Philip is a racially ambiguous protagonist ([6], p. 65). Also, he describes Philip as morally ambiguous because, even though Philip saves many people's lives, he cooperates with the Japanese ([7], pp. 48, 56). These ambiguities foreground the marginalisation Philip faces. However, Holden has only pointed out Philip's marginalised identity, which is the portrayal of his identities at the beginning of the story and during Japanese occupation. In S. Hall's article "Cultural Identity and Diaspora", he claims that,

Cultural identity... is a matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being'. It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture. ([8], p. 225)

It is evident that cultural identity is not static. It is not only affected by the historical events experienced but also highly influenced by the cultures practiced. Hence, this study proposes that Philip's identities undergo transformation after fifty years the Japanese occupation ends. In short, although debates on *The Gift of Rain* are growing, there is still a prevalent lack of scholarship focusing on the complex interactions between Philip's traditional and foreign cultures, which influence his identities. Past studies conducted on *The Gift of Rain* have not addressed how Japanese culture drives Philip to rediscover his traditional cultures and identities, and why he continues to practise both his traditional cultures and the Japanese cultures even when he is resisting Japanese hegemony. Also, the effect of trauma on Philip's cultures and identities, and the changes of his identities after fifty years the Japanese occupation ends have not been addressed in past studies. In order to address these gaps, the complex interactions between Philip's traditional and foreign cultures are examined by analysing the process Philip acquires foreign culture and incorporates the foreign culture into his traditional cultures.

In other words, this study examines multicultural depictions in the novel. Khan, Tiwari, Sheoran and Tan C. S., for instance, have found that multicultural circumstances depicted in literary works cause characters to search for identity or experience identity crisis [5, 9-11]. Instead of taking the same perspective, this study intends to foreground the positive side of multicultural depictions. This perspective is supported by Onghena, who emphasises that "[n]ow is the time to stop referring to [cultural] diversity solely as some sort of disturbing "other," an intruder with the capacity to destabilise our security" ([12], p. 181). Thus, this study does not perceive multicultural depictions as negative phenomena.

Even though studies that have been carried out on multicultural depictions have also examined the portrayals of hybrid elements, these studies have only centred on the end product. As examples, Zainul Din, See Tho, and Cheah, who investigate the portrayals of hybrid elements, are only concerned with the representations of hybridity, such as the characterisation and writing styles used to foreground hybridity, and the issues conveyed through these hybrid elements, for instance, multicultural nation, nationalistic tendencies and post-colonial sentiments [13-15]. On the contrary, studies that have examined the processes of individuals acquiring foreign cultures and incorporating the foreign cultures into their traditional cultures to form new cultural practices are limited. Hence, the present study takes the initiative in investigating the interactions between various cultures.

## 2. Transculturalism

In order to investigate the complex interactions between traditional and foreign cultures of the protagonist, a concept that looks into the process of acquiring foreign cultures and incorporating the foreign cultures into traditional cultures must be applied in this study. Concepts such as hybridity, multiculturalism and the melting pot have been evaluated by Alvarez ([16], p. 43). By comparing these concepts with the concept of transculturalism, she finds that hybridity models only highlight the harmonious end result of cultures while the concept of transculturalism highlights both the

tenuous relationships between cultures as well as the painful negotiation process ([16], p. 212). Hence, the concept of transculturalism is applied in this study.

Allolio-Näcke explains in the *Encyclopedia of Critical Psychology* that transculturalism originates from “transculturation,” a term coined in 1940 by a Cuban anthropologist named Fernando Ortiz ([17], pp. 1985-1986). In *Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar*, Ortiz uses the term “transculturation” to describe the different stages and effects of cultural contact among people brought together by European colonial expansion into the Caribbean [18]. He contends that transculturation illustrates “the different phases of the process of transition from one culture to another” ([18], p. 102). More specifically, the process of transculturation “does not consist merely in acquiring another culture”, which is the term “acculturation” suggests, but also “necessarily involves the loss or uprooting of a previous culture, which could be defined as a deculturation” ([18], p. 102). Last but not least, the process of transculturation also includes “the consequent creation of new cultural phenomena, which could be called neoculturation” ([18], p. 103).

However, in *Writing across Cultures: Narrative Transculturation in Latin America*, Rama comments that Ortiz’s concept of transculturation does not pay sufficient attention to the factors of “selection and inventiveness that must always be part of the mix in any case of cultural plasticity, for such a state testifies to the energy and creativity of a cultural community” ([19], p. 22). Rama points out that a country’s traditional culture is not passive or destined for great losses and inferior to the foreign culture that comes in ([19], p. 19). On the contrary, “[i]f the community is alive”, it will select elements from both foreign and traditional cultures, including traditional cultures that are destroyed or lost ([19], pp. 22-23). Thus, the community’s primitive values that have almost been forgotten could be rediscovered. Moreover, Rama further claims that the rediscovery of primitive values can strengthen its defence against the foreign culture. Hence, the damaging impact of transculturation could be resisted and the community could go through a combinatory system, where new things are invented to suit the cultural system’s own autonomy. In short, Rama believes that transculturation involves losses, selections, rediscoveries, and incorporations ([19], p. 23).

