



*Self-Actualization: An Analytical Study in Philip Kan Gotanda's play
The Wash EDITED COPY*

Safa Qais Fatah

Prof. Nahidh Falih Sulaiman (Ph. D.)

University of Diyala College of Education for Humanities

Abstract

Self-actualization is a very personal process that is likely to differ greatly from person to person because it is dependent on using one's abilities to attain one's goals. The pursuit of self-realization and a sense of personal greatness is the essence of self-actualization. To comprehend the self-discovery process more fully, Abraham Maslow's idea of the Hierarchy of Needs will be employed. One of Maslow's significant contributions is his emphasis on individual drives, which he believed set his work apart from modern motivational psychology. Asian American playwrights wrote about different topics, including self-discovery and self-actualization. Philip Kan Gotanda is among the Japanese American playwrights whose plays, men and women fight over how Asian Americans should struggle to be a part of American society from different viewpoints. This study examines the development of Masi's character in Gotanda's play The Wash and traces the stages of self-awakening along the path to self-actualization. It also emphasizes the social realities of Asian-to-American cultural transmission. The study finds that Masi's character is capable of reaching a high level of self-actualization.

Email:

pretty.alice82@gmail.com
nahidhum@gmail.com

Published:1-12-2023

Keywords : Asian American, Abraham Maslow, the Hierarchy of Needs, self-awakening, self-actualization, the Wash..

هذه مقالة وصول مفتوح بموجب ترخيص

CC BY 4.0

(<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>)

المخلص باللغة العربية:

تحقيق الذات هو عملية شخصية للغاية من المحتمل أن تختلف اختلافا كبيرا من شخص لآخر لأنها تعتمد على استخدام قدرة الفرد على تحقيق أهدافه. السعي للإدراك الذاتي والشعور بالعظمة الشخصية هو جوهر تحقيق الذات. لفهم عملية اكتشاف الذات بشكل كامل ، سيتم استخدام فكرة أبراهام ماسلو عن التسلسل الهرمي للاحتياجات. واحدة من مساهمات ماسلو المهمة هي تركيزه على الدوافع الفردية ، والتي يعتقد أنها تميز عمله عن علم النفس التحفيزي الحديث. كتب الكتاب المسرحيون الأمريكيون الآسيويون حول مواضيع مختلفة تشمل اكتشاف الذات وتحقيق الذات. فيليب كان جوتاندا هو من بين الكتاب المسرحيين الأمريكيين اليابانيين الذي في مسرحياته يتقاتل الرجال والنساء حول الكيفية التي يجب أن يكافح بها الأمريكيون الآسيويون ليكونوا جزءًا من المجتمع أمريكي من وجهات نظر مختلفة. تبحث هذه الدراسة في تطور شخصية ماسي في مسرحية جوتاندا "الغسيل" وتتبع مراحل الصحوّة الذاتية على طول الطريق إلى تحقيق الذات. كما تؤكد على الحقائق الاجتماعية للانتقال الثقافي الآسيوي إلى الأمريكي. توصلت الدراسة إلى أن شخصية ماسي قادرة على الوصول إلى مستوى عالٍ من تحقيق الذات .

1-Introduction

In the United States, the concept of cultural plurality is increasingly represented in American theatre and drama. While giving re-visions of the American Melting Pot, a number of American playwrights and theatre specialists criticise its utopian assumptions, thereby including the unique cultural characteristics of American minorities into their work. Moreover, this new perspective frequently “coincides with a radical departure from conventional stage realism, resulting in the creation of new dramatic forms” (Maufort,1995, p.1). Many of these theatrical frameworks represent minorities’ concerns about cultural absorption into mainstream America. Minority authors frequently dramatize aspects of the new American mosaic in which people are compelled to redefine their ethnic identities. Nonetheless, the link between Asian American theatre and mainstream theatre raises several concerns about representation, marginalization, and creative liberty.

Asian American writers fall under the group of writers who write in a number of genres and on a wide range of topics. Asian American literature does not share a common ancestry, but rather focuses on specific cultural features. Regardless of the differences in experiences, the common ground is frequently centered on the inherent process of self-discovery and self-actualization among the main characters in those works. In its most basic

form, self-actualization is the process of striving for self-actualization and a sense of personal excellence. Additionally, Japanese American literary works expose their special experience in American society. Especially because the memories of Japanese Americans of all generations reveal that the importance of ethnicity among them has shifted over time, from essentially primal affiliations before World War II to shame during and after the war, to an overall sense of anguish when the past is reopened, and lastly to ethnic pride as a result of a positive reading of the past (Takezawa, 1995).

