

The representation of japanese society in a pale view of hills by kazuo ishiguro

[Parts of the World](#), [Asia](#)



With the onset of globalization, the exchange of cultures has become common, with people from different backgrounds sharing their experiences of living within a different culture. Inherently, this results in a situation where people tend to develop images of their culture, depending on the time and place of their relocation to the foreign land. This is the case for Kazuo Ishiguro, who moved from Japan at a young age, and thus created an imaginative version of Japan which can be seen in his novel “A Pale View of Hills”. Due to this, it can be said that his novels portray a stereotypical and non stereotypical view of Japanese culture. The effect of this enables the writer to dismantle certain stereotypes that may have existed. This essay will analyze the representation of Japanese society in a Pale View of Hills.

The historical context of the novel is based upon post-war Japan after country’s defeat in WW2. As a result, the country had entered a stage of transition – moving away from its traditional ideals towards western ideals. It is during this shift that A Pale View of Hills takes place. The reaction of Japanese society, towards this change is reflected through various characters – conservative and liberal alike. The focus of this book is largely on the oppression of women in traditional Japanese society. However, it also must be considered, that the book exists as a statement, and possibly a personal reflection of the author, on the role of culture in forming our personalities and perceptions of the world.

Firstly, A Pale View of Hills seems to suggest that Japan used to be centred around a patriarchal society. This can be seen through the role of women in pre-war Japan, as servants to their husbands. Women were not expected to

have an identity of their own in the context of their family. Instead they were expected to behave in accordance to their husband's desires and living for their family, rather for themselves. This is evident in Etsuko's role in the discussion between Jiro and Ogata-San. During the conversations of these two men, Etsuko is seen to have minimal input and exists solely to serve food and tea, and prepare Jiro's clothes. This shows the lack of women's individuality inside their families. While her husband and father in law converse, Etsuko rarely gets involved, but is seen to listen instead. Furthermore, it is seen as her duty to reflect her husband's opinion in public. This can be seen in the visit by Jiro's co-workers, where one of his co-workers had mentioned that upon discovering his wife's desire to vote for another political party, he had intimidated her and expected her to vote for his preferred party. In addition, Jiro and Ogata-San both agree that " husband and wife voting for different public parties is a sad state of affairs" which goes to show that Etsuko is expected to mirror Jiro's views in public. This representation of Etsuko could be a parallel to the roles undertaken by Japanese women leading up to post-war Japan.

Another aspect of Japanese society which is frequently discussed in the novel, is a woman's identity being her family. The idea of " Ryosai Kenbo", good wife, wise mother, was expected of women living in Japan leading up to the end of the war. The life of a woman was tied to her family. Women were granted no agency. It was because of these societal expectations that Sachiko is seen in a desperate attempt to escape Japan. Sachiko mentions, " life's much better for a woman in America" and goes on to list that Mariko,

her daughter “ could become a business girl, a film actress too”. However, before Mariko could be free, Sachiko had to find a way out of Japan and this was seen through Frank-San her “ lover” she pursued. However, the male figure is seen to take advantage of this, by promising to take her to America while only using her for other favours. Eventually, Sachiko figures that Frank-San had been seeing other women and breaks off their engagement. However, Frank does not relent, and insists she moves to Kobe with him, before he pays for her to come with him to America. While, it is unclear what the outcome of this situation may be, based on past judgements, the assumption made could be the fact that he will eventually use her again. Essentially, this implies that while Japanese women continue to face oppression, it raises the point that the Western alternative may not really be the best way out.

A Pale View of Hills is a statement on the impact that our cultural upbringing has on our personalities, and that cultural evolution is a long process. While some characters may express Western values, they are still inextricably Japanese. The reason for this is simply because they had been raised in a society with Japanese values. However, this does not mean that their initial held beliefs cannot change at all. While Etsuko and Sachiko maintain their somewhat conservative ideals, they also adopt liberal attitudes as seen by Sachiko wanting Mariko to have her own identity and Etsuko accepting the choices of Niki and her friends. On the other hand, Nikki seems to have a semblance of Japanese culture in her identity. This is a result of her being raised in the West, being removed from traditional Japanese culture. The

implication of this is that the children of those who emigrated to the west would embody western ideals and values. This is a result of the changes that Japanese society underwent in the context the book was written.

In conclusion, A pale view of hills, shows us that we are all products of our culture. We embody both the positive and negative aspects of it. However, this does not mean that change within society cannot take place, but rather that it takes time.