Similarly, Pratt delineates that, in the process of transculturation, the subjugated people determine to various extents what they take into their own and what they use it for, even though they have no power over what emanates from the dominant culture ([20], p. 6). This leads her to believe that transculturation is a situation in the “contact zone.” In “Arts of the Contact Zone”, she further clarifies that “contact zones” are “social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other” ([21], p. 34). This is why Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin conclude, that transculturation is “the reciprocal influences of modes of representation and cultural practices of various kinds in colonies and metropolises” ([22], p. 213). Hence, post-colonial literature is perhaps the most profound illustration of transculturation ([23], p. 122). Therefore, the concept of transculturation, which is coined for a cultural phenomenon, can be applied to literature.

A number of scholars have, however, applied the concept of transculturalism in their literary studies. Nevertheless, these literary studies are conducted on Latin American literary works. Scholars, such as Shaw, Alvarez, Hambuch, and Read, for example, have used the concept of transculturalism to analyse the depictions of Latin American cultures and have found that transculturation takes place in Latin America due to colonisation and post-independence developments [16, 24-26]. This is why both European and North American cultures are found to have been introduced to Latin Americans. However, previous scholars have argued instead that Latin Americans do not abandon their own cultures but has transformed Latin American languages and cultures using a transcultural approach. This leads them to conclude that the concept of transculturalism, which allows them to examine the cultural conflicts between various cultures, is suitable for analysing Latin American literary texts. This study argues that the concept of transculturalism is not only suitable for analysing Latin American literary works but also Asian literary works.

In recent years, Asian literary texts have also been studied using the concept of transculturalism. Pereira-Ares, Kaur, and Thornber, for instance, have employed the concept of

transculturalism to analyse Asian texts and found that languages and cultural traditions are translated and negotiated as various cultures meet [27-29]. This condition destroys national and cultural barriers. Thus, Pereira-Ares concludes that transcultural identity is produced as one experiences transculturation ([27], p. 486). Since the concept of transculturalism is compatible with Asian cultures, this study employs the concept to analyse *The Gift of Rain* which is set in Asia.

### 3. Transculturalism in Tan Twan Eng's *The Gift of Rain*

*The Gift of Rain* is analysed in three stages, acculturation, deculturation, and neoculturation.

#### 3.1. Acculturation Stage

##### 3.1.1. Reason of Acculturation

Philip Hutton, the half-British, half-Chinese protagonist undergoes acculturation because he is culturally marginalised by the society. He is shunned by both the British elite and the Asian community ([30], p. 14F). This is evident as Philip mentions, "because of my mixed parentage I was never completely accepted by either the Chinese or the English of Penang, each race believing itself to be superior" ([31], p. 28). Also, Philip is being "called a mongrel half-breed" by the boys at school ([31], p. 35). When he explains this problem to his father, "[his father] had dismissed [his] words..." ([31], p. 28). This leads Philip to mistakenly believe that he is also marginalised by his families, "[he] had no choice but to harden [himself] against the insults and whispered comments, and to find [his] own place in the scheme of life" ([31], p. 28). Hence, he slowly isolates himself from both his British and Chinese family members.

As a result, Philip loses both his British and Chinese cultures and identities. He feels "no connection with China, or with England. [He] was a child born between two worlds, belonging to neither" ([31], pp. 36-37). Although Philip loses his British identity, he lives with his British family and practises British culture in his daily life. Thus, he does not lose his British culture. On the contrary, Chinese culture has been abandoned by Philip, "'It's almost the end of Cheng Beng, have you forgotten?'"... "I haven't forgotten," I said, although I had" ([31], pp. 65-66). Also, Philip loses his Chinese identity. This is evident when he pays respects to his mother on Cheng Beng together with his aunt, Aunt Yu Mei, "'Your grandfather was wrong when he said you would forget your roots.'" I did not know what to reply. In truth I was only doing this to humor her" ([31], p. 67). Apparently, Philip has forgotten his roots, his identity. In brief, Philip loses both his British and Chinese identities as well as his Chinese culture as he grows up.