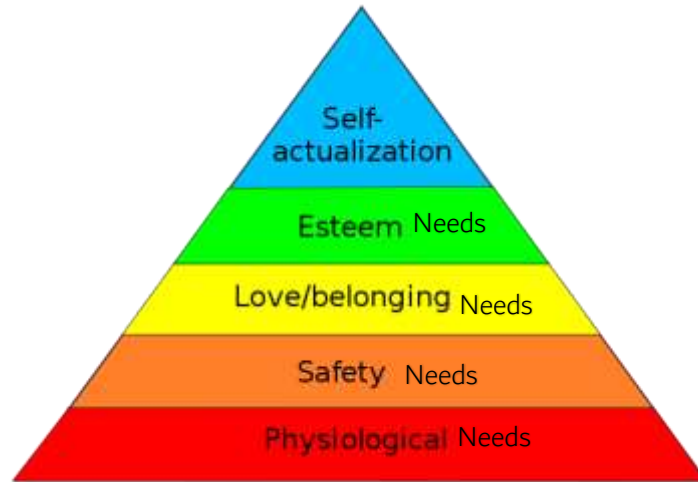
Philip Kan Gotanda is a Japanese-American writer who has had a significant impact on introducing Asian American experiences to mainstream American theatre. *The Wash* is considered the third piece of Gotanda's family trilogy, which consists of *A Song for a Nisei Fisherman* and *Fish Head Soup*. It revolves around a small cast of characters, each with their own unique perspectives and personalities. The play depicts Japanese Americans' struggle to identify themselves within two cultures: American culture and Japanese culture. *The Wash* is mainly about a wife, Masi, who unexpectedly separates from her husband after more than 40 years of marriage, yet she continues to make his laundry and pays frequent visits to drop by his messy bachelor home. She has been completely submissive in her marriage and has remained obedient even now that they are apart. A wife's self-subjugation and her reluctance to embrace an independent existence are symbolized by the laundry. Masi and her husband, Nobu, are imprisoned by their lengthy, enduring marriage as well as by the memories of their imprisonment during World War II. The experience of internment camp has had a lasting impact on both their lives and the play itself (James, 1988). *The Wash* is among Gotanda's plays, which trace the elements of self-awakening through Masi's character. Masi, the protagonist, embarks on a mission to uncover her true identity.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Self-actualization needs are at the fifth and last level of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. The American psychologist Abraham Maslow (1908–1970) created the Hierarchy of Needs, which gives a framework for comprehending the self-discovery process. Maslow, in general, rejects the idea that mechanical forces, such as those produced by stimuli and reinforcement (behaviourism) or by unconscious instincts (psychoanalysis), push and pull on people. Rather, he focuses on potential, believing that

humans seek greater powers. They are interested in pushing the boundaries of creativity. This results in a “fully functioning person,” or a “self-actualizing person,” as Maslow refers to him or her (Maslow,1968). Maslow developed a requirements hierarchy hypothesis with five basic stages (see diagram below).

Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs



Humans begin with a very weak disposition, which is then fully formed as the person grows. The demands progress in an increasing order, beginning with physiological needs, then moving on to safety needs, love and belonging needs, esteem needs, and finally the need for self-actualization. Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs theory is sometimes depicted as a pyramid, with the lower, greater levels indicating lower requirements and the upper point reflecting the need for self-actualization or transcendence (Maslow,1968). It can be traced in Gotanda’s play *The Wash*.

Masi’s journey of self-actualization

Masi Matsumoto is a woman from the second generation of Japanese Americans (Nisei) who is in transformation status. Masi, who has been married to Nobu for more than forty years, separates from him in order to find herself, reclaim her self-esteem, and try to start a new life by dating Sadao. Such behavior from a second-generation Japanese American woman is “unthinkable,” since many wives were supposed to sacrifice their personal

goals for the sake of their husbands and families (Omi, 1991). Masi decides to gain her independence and leave her home. Despite their breakup, she visits her husband's residence once a week to pick up and launder his laundry since cultural habits and rituals are difficult to change. She feels obligated to keep doing his laundry and shopping as a part of her duty as a traditional Japanese. At Act 1 scene 1, Masi appears at Nobu's house,

...Masi enters through the side door with two large brown paper bags. She's struggling to open and close the door with both hands full... Masi sets both bags on the kitchen table and catches her breath...

