The Rhetoric of Idealism in Tagore’s Pan-Asianism

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Abstract
This essay analyzes the rhetoric of idealist Pan-Asianism in the literary and critical writings of a modern poet, Rabindranath Tagore, who was acknowledged worldwide in the early twentieth century for his good sense, good morality, and good will. Through his idealistic faith, based on his own idealist philosophy that viewed the world as a twin-pan balance, Tagore struggles to strike a blow against nationalism, imperialism, and materialism, and he shows his readers his ideal world: one in which “One Asia” and “One Europe”—the spiritual/soul and material/body—coexist in equality and peace. Rooted in his philosophical idealism, Tagore creates an advanced rhetorical logic that presupposes the Other coexisting with us from the beginning, instead of the rhetoric of exclusion and rejection. Therefore, his rhetoric appeals to the powerless rather than the powerful. However, his international target readers were dominant European, American, and Japanese intellectuals, and unfortunately, he did not receive emotional sympathy from his main audience. Through this failure of Tagore’s rhetoric, we can reaffirm the importance of pathos as much as of ethos and logos when idealism works as a rhetoric or a discourse.

Keywords
Rabindranath Tagore, rhetoric, idealism, Pan-Asianism, anti-nationalism
Introduction

Idealism:
1. Belief in or pursuance of ideals;
2. The tendency to represent things in their ideal forms, rather than as they are;
3. Any of a group of philosophical doctrines that share the monistic view that material objects and the external world do not exist in reality independently of the human mind but are variously creations of the mind or constructs of ideas. ("Collins" n. pag.)

According to the Collins English Dictionary definition above, “idealism” is used in three main contexts. In the first, it means a thought or a behavior that works to achieve one’s ideals as they should be; in the second, it is contextualized as a representation of imagined types with the conception of perfection; and in the third, it is a philosophical field based on theories espousing the view that material things and the reality consisting of them exist inseparably from human ideas, understanding, and perception.

The Pan-Asianism of Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) views “idealism” from the first and the third definitions; it is based on the theory that everything in the universe is composed of two opposite but equal elements—the material and the spiritual. Tagore believed that balance and harmony between these elements represents the ideal state of the universe. He struggled to actualize this ideal world based on his philosophy, arguing against nationalism in his speeches, essays, and literary works. His Pan-Asianism served as idealism in philosophical and ethical contexts in the early twentieth century.

Pan-Asianism can be defined as a set of beliefs in the political, economic, social, or cultural unity of Asian peoples, promoting “Asian values.” From the start of the twentieth century, various Pan-Asianisms emerged in different parts of Asia, including Japan, China, and India. Tagore’s Pan-Asianism formed under the influence of traditional Indian philosophies and Eastern and Western ideologies that resisted imperialism and war in the early twentieth century. His philosophies regarding Asia continue to be studied today from various angles. In Another Asia (2006), Rustom Bharucha notes the relationship between Tagore and Okakura Tenshin, a Japanese scholar and curator, and the intersection of and interaction between their ideas of Asia, emphasizing the two people’s “friendship” for inter-Asian connections. In From the Ruins of Empire (2012), Pankaj Mishra examines
the thoughts and career of Tagore as one of the most prominent Asian intellectuals who struggled with the West’s dominance and envisioned a greater Asia. Just recently, in Imperfect Solidarities (2020), Madhumita Lahiri highlights Tagore’s “print internationalism,” which was “a strategy within the worldwide hegemony of the English language,” to reformulate Gitanjali into a “pan-Asian approach to aesthetics” (3-4).