Due to the fact that Philip's British and Chinese identities are weakening, he develops "the sense of not being connected to anything" ([31], p. 34). Endo, whom Philip meets at this time, becomes the one he turns to. Endo is a Japanese who rents the island near Philip's house from Philip's father, Noel. Endo is neither British nor Chinese. Thus, Philip not only does not have to resolve his dual identities when he is with Endo, but he can also confess his problem to Endo, who is only a stranger he meets that same day, "'I'm the outcast. The half-Chinese child of my father...'" ([31], p. 33). In addition, after Endo finds out that Philip has a sense of loss for being unable to spend time on the island after he rents it, he invites Philip to continue coming to the island. This is important because the island is Philip's "personal retreat" ([31], p. 29). Endo's characteristics correspond with what Tan Twan Eng says in an interview, "Philip wants ... to find a place to belong to... a place where we are fully accepted for what we are and how we think" [32]. Endo, who understands and accepts Philip the way he is as well as welcomes Philip to the island, gives Philip a sense of belongingness. This justifies why Philip is willing to undergo acculturation to acquire the Japanese culture offered to him by Endo.

##### 3.1.2. Acculturation of Japanese Culture

Before Philip learns Japanese culture formally, he has begun acculturating to the Japanese culture since the first day he met Endo. When Endo thanks and gives Philip a slight bow, Philip

“immediately returned without thinking” ([31], p. 31). Rama has written that selection is one of the significant factors in cultural plasticity ([19], p. 22). This is because selection reflects the energy of a cultural community. Since Philip’s practices of traditional cultures, especially his Chinese culture, are weak, he simply acquires the Japanese culture of bowing without selecting or thinking. He seems to have omitted the selection factor of acculturation on his own free will.

After Endo and Philip develop a teacher-student relationship, Philip formally acculturates to the Japanese culture. He begins by learning *aikido*, a Japanese martial art, “I began my lessons in *aikijutsu* the following morning, entering into a ritual of learning that would continue largely unbroken for nearly three years” ([31], p. 37). Apart from this, Philip also acquires the Japanese language, “Endo-sensei...– teacher. ...He wanted me to learn to speak Japanese, and to read and write the three forms of Japanese writing: *hiragana*, *katakana*, *kanji*” ([31], p. 41). Aside from this, Endo also introduces *Zen* Buddhism to Philip, ““A branch of Buddhism very much influenced by Daruma. It teaches its adherents to find Enlightenment by way of meditation and rigorous physical discipline...”” ([31], p. 43). Overall, Philip willingly and formally acquires most of the Japanese cultural elements.

### 3.2. Deculturation Stage

#### 3.2.1. Loss of Chinese Culture and Identity

In *Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar*, Ortiz claims that the process of transculturation “necessarily involves the loss or uprooting of a previous culture, which could be defined as a deculturation” ([18], p. 102). This is evident as Philip loses his Chinese culture as well as his Chinese and British identities during the deculturation stage due to the acculturation of the Japanese culture. Before acculturating to the Japanese culture, Philip has lost most of his Chinese culture, which then leads him to lose his Chinese identity. However, after he undergoes the acculturation of Japanese culture, Philip’s Chinese identity further disintegrates:

... they’re advancing deeper into China... I felt as though I was being spun around in one of Endo-san’s *aikijutsu* movements, not knowing where I stood. I could not abandon what I had begun with Endo-san, for my classes with him had become a way of life for me and the knowledge he was imparting to me was too precious to be surrendered. Endo-san was not responsible for what was happening in a land far away, I told myself. ([31], p. 65)

Based on Williams’ definition of culture as “a description of a particular way of life, which expresses certain meanings and values not only in art and learning but also in institutions and ordinary behaviour” ([33], p. 57), Philip has acculturated to the Japanese culture when the classes he has had with Endo have become his way of life, which are too valuable for him to give up. His acculturation of Japanese culture then leads him to undergo deculturation. When he receives news about the Japanese advances in China, he does not know where he stands. In order to avoid abandoning the Japanese culture, Philip tries to convince himself that Endo is not responsible for the Japanese atrocities in China. Philip does not have the intention of standing by any Chinese ethnic group by conforming to the unwritten rules such as not befriending Japanese people and not practising Japanese culture. Since identity is a set of social expectations related to oneself and others, as explained by B. J. Hall ([34], p. 102), Philip is unable to gain or maintain his Chinese identity in the Chinese community when he does not conform to those unwritten rules. Hence, it is evident that after Philip acculturates to the Japanese culture, he undergoes deculturation of the Chinese culture, which causes his Chinese identity to be further disintegrated.