MASI: (Putting tomatoes and Japanese eggplant from one of the bags into refrigerator) If you have any more dirty clothes I can take them now. Nobu? Is this everything?

(Gotanda & Omi, 1995, p. 141)

Jun Xing sees Masi as a complicated woman full of soft feelings and compassion (Xing, 1998). In his article *Wife is Dutiful Though Separated*, the critic Mel Guessow mentions: "... the laundry becomes the central symbol of a wife's self-subjugation and the hesitancy with which she assumes a life of independence" (Guessow, 1990). Other interpretations of a tittle come on different levels: On a literal level, *The Wash* is just the laundry that Masi washes for her estranged husband Nobu on a regular basis. On another level, it represents women's labor and Masi's metaphorical captivity in an increasingly restrictive marriage. On a more abstract level, it represents the ability of change to "wash over" all elements of these characters' lives, as the limits controlling existence in this play are always shifting (Berson, 1990, p. 33).

From the very beginning of the play, Masi adopted an integration strategy since she interacts with both cultures. Integration strategy is one of four strategies in the Fourfold Model of Acculturation. Integration occurs when the adaptation of mainstream and maintenance of culture of origin are sought by individuals (Rudmin, 2003). The influence of American culture has the potential to transform individuals and alter their perspectives. Individualism dominates American culture, with an emphasis on

independence and individuality. East Asian culture is collectivist in nature and based on Confucian principles, emphasising interdependence and the importance of the group above the individual. Masi's inner conflict is represented in her will to act a traditional Japanese woman and her desire to achieve happiness. As the play progresses, Masi cries out to Judy in Act 2 Scene 7, "And I was trying to explain my side of it, when he turned on me, 'Shut up, Mama. You don't know anything. You're stupid.'" (Gotand & Omi,1995, pp.185-186). The audience perceives Masi as a victim of verbal abuse, at least in American culture. Moreover, during the internment, Masi was dating Chester, a different camper and they were together. Chester served in World War II and died with Regiment 442. After the war, Masi married Nobu. Although Nobu is in love with Masi, his pride and stubbornness prevent him from showing it. As Masi comments, "I didn't think anyone could keep up with Papa. However, you could put in long hours. Papa and you Proud. Stubborn." (p. 180). She is eventually forced to choose between allowing Nobu to abuse her and saving what remains of her life. Masi decides to save herself, declaring, "Because I want to be happy, Nobu. I have the right to be happy" (p.189).

C.N. Le suggests that Masi has partially adapted to American culture, as she only partially adopts the cultural norms of American culture (Le, 2014). Her Japanese heritage compels her to support her family; therefore, she endured years of unhappy marriage before defying her upbringing and divorcing her husband. Masi makes the decision to rely on herself and begin a new life. Instead of treating her as an equal partner, Nobu treats her like a slave and makes her feel foolish. Additionally, he robs her emotionally. As well as her effects by dominant culture, living in America, with its cultural ideals of self-sufficiency and one of the world's highest divorce rates, one can anticipate such viewpoints clashing. Thus, Masi realises she needs to renew her life and experiment with an equal give-and-take relationship. When a Japanese-American marriage ends, the wife is trapped between the happiness her Japanese upbringing requires and her American sense of self-fulfillment wants her to pursue (James, 1988).

In *The Wash*, Masi's character experiences fulfilment against the backdrop of Maslow's pyramid. The base of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs is physiological needs. They are the things a person needs the most in order to survive. They include the need for food, clothing, warmth, rest, and health. At this level, a person's drive stems from their survival instinct (Huitt, 2007).

Masi lives in a small apartment by herself and depends on herself to meet these needs, so her physiological needs are met.

Safety demands are found on Maslow's second level of the hierarchy of needs. A person's need to feel comfortable and protected in their life and surroundings is referred to as their safety or security requirements. Masi has a hard time achieving stable life. At first, she protested against her marginalised lifestyle while still wanting a better life. Even though Masi is a victim of Nobu's verbal abuse and the traditions of Japanese culture, Gotanda expresses a very blatant revolt against Nobu's view of his wife, Masi. Masi cries out to Judy in Act 2 Scene 7:

MASI: ... Ten, fifteen years he didn't want me. (Pause)

We were having one of our arguments, just like always.