Perhaps the reason why Tagore’s philosophies of Pan-Asianism, internationalism, cosmopolitanism, and universalism—all of which seek to overcome nationalism—continue to be studied is because we remain unable to solve fundamental world problems, such as terrorism, corporate tyranny, and environmental destruction. This reinforces the enduring validity and usefulness of Tagore’s thoughts. However, as Mishra notes, the Japanese invasion of Manchuria and China proved how “vague” the concept of Asian “spirituality” was within Tagore’s lifetime (240), and as Bharucha indicates, Pan-Asianism from the “‘Asian perspective’ represented by Tagore and Okakura” was “fictitious” and obscure or exceedingly idealistic (xxi). Nevertheless, could his ideas offer an answer to the world’s problems? If so, in what parts or aspects of them can we find the answer?

Tagore’s Pan-Asianism as a solidarity beyond the nation-state is linked to the concept of cosmopolitanism. Historically, there have been three approaches to interpret the tension between particularist and generalist political formations and allegiances: radical cosmopolitanism, anti-cosmopolitanism, and soft cosmopolitanism (S. Kim 151). Radical cosmopolitans insist we should establish a world state or government to solve problems, whereas anti-cosmopolitans posit that radical cosmopolitanism will eventually lead to imperialism or despotism. Soft cosmopolitanism combines these two positions, endeavouring to set up a global civil society that respects national cultures and autonomies. This is Immanuel Kant’s position, which is based on the rule that “states should be governed in a republican manner” and “consent . . . to consider each other as autonomous entities and respect each other’s political sovereignty and territorial integrity” (Mertens 330). Tagore’s Pan-Asianism resembles this position, as he ultimately conceived of “one world” as an entity in which the East and the West could coexist compatibly under humanism while preserving each country’s autonomy. The advantage of this soft cosmopolitanism is its resistance to political, economic, or cultural colonization by maintaining harmony between national cultures and the world. In this sense, Tagore’s cosmopolitan Pan-Asianism has significant implications for today and can
be linked to contemporary concepts such as a “vernacular cosmopolitanism”\(^1\)—unless we seek to ordain the “Asian value” or “Asian spirit” that Pan-Asianism cherished, which was perverted by Japanese imperialism and expansionism in the past and could be easily misemployed by Sinocentrism or Indocentrism because of its fictitious nature and basis.

While there have been many studies on Tagore’s Pan-Asian, international, and cosmopolitan thoughts, to date none has been conducted in relation to rhetoric.\(^2\) Instead of examining the Asian values or spirituality in his Pan-Asianism, I aim to focus on Tagore as an intellectual rhetor able to maximize rhetorical effects by using his ethos along with his global reputation, logos based on his philosophy, and pathos from his poetic sensitivity. Furthermore, by analyzing Tagore’s Pan-Asianism, I attempt to explore the rhetoric of idealism in the two aspects introduced above, which function rhetorically both as a philosophical notion of logos and as a moral principle of ethos and pathos. Rhetoric is a means of conveying idealism to the general public and is itself an example of applying idealism to our lives. All philosophies and great ideas, including idealism, are made known and spread to people through rhetoric, and the strategies rhetoric employs to persuade audience and reader are inspired by contemporary philosophies.

In a rhetorical sense, idealism as an ethical or moral value (according to its first definition) sounds negative, or at least unsuccessful. If a speaker or writer succeeds in communication and persuades his or her audience and readers to change their mind and reality, the rhetor’s beliefs, behaviors, and message are no longer “idealistic,” meaning fair but empty, but “realistic.” In other words, a discourse that succeeds in persuading can no longer be called idealistic. From this rhetorical perspective, Tagore’s Pan-Asianism is a failed discourse. If his rhetoric had been successful, World War II would not have occurred, and battles and conflicts among nations would have disappeared not only in Asia but worldwide. Therefore, it can be said that this essay is an analysis of why his rhetoric or discourse failed. Through this analysis, in the future, we can more broadly and deeply consider the effective rhetorical strategies of such ethical idealism as well as philosophical idealism for communication with the public.

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1 “Vernacular cosmopolitanism” can be defined as “an understanding and acceptance of cultural differences derived from mundane, routine social interactions across ethnic-cultural boundaries in everyday life” (Chua 51).