#### 3.2.2. Loss of British Identity

Apart from this, Philip’s British identity is also disintegrated by the acculturation of the Japanese culture. Before acculturating to the Japanese culture, Philip does not identify himself as a member of the Hutton family, “[t]he half-Chinese, youngest child in an English family? I don’t

think I fit in anywhere at all” ([31], p. 59). When Philip undergoes a more forceful acculturation of the Japanese culture, his British identity is further broken down:

...I sat and listened again to the traditional English hymns that had formed the music of my boyhood... *“I will not cease from mental fight; Nor shall my sword sleep in my hand...”* He... “I cannot agree. The sword must always remain the last option.”... He made me promise him that I would always remember that. ([31], p. 55)

When Endo demands Philip not to lead his life in such a way, he demolishes Philip’s British identity since the lyrics symbolise a British standpoint. As a result, Philip’s British identity is further reduced, “[b]loody Germans,” Edward [Philip’s eldest brother] said. “Over seven hundred lives were lost. British lives,” he added, as though those had a greater value” ([31], p. 159). To Philip, there is no difference between the British and the Germans. Hence, unlike his brother Edward, Philip is neither angry nor does he have pity for the deaths of the British. This shows that Philip does not consider himself as related to the British at all. Thus, it is evident that after forceful acculturation of the Japanese culture, Philip undergoes deculturation, which causes his British identity to be greatly reduced.

### 3.2.3. Rediscovery of Chinese Culture and Identity

Nonetheless, as Rama points out, when a foreign culture comes into a community, the community would not only select cultural elements from the foreign culture but also those of the traditional culture which are destroyed or lost ([19], pp. 22-23). Such a situation then causes the community’s traditional values to be rediscovered. Philip also goes through such a situation. During the rediscovery phase of the deculturation stage, Philip’s grandfather uncovers the family history and clarifies Philip’s Chinese lineage:

I had planned never to see him [grandfather] again after this meeting but ... now this strange tale, had made him human, a man with a history... I could not be indifferent to him now... ([31], p. 124)

As Philip’s resistance towards his Chinese origin becomes weaker, his grandfather leads him to rediscover several Chinese cultural elements. One of which is Buddhism, a common religion among the Chinese. Philip has come across Buddhism because of his aunt. However, because he practises Christianity with his paternal family, he is not familiar with it. Before Philip meets his grandfather, Endo has reintroduced Daruma and Zen Buddhism to him. Hence, he unconsciously rediscovers the common religion among the Chinese. This shows that Tan C. S., who argues that Philip revisits Chinese religion only to defend his Chinese identity against the Japanese hegemony ([5], p. 243), overlooks the Japanese culture that also leads Philip to rediscover his Chinese religion. However, Philip’s rediscovery of this common religion among the Chinese through Endo is minimal until he listens to his grandfather’s narration, which gives much more detail about Daruma, “...Bodhidharmo was an Indian monk who had travelled all across China. ... He went as far as Japan...” ([31], pp. 111-112). Philip does not realise that Daruma and Bodhidharmo are the same person until Endo points it out, ““Philip, they are the same person,” he said” ([31], p. 218). Thus, even though Philip’s rediscovery of Buddhism, a common religion among the Chinese, begins unconsciously when he acculturates to the Japanese culture, and is supplemented by his grandfather’s narrative, it is completed by Endo, the one who leads Philip to undergo acculturation of Japanese culture. This once again indicates that acculturation of Japanese culture indirectly leads Philip to rediscover Chinese cultural beliefs that he has forgotten.

Another aspect of the Chinese culture that Philip rediscovers from his grandfather’s narrative is reincarnation. Since Philip is not familiar with Buddhism, he also does not understand the concept of reincarnation, a common belief among Buddhists, or more specifically in the Malayan setting, a

common belief among the Chinese. Similarly, Endo has introduced this Chinese cultural belief to Philip earlier than Philip's grandfather after meeting a fortune-teller:

"...what happened before you lived? Where were you then?" ... "You have another life. After the end of that life you were reborn to this life. And so it will go on and on until you have redressed all your weaknesses, all your mistakes."..."Perhaps after a thousand lifetimes, you will reach Nirvana."...It is a state of enlightenment. Free from pain and suffering and desires, free from time." ([31], pp. 51-52)

Later, the concept of reincarnation is brought up by Philip's grandfather when he explains the reason did not agree with the marriage of Philip's parents,

"... I had been warned that she could not marry him." "Warned? By whom?" "A fortune-teller at the snake temple in Penang." I held my breath and a feeling of unreality came over me as the memory of the day I spent with Endo-san at the temple uncoiled itself inside me... "Is this why, after all these years, you finally decided to speak to me: to warn me of some fortune-teller's words...?" He shook his head. "I am not asking you to do anything against your own wishes or reason. I have learned over the years that life has to take its own path... Nothing could have changed it." ([31], pp. 124-125)

This shows that Philip's rediscovery of reincarnation begins with Endo and is supplemented by his grandfather. On the one hand, Endo teaches Philip about redressing all mistakes before reaching the state of Nirvana; and on the other hand, Philip's grandfather teaches Philip that everyone lives a destined life. These two notions are connected because one's present life is destined in order to redress the mistakes one made in the previous life. Overall, Philip rediscovers both Buddhism and reincarnation, two common cultural beliefs among the Malayan Chinese through Endo and his grandfather.