And he was going on and on about how it was my fault

this and my fault that...Stupid. After forty-two years

of letting him be right he called me that. And I understood. He didn't even need me to make him be right anymore. He just needed me to be stupid. I was tired. (Gotand & Omi,1995, pp.185-186)

Masi realises she will have a miserable life unless she surrenders to the Japanese traditions that make her a good woman. Masi's Japanese heritage compels her to support her family; thus, she endured years in an unhappy marriage before defying her tradition and divorcing him. Making a clear split can be challenging, as seen by the fact that she initially continues to care for him by doing his washing and cooking for him, although she lives in a different flat. After many years of marriage, Masi makes the "unthinkable" decision to leave her husband and her house to pursue her freedom (Muthana,2019).

The separation is a turning point in her life since she starts to experience something a new. After Masi and Nobu's separation, the wife undertakes new relationships. Masi, who is now 67 years old, aspires to build a new life for herself and begins to fall in love with Sadao, who is 65 years old and quite unlike her ex-husband, Nobu (Guessow, 1990). Thus, the need for safety filled when she fell in love with Sadao, who seemed to promise a better life. Masi finds happiness and comfort with Sadao., as she confirms in Act 2, Scene2,

MASI: No, no, nothing like that. (Pause, thinking) I'm too happy.

SADAO: What?

MASI: I feel . . . too happy. (Sadao stares at her uncomprehending) I used to feel like this as a kid, I think. But it was ... different.

SADAO: You feel too happy?

MASI: When you're a kid you get ice cream and' member how you used to feel? Happy, right? But then you eat it all

up and it's gone, or, you eat too much of it and you throw up. But this just goes on and on. (Gotanda& Omi, 1995, p, 174)

Love and belonging needs are at the third level of Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Humans are social beings who long for connection with other people. This level of the hierarchy describes the requirements for love, family, intimacy, and friendship. People need to be loved and accepted and to have a sense of community. People could feel lonely or depressed when these demands are not met (Huitt, 2007). Masi gets love and encouragement from her daughters, Marsha and Judy, which gives her motivation to go on. The new partnership provides her with the love she needs. She achieved this by moving in with Sadao, who seemed to offer her acceptance and support. Esteem requirements are at level four of Maslow's hierarchy of needs. A person's need for respect, prestige, and recognition is tied to their need for self-esteem. Once their needs for affection and belonging are satisfied, the person attempts to fulfil their requirements for esteem. (Cherry, 2018). The audience concludes from the conversation between Marsh and Nobu that Masi fills her esteem needs:

MARSHA: (Seated) What do you want me to say? Huh, Dad? They're happy. He's a nice man.

NOBU (repeating): "He's a nice man." What the hell's that supposed to mean?

MARSHA: He treats her like a very special person.

NOBU: Well, everyone does that in the beginning. In the beginning it's so easy to be...

MARSHA (interrupts): She laughs. All the time she's

laughing. They're like two little kids. They hold hands. Did you ever do that?... He takes her fishing. He has a little camper and they drive up to Lake Berryessa and camp overnight... (Gotanda & Omi, 1995, p. 191-192).

Maslow classified the desire for esteem from others and the need for respect from oneself into two categories. Social acceptance, status, and recognition have a connection to being respected by others. Self-confidence brought on by proficiency or expertise in a particular task (McLeod, 2007). Masi is capable of handling modern tools, including fishing gear, phone answering machines, and ceramics training classes. Additionally, she rebels and relocates to a different flat from her previous residence. Masi discovers her genuine self by allowing these changes into her life. Besides, she also gets respect and care from Sadao and from her daughters. Sadao demonstrates how to operate the fishing equipment to Masi, unlike Nobu, who appears unable to communicate with her. She is treated by him as a person who should share his interests. He presents her with a fishing rod and reel. She expresses uncertainty about taking the gift and says:

MASI: (Takes it and begins unwrapping it): No, I can't accept this. I don't have anything for you. (Masi unwraps pole) which is broken down into pieces. Sadao sets reel on table and takes pole from Masi and proceeds to put together.) SADAO: See, it goes like this. And then you're all set to catch fish. (Hands it back to MASI) I told you I was going to take you. (Gotanda & Omi, 1995, p. 148)