2 In his recent book, Lahiri approaches Tagore’s Pan-Asianism from a rhetorical perspective, focusing on the poet’s linguistic strategies for a political purpose. However, Lahiri highlights only Tagore’s use of English as “the global Anglophone” to build a “non-Eurocentric internationalism” and does not cover his rhetoric in general (26).
From ancient Greece to the nineteenth century, the term “rhetoric” meant the art of persuasion or argumentation, and later its meaning was reduced to mere style, ornament, or trope. In the early twentieth century, rhetoric was defined as “the art of communicating thought from one mind to another, the adaptation of language to circumstance” (Joseph 3). Currently, rhetoric is more widely understood as “the human use of symbols to communicate” (Foss 4). A more recent understanding of rhetoric suggests that it is associated with all the processes of “[h]ow we perceive, what we know, what we experience, and how we act” (Foss, Foss, and Trapp 1). In either case, human experience and knowledge are seen as distinct because every word choice results in individuals viewing the world in one way rather than in another (2).

This view leads to the idea that language is the framework of everyday life, and rhetoric exposes worldviews or what Kenneth Burke calls “terministic screens,” which determine human attitudes and attention to particular parts of reality, forming a reflection, selection, and deflection of the reality (45). In this sense, rhetoric correlates with philosophical idealism, which is precisely concerned with how human attention is related to, impinges upon, or receives information from reality. A final conceptualization declares that rhetoric is “‘epistemic’, that is, knowledge-building” and a means through which “people come to accept some ideas as true and to reject others as false” (Herrick 22). ³ Now, rhetoric implies not merely a trope or figure of speech for creating impressive expressions but also episteme for generating and understanding knowledge that reflects the zeitgeist. This approach is reminiscent of Michel Foucault’s conceptualization of “discourse.” Rhetoric or discourse, in this vein, is regarded as both action and perception in a broad range of communication areas. It is both a guide for persuasive or effective expression and a framework for intelligent understanding. As Terry Eagleton points out, rhetoric is “a ‘creative’ as well as a ‘critical’ activity” covering “both the practice of effective discourse and the science of it” (180).

Relying on the latest definitions and scope of rhetoric, I will focus not only on which rhetorical strategies Tagore employed for effective persuasion but also on how Tagore as a rhetor and his readers as audience perceived and understood the world in the twentieth century. This means studying how his idealism was conveyed to the public and why his idealism failed to persuade his audience. Through this, we will be able to appreciate Tagore not only as a poet or an intellectual thinker but

³ Likely the first consideration of this perspective on rhetoric is given in Robert L. Scott’s “On Viewing Rhetoric as Epistemic” (1967), which was a turning point not only for the philosophical vision of rhetoric but also for the interpretation and evaluation of the ethical aspects of rhetoric.
also as an idealist rhetor, thereby achieving a more multifaceted understanding of him. Moreover, I hope that we can learn valuable lessons from his rhetorical failure and think about what rhetorical strategies are needed in the future. In the following sections, I will analyze Tagore’s ethos, the logos of his Pan-Asianism, and its pathos for his audience at that time.

Ethos

Rabindranath Tagore was not only a famed poet, educator, and social-reformer in India, but also a rhetor who insisted that the West and the East should be balanced and Asia should be one, and this (idealist) rhetorical strategy emerged from his idealist philosophy. He was born of aristocratic Bengali Brahmins in Calcutta (now Kolkata) in 1861, began to write poetry at an early age, and was educated at home until he was sent to England for formal schooling when he turned seventeen. However, he did not complete his studies there; he returned to India to manage his family’s estates, but remained involved in literary activities and published several books. He wrote in Bengali and often translated his own works into English. He was introduced to the West with his book of poetry Gitanjali and became the first non-European winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1913. He died in Calcutta in 1941 at the age of eighty.