#### 3.2.4. Rediscovery of British Identity

Moreover, Philip also rediscovers his British identity during the rediscovery phase of the deculturation stage by reconciling with his family members. Philip reconciles his relationship with his father, Noel, by using the Japanese martial art techniques he acquires from Endo:

*Lead the mind*, Endo-san had said. Now my father... his thoughts for the moment taken where I wanted them to go... "I did love your mother, you know," he said. "People thought I had gone native... But they didn't understand what she and I felt for each other." "I know," I said, trying to hold on to the fragile connection that had, unexpectedly, grown between us. ([31], pp. 164-165)

Philip comes to know that he is conceived out of love. This enables a fragile connection to grow between Philip and Noel, forming the father and son bond. Later, Philip clearly notices that he has neither been abandoned nor marginalised by his father all these years:

For the first time in my life I felt we were each a living part of the other. And I knew, with the insight that had arisen as a consequence of learning from Endo-san, that he had loved me all along from the moment I was born, even through the years when I distanced myself from him and my family. That was one of the greatest gifts Endo-san had given me – the ability to love and to recognize being loved. ([31], p. 204)

Philip is able to recognise his father's love towards him because of the lessons Endo gives him. Hence, Endo's lessons have enabled Philip to rediscover and reinforce his bond with Noel as father and son.



Furthermore, Philip also reconciles his relationship with his siblings during the rediscovery phase of the deculturation stage. Similarly, the reconciliation between Philip and his siblings is also caused by Endo, “I was not close to my siblings before I met Endo-san...” ([31], p. 28). This is because:

... Endo-san had transformed me through his lessons, which I knew were partially responsible for this growing insight into my relationship with my family... In strengthening my body Endo-san was also... fortifying my mind. It was a process that offered me the ability to bridge the conflicting elements of my life and to create a balance. ([31], p. 181)

After undergoing acculturation of the Japanese culture through Endo’s lessons, Philip can bridge the conflicting elements of his life, which refer to his Chinese and British cultures and identities. This is supported by McCulloch, who states that Endo’s physical and mental regimen assists Philip to resolve his otherness ([35], p. 20). This explains why Philip changes from one who isolates himself from both the Chinese and British communities to one who can easily speak about his encounters with his Chinese family members to his British family members:

...I told him [Philip’s elder brother, William] about my visit to my grandfather... He hooked an arm around my shoulders and squeezed. For a moment I was a young boy again and he was the big brother... ([31], p. 182)

Philip no longer sees himself as an outsider to his family. Thus, Endo’s teaching or acculturation of Japanese culture has undoubtedly helped Philip to rediscover his relationship with his siblings.

After reconciling his relationships with his father and siblings, Philip rediscovers his British identity as a member of the Hutton family during the deculturation stage, “after years of walking my own path, distancing myself, I had finally returned to my family... It was a homecoming for me” ([31], p. 202). Thus, Endo’s lessons have enabled Philip to rediscover his British identity as part of the Hutton family.

### **3.3. Neoculturation Stage**

#### **3.3.1. Neoculturation of Chinese and British Cultures**

After Philip rediscovers his Chinese culture as well as his Chinese and British identities in the deculturation stage, he begins to identify himself as related to both ethnicities. This situation leads Philip to undergo a neoculturation stage. In consistence with the term “neoculturation” delineated by Ortiz as “the consequent creation of new cultural phenomena” ([18], p. 103), Philip incorporates Chinese culture into his British way of life and creates new cultural practices. For instance:

“Take care, my brother,” he said. “I will. You watch out for danger,” I said,... “I’ll say some prayers for you at the temple.” He smiled. “You’d better watch out yourself, you are turning Chinese.” Thinking of the duality of life, I asked – more to myself than to anyone else: “That’s not such a bad thing, is it?” ([31], pp. 247-248)

Philip’s intention of saying prayers for his friend, Kon, at the temple shows that he has incorporated a Chinese tradition into his British culture.