Self-actualization needs are at the fifth and last level of Maslow's hierarchy of requirements. Self-actualization is the accomplishment of one's full potential. People want to improve to their highest potential at this level (McLeod, 2007). The pursuit of personal development and fulfilment in accordance with one's own ideals and goals is self-actualization, which can take many different forms depending on the individual. Self-actualization can take the form of making decisions and choices that prioritise one's own happiness and well-being over winning others' acceptance (Perera, 2023). Masi's character is capable of reaching a high level of self-actualization since she seeks to achieve happiness and satisfaction in her new life.

Gotanda, through Masi's character, wants to change the stereotype that Asian American women are weak and reliant on men. Gotanda confronts this stereotype throughout *The Wash* and provides an accurate depiction of the Asian American lady. Masi had the courage to start again with a new man in

her advanced years. By doing this, she transforms from a submissive to a self-reliant woman who can make her own decisions. Most significantly, she decides to get a divorce after 40 years of marriage. This is not familiar to her own time as a Nisei lady.

Conclusion

In *The Wash*, Masi's character experiences self-fulfilment against the backdrop of Maslow's pyramid. To begin with, Masi depends on herself to provide for her living needs, so her physiological needs are met. After Masi and Nobu's separation, the wife undertakes new relationships. Masi aspires to build a new life for herself and begins to fall in love with Sadao. Thus, her safety demands are met when she finds the love and support that she deserves in her relationship with Sadao, who seemed to promise a better life. Masi is excited to learn and do more Americanized things. Thus, Masi discovers her genuine self by allowing these changes into her life. Besides, she also gets respect and care from Sadao and her daughters, which helps Masi fill her esteem needs. Finally, Masi's character is capable of reaching a high level of self-actualization when she achieves happiness and satisfaction in her new life. Masi emerges as a strong rejectionist figure which, is not familiar to her own time as a Nisei lady.

Bibliography

- Berson, M. (Ed). (1990). *Between Worlds: Contemporary Asian-American Plays*.
- New York: Theatre Communications Group
- Cherry, K. (2018). The five levels of Maslow's hierarchy of needs.
- *Verywellmind.com*.
- Gotanda, P. K., & Omi, M. (1995). *Fish Head Soup and Other Plays*. (No Title).
- Guessow, M. (1990, November 8). Wife is Dutiful Though Separated. *New York Times*. Retrieved August 16, 2023, from <https://www.nytimes.com/1990/11/08/arts/review-theater-wife-is-dutiful-though-separated.html>
- Huitt, W. (2007). Maslow's hierarchy of needs. *Educational psychology interactive*, 23.
- James, C. (1988). The Wash', an Exploring of Ties That Break and of Ties That Bind. *New York Times*, 17.
- Le, C. N. (2014). *Assimilation & Ethnic Identity-Asian-Nation: The Landscape of Asian America*.
- Maslow, Abraham. (1968). *Towards a Psychology of Being*. New York: Van Nostrand.
- Maufort, Marc. (1995). *Staging Difference: Cultural Pluralism in American Theater and Drama*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing.
- McLeod, S. (2007). Maslow's hierarchy of needs. *Simply psychology*, (1), 1-18 .
- Muthana, R. K. (2019). Internment: The Impact of Internment on Issei and Nisei's Identity in Philip Kan Gotanda's *Sisters Matsumoto*. *Al-Adab*, (128).
- Omi, M. (1991). *Fish Head Soup and Other Plays by Philip Kan Gotanda*. Seattle: University of Washington Press.
- Perera, A. (July 28, 2023) Self-Actualization in Psychology: Theory, Examples & Characteristics. *Simply Psychology*. Retrieved August 19, 2023, from <https://www.simplypsychology.org/self-actualization.html>
- Rudmin, F. W. (2003). Critical history of the acculturation psychology of assimilation, separation, integration, and marginalization. *Review of general psychology*, 7(1), 3-37.
- Takezawa, Yasuko I. (1995). *Breaking the Silence: Redress and Japanese American Ethnicity*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Xing, Jun. (1998). *Asian American through the Lens: History, Representations, and Identity*. Oxford: Altamira Press.