Due to his family and educational background, Tagore might have been, in the view of some Eastern readers, one of those in “a class who may be interpreters between [the British imperialists] and the millions whom [the British imperialists] govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect” (Macaulay 430). If he was neither comprador nor faithful teacher of imperialism, he was still positioned as a kind of psychological and intellectual hybrid between the colonizers and the colonized. Western readers, however, wanted to hear from this Eastern sage the words of the religious gospel they had lost in the past. Indeed, in his introduction to Gitanjali, William Butler Yeats writes, “we have met our own image . . . or heard . . . our voice as in a dream” (22-23). Dean William Inge, on Tagore’s sixtieth birthday, commented that although Tagore was not a Christian, it was “the time of the original Gospel,” and “[a]gain and again he seemed to be more Christian than the Christians” (qtd. in Verma 1). Western literary practitioners described Tagore as an “Oriental Saint” with an admiration that was neither for the poet himself nor for the Bengal civilization giving birth to him, but for the Western self, that is, a Western identity creating this Eastern poet (J. Lee 632).
These perspectives on Tagore, not only as an Indian mediator with dark skin wearing a white mask but also as an orientalist guru or even a prophet preaching the original Christian gospel, “obscured the poet’s long-standing involvement with Indian anti-colonial movements” (Featherstone 181). Tagore participated in the anti-imperialist movement in 1905, when the British Partition of Bengal was announced, which served as a catalyst for Tagore to develop his lucid ideas against Western imperialism (J. Kim 67). From then on, he consistently showed his political stance against colonialism and imperialism through both his individual writings and the media, such as The Times. As a matter of fact, the reason he left his studies at London University in his youth was his disillusionment with Western education. Later, he founded an experimental school at Santiniketan in West Bengal, which later became Visva-Bharati University, where he tried out his Upanishadic ideals of education. Although he was knighted by the British Government, he resigned the honor in protest against the imperial policies in his country.

Tagore was in tune with the Indian independence movement from the standpoint of anti-colonialism and anti-imperialism, and he participated in the Indian national movement from time to time, but he was not in perfect agreement with the Indian nationalists. Although he favored the cause of Indian independence, he argued that the means to gain independence should not be narrow Western nationalism. He supported India’s independence movement but opposed the Hindu-centered nationalist movement. In his view, the Indian nationalist independence movement, unlike its original intent, was leading to a nationalism that excluded and discriminated against Indian Muslims. Here, he broke with the Hindu-centered nationalist movement because he believed that the Indian independence movement should aim ultimately at human liberation and equality. He argues that India’s problem is “the problem of the world in miniature” and seeks to resolve matters of colonialism and nationalism at the same time (Nationalism 136). In his works in various genres, Tagore points out the violence of nationalists in India and other parts of Asia, who imitated Western ideas and struggled to win their political freedom in the name of building a nation-state (Sohn, “Nationalism and Female Issue” 48).

A good example of his criticism of both Western imperialism and Indian nationalism is his argument for the problem facing Indian women. He seeks to

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4 The partition of Bengal was announced on 19 July 1905 by the Viceroy of India, George Nathaniel Curzon, and separated the largely Muslim eastern areas from the largely Hindu western areas. Bengal was reunited by Lord Hardinge in 1911, in response to the Swadeshi movement’s riots in protest against the policy.
provide a new perspective on the lives of Indian women trapped in two traditions—
imperialism and patriarchal nationalism. Nationalism advocated a new patriarchy for modern times, conferring “upon women the honour of a new social responsibility” and “the task of ‘female emancipation’ with the historical goal of sovereign nationhood, [that] bound them to a new, and yet entirely legitimate, subordination” (Chatterjee 248). Western modernization seemingly liberated women, but in fact, combined with patriarchal nationalism, it subordinated them. In his work, such as in The Home and the World, Tagore warns about the nature and danger of not only imperialism and colonialism but also of masculine nationalism and a nationalist patriarchal system (Sohn, “Nationalism and Female Issue” 60).