#### **3.3.2. Struggling between Opposing Sides**

In spite of his successful neoculturation of Chinese and British cultures, Philip could not incorporate Japanese culture into the new cultural practices he has created from the neoculturation of Chinese and British cultures. This is because the Japanese are infamous for their cruelty in both China and Malaya during this period of time:

The Japanese consul, Shigeru Hiroshi ... “We have the best army in Asia now. They are disciplined, highly trained, and civilised,” he said... “Oh, but what about Nanking?” I asked, using the English name for Nanjing... “Were the Japanese troops there ‘disciplined, highly trained, and civilized?’” I persisted... “Yes, of course they were...” There were loud snorts around us, especially from the Chinese... ([31], pp. 138-139)

By using “Nanking”, the English name for Nanjing, when he confronts the Japanese consul about the brutality towards the Chinese in China, Philip’s British and Chinese identities are foregrounded. Thus, it is apparent that Philip successfully undergoes neoculturation of Chinese and British cultures. Nevertheless, Philip’s successful incorporation of Chinese cultural elements into his British culture is the main factor that causes him to be unable to incorporate Japanese culture into the new cultural practices formed. This is due to the fact that Japanese is seen as an opposing culture and identity by both the Chinese and British during this period of time. This condition is depicted in the excerpt above, where the Chinese snort to show their disagreement and irritation on the Japanese consul’s description of Japanese superiority. In addition, the British community also resists Japanese influences:

I had noticed a change in the way Endo-san’s people were now referred to. No longer were they the more polite “Japanese,” but “the Japs” or, as was more common now, “the *bloody* Japs.” ([31], p. 265)

As a result, Philip could not undergo neoculturation of Japanese, Chinese and British cultures.

Despite the resistance of the Chinese and British against the Japanese, Philip decides to work for the Japanese government in Malaya. However, this decision does not signify that he loses his Chinese and British identities because he only aims at protecting his families, rather than collaborating with the Japanese: “I was choosing a path that had the strongest chance of saving all of us, all of my family, and I would take it” ([31], p. 262). This is supported by Lim who notes that Philip never identifies with the Japanese propaganda even though he is subjected to Japanese colonial indoctrination by Endo ([36], p. 244). Hence, this study argues that Philip uses the privileges given to him not to realise the Japanese plans but to undermine them. This corresponds with Pratt’s explanation of the process of transculturation. She explains that even though subjugated people could not decide what the dominant culture emanates, they could determine what they use it for ([20], p. 6). Thus, although Philip has no power over the policies and programmes executed by the Japanese government, he could decide how to use the information regarding these programmes to save the locals from being captured by the Japanese:

Under the *Sook Ching* exercise, Chinese businessmen and villagers suspected of being members of anti-Japanese groups were to be rounded up and sent to labor camps... Hiroshi... “These are the first batch of names...” “Yes,” I said, but my mind was already searching for a way to save the people on the list. ([31], p. 309)

By looking at his efforts in protecting his British and Chinese families as well as helping the masses, it is obvious that Philip does not lose his British and Chinese identities.

Nevertheless, Philip also willingly practises certain Japanese cultural elements during the Japanese occupation. This has been overlooked by Tan C. S. [5]. He only points out that Philip revisits his ancestral roots, Chinese culture, religion, and history to defend his Chinese identity against the Japanese hegemony ([5], p. 243). Tan C. S. neglects that Philip continues to practise certain Japanese cultural elements even when he is resisting the Japanese hegemony. For instance, Philip willingly bows to his friend, Kon: “...In the end I decided not to say anything and bowed to him” ([31], p. 330). Similar to Philip, Kon has also acquired the Japanese culture before the Japanese invasion of Malaya. Thus, Philip feels that bidding farewell to him in a Japanese manner is normal and acceptable.

In spite of practising both traditional and foreign cultures for a period of time, Philip still could not undergo neoculturation. Since Philip does not lose his traditional cultures - Chinese and British - and challenges as well as willingly practises Japanese culture at the same time, he struggles between the opposing sides during the Japanese occupation. He could not decide whether he should remain loyal to the Malayan people or devote himself to Endo, who represents the Japanese. This is evident when Philip helps his father to destroy the documents that are useful to the Japanese:

We...destroying any that could assist the Japanese... I...conflicting emotions. I was officially Endo-san's assistant and, as we tore up reports and files and burned them, I felt I was betraying the Japanese. But by choosing to work for the Japanese, I was also betraying the people of my island. Once again I was caught between two opposing sides, with nowhere to turn. ([31], p. 271)

As Philip struggles between the opposing sides of the Japanese occupation, he could not undergo neoculturation of the Japanese, British and Chinese cultures.

### 3.3.3. Having a Firm Standpoint

Later, Philip decides to make a firm standpoint and no longer struggles between the opposing sides. This is because the death of his sister, Isabel, has brought about his guilt, "...I was responsible for driving my sister to the acts that had finally come to this" ([31], p. 341). This condition not only causes him to be trapped in his memories of suffering for the next five decades but also leads him to choose a standpoint, "I decided that I would no longer hide under the protection of Endo-san but play my part as Isabel had done" ([31], p. 349). Such a change in Philip reflects Rama's claim, that is, one's rediscovery of primitive values could act as a resistance against foreign culture ([19], p. 23). Such resistance prevents the development of damaging impacts as one undergoes transculturalism. This means that one would not accept the foreign culture wholeheartedly. Since Philip has rediscovered his British identity, he is no longer detached from his British family, and in this case, Isabel. This explains why Isabel's death has an extreme impact on Philip, which then prevents him from continuously tolerating the Japanese. However, his resistance against the Japanese also causes him to be unable to undergo the neoculturation of Japanese, Chinese and British cultures

### 3.3.4. Philip's Regret and Guilt

Although Philip decides to fight against the Japanese after Isabel's death, he continues to practise the Japanese culture. This is because he regrets killing Endo, even though Endo is the one who demands it:

...I felt very certain that I had not disappointed Endo-san. After all, I had risen to the occasion, as he had demanded, as he had prepared me to. Yet as the years passed, a sense of failure had gradually corroded that feeling of certainty. ([31], p. 425)

As Philip is unable to grieve for Endo's death, he is trapped in the past due to his regret. This results in Philip keeping the Nagamitsu sword he uses to kill Endo for fifty years:

"...every day I'm aware of its presence. There were some days when I wanted so badly to row out to sea and drop it into the depths." "Why have you held on to it then?" "Because I was frightened... What if I forgot him, forgot everything that had happened?" ([31], p. 426)

Besides, Philip also continues to practise *aikido*, the Japanese martial art he learned from Endo in order to make sure that he does not forget Endo.

In addition, Philip's guilt for associating himself with the Japanese, who have caused the deaths of almost all his families' members, also prevents him from undergoing his neoculturation of Japanese, Chinese and British cultures successfully. This explains why when Michiko shows Philip the Nagamitsu sword Endo used to execute Noel fifty years ago, Philip feels the pain strongly:

Its presence had disturbed me... I struggled to keep my composure... I looked away... trying to block the sudden rush of memories, as though the sword itself had cut a gash in the dike I had built. ([31], p. 15)

Philip does not let go of the past. His family members' deaths, which are all caused by the Japanese, make Philip feel sinful for his association with Japanese. This leads him to build a dike to keep all his painful memories buried deep within his heart. By doing this, Philip traps himself in the past for fifty years and is unable to move on.

### 3.3.5. Neoculturation of Chinese, British, and Japanese Cultures

After Philip tells Michiko, a Japanese woman who knows Endo, about his experience during the Japanese occupation, he successfully comes to terms with his regret and guilt. This is evident as Philip donates both Nagamitsu swords to the Penang Historical Society:

The president of the Penang Historical Society... thanked Mr. Philip Arminius Khoo-Hutton for... his generosity in donating a pair of invaluable weapons to the society... as I let the swords go I said a silent farewell to them. ([31], p. 430)

While letting go of the Nagamitsu sword that Endo used to kill Noel symbolises that Philip has released his guilt, donating the Nagamitsu sword that Philip used to kill Endo represents that Philip has overcome his regret for killing Endo. Hence, it is apparent that Philip's narration of his sufferings during the Japanese occupation to Michiko helps him to come to terms with his guilt and regret.

After Philip overcomes his guilt and regret, he successfully completes his neoculturation of Chinese, British and Japanese cultures to create new cultural practices. This is evident through the changes of his perception on the concepts of fate and free will. The concept of fate is introduced to Philip through reincarnation, a common belief among Buddhists. Philip's grandfather and Endo, who both practise Buddhism, and represent Chinese and Japanese cultures respectively, believe in reincarnation and fate. However, as someone who grows up in a British family and practises British culture in daily life, Philip only believes in free will, "[w]e always have a choice. Nothing is fixed or permanent" ([31], p. 235). Nonetheless, Philip's grandfather clarifies that

"... only certain choices are presented to us, does that not indicate that our options have been limited by some other power?" "Then what is the point of life itself?" I asked, unable to accept what he was telling me. "I shall tell you when I find out myself," he said. ([31], p. 235)

Philip could not accept the concept of fate even fifty years after the end of the Japanese occupation. Only after Michiko relates the concept of fate to a British poem, Philip begins to consider adopting the cultural belief of reincarnation:

"There must be free will to choose. Do you know the poem about the two roads, and the one not taken?" "Yes. That has always amused me, because who created the two roads in the first place?" It was a question I had never considered. ([31], p. 401)

Furthermore, Michiko relates the cultural belief of reincarnation with Christian teaching:

“You had two roads to walk on and they had been created before you set foot on them. Does not the Christian God say, *There is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done?*” ([31], p. 425)

Similar to Philip’s grandfather, Michiko points out that even when there are two roads for one to choose from, both roads are already created before he makes a choice, which means that choices are limited by God in the first place. Thus, with the help of Michiko, he finally finds an answer to the question he once asked his grandfather:

...I have thought over my grandfather’s words and I have come to the conclusion that he was not entirely correct when it comes to the inevitability of a person’s destiny. While I now accept that the course of our lives has been set down long before our births, I feel that the inscriptions that dictate the directions of our lives merely write out what is already in our hearts; they can do nothing more... ([31], pp. 431-432)

Philip’s answer reflects that he undergoes neoculturation successfully. He has taken in the concept of fate, which is embedded in both Chinese and Japanese cultural beliefs of reincarnation. However, by using the phrase “not entirely correct”, Philip points out that his new perception of fate is not exactly the same as the one he learned from his grandfather and Endo. Even though Philip accepts that the concept of fate rules one’s life, he believes that one’s heart has control over it. One’s heart symbolises the concept of free will. This shows that Philip is still retaining the British culture - the concept of free will - in the new cultural belief he practises. Apart from this, Philip’s concept of free will is also not entirely the same as his former perception of free will:

... we were beings capable mainly of love and memory. These capabilities are the greatest gifts given to us, and we can do nothing else but to live out the remembered desires and memories of our hearts. ([31], p. 432)

Formerly, Philip takes the concept of free will as one’s total freedom to make choices. After Philip undergoes neoculturation successfully, he comes to perceive free will as one’s ability to continue one’s desires and memories from previous lives. Hence, it is evident that the new cultural belief, formed after Philip completes neoculturation, contains Chinese, Japanese and British cultural elements, but these cultural elements are not entirely the same as before. This corresponds with Ortiz’s claim that every union of cultures is similar to the reproduction process between individuals ([18], p. 103). While the offspring is always different from the parents, he or she always has something of both parents.

Further evidence of Philip’s successful neoculturation is his decision to use his full name, “Philip Arminius Khoo-Hutton”. Philip’s middle name, “Arminius” is chosen by his mother because Arminius “... propounded the view that a person’s salvation lay in the exercise of his own free will...” ([31], p. 234). In addition, while “Khoo” represents the concept of fate in Chinese culture, “Hutton” symbolises the concept of free will in British culture. These two cultures are combined together by a hyphen, which was “... similar to the ideogram for “one” in Japanese...” ([31], p. 227). Before attaining neoculturation, Philip does not use his full name because he holds on to the concept of free will strongly, “...each name in its own way wanted to decree a future for me, a future in which I would have had no say” ([31], p. 355). After he undergoes neoculturation successfully, he starts using his full name,

... Mr. Philip Arminius Khoo-Hutton... It was the first time ever that I had requested to use my full name... I experienced a feeling of integration and fulfilment that had eluded me for all my

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life... feeling sought and found a permanent abode within me and stilled forever the empty echoes of my dreaming heart. ([31], p. 431)

Philip's decision to use "Philip Arminius Khoo-Hutton" as his full name signifies that he successfully completes neoculturation to form one new multicultural identity that involves all the three cultures. Therefore, it is apparent that Philip has completed the neoculturation of Japanese, Chinese and British cultures successfully.

## 5. Conclusion

After examining *The Gift of Rain* using the concept of transculturalism, this study has found that Philip has been culturally marginalised by his society. This has caused Philip to turn to Endo, who gives him a sense of belongingness. As a result, Philip has undergone acculturation stage to acquire Endo's culture, the Japanese culture. Also, Philip has undergone deculturation stage, where he loses as well as rediscovers his traditional cultures. Last but not least, he has entered the neoculturation stage of the transculturation process. He has struggled between opposing sides before coming to terms with his guilt and regret. In the end, Philip has successfully completed his neoculturation stage. Thus, new cultural practices, which are made up of his traditional and foreign cultures, are created by Philip at the end of the transculturation process.

Based on this study, it can be concluded that, by investigating the interactions between various cultures rather than only focusing on the end products, which are the portrayals of hybrid elements, cultural elements that make up the newly created cultural practices could be determined. This is extremely important because a detailed examination of the complex interactions between various cultures could reveal that the newly created cultural practices consist of not only the cultural elements introduced or brought in by foreigner but also the protagonist's own traditional cultural elements. This, in turn, reflects that Philip, who has undergone the process of acquiring foreign culture and incorporating the foreign culture into his traditional cultures, has not totally lost his own traditional cultures and identities. Therefore, it is evident that multicultural depictions in literary texts could be read positively, provided that the complex interactions between various cultures, which resulted in the incorporation of foreign cultures into traditional cultures, are examined

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