The turning point came when Tagore, who had resisted British imperialist aggression, became aware of the problems of nationalism based on imperialistic ethnocentrism and realized that European nationalism led to controversies among nations and, eventually, to war. Following World War I, Tagore was convinced that nationalism could not be the intellectual heritage of mankind. He attributes the war’s main cause to materialism and nationalism: “The great war was one of the blows of God working to break down our materialism, our selfishness, our narrow nationalisms” (qtd. in Kundu 82). World War I’s destruction of Europe weakened the validity of the dominant ideologies that had sustained the West, making Europe’s supposed superiority questionable.

After the outbreak of World War I, Tagore asserts his anti-imperialist idea more firmly, that the “whole world is . . . one country” where the East and the West coexist (Nationalism 119), and he strengthens his position as an anti-imperialist, anti-nationalist, internationalist, universalist, and Pan-Asianist. Due to his political positions as an anti-imperialist and anti-nationalist, he was often misunderstood and verbally attacked both in the British Empire and in his colonial homeland, India. Nonetheless, his criticism of Western imperialism, colonialism, and nationalism became more and more intense. To him, nationalism was a product of European imperialism and colonialism, whose ideologies sacrificed others for the material benefit of a dominant group. Therefore, his political position was not contradictory but consistent with his worldview as revealed in his rhetoric.

As is well known, Aristotle suggests three factors of credible rhetors: “good sense, good moral character, and good will” (Rhetoric 1378a). If rhetors do not have good sense, they cannot form good opinions; if they do not have moral goodness, they might lie wickedly; and if they do not have good will, they might hide the best ideas they know. This is why even modern audiences often have more interest in who is speaking rather than what is being said. Tagore was
acknowledged worldwide in the early twentieth century for his good sense, good morality, and good will, although he was criticized by some Western intellectuals and Hindu-centric nationalists. The *ethos* of his rhetoric was effective not only because of his credible character and good sense, but also because of the good morality and will expressed through the role he played as a modern intellectual who resisted dominant discourses according to his conscience.

Regarding *ethos*, “who is speaking, who is allowed to speak, who has a voice, and whose voice cannot be heard are crucial points that demonstrate the closeness of the relationship between rhetoric and power” (Choi 103). In ancient Greece, the rhetor’s *ethos* was discovered by the audience during the process of speaking, but today, the audience tends to first pay attention to who is speaking and later to what is spoken. If nobody directs any attention to the speaker’s voice, the message is never passed on to anyone. As Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak declares, “the subaltern cannot speak” (“Can the Subaltern Speak?” 308). The real meaning of this provocative statement, which is frequently misunderstood, is that “even when the subaltern makes an effort to the death to speak, she is not able to be heard” because her voice is not recognized in dominant hegemonic systems (Spivak, “Subaltern Talk” 292). Not all people can speak in their own voices, and the roles of intellectuals are therefore crucial in modern society. Under dominant discourses including nationalism and imperialism, modern intellectuals have played their roles as credible and reliable speakers using their knowledge and intelligence, and their voices have attracted popular attention. Modern intellectuals’ words—that is, their rhetoric—have power. As an intellectual rhetor, Tagore had the power to get attention from the world public.

According to Foucault, however, the task of intellectuals is not to speak directly on the voiceless people’s behalf, but “to help to create conditions in which the disqualified may express themselves” (Foss, Foss, and Trapp 356) and to “struggle against the forms of power that transform [even the intellectuals themselves] into its object and instrument in the sphere of ‘knowledge,’ ‘truth,’ ‘consciousness,’ and ‘discourse’” (Foucault 208). Modern intellectuals as rhetors “should be not merely those who resist power but those who constantly attempt to remove or separate the power from knowledge and discourse” (Choi 107). However, Tagore did not advance to this point, although he was an intellectual who acted according to conscience and intended to subvert the dominant discourses. Based on his responsibilities and abilities as an intellectual and a rhetor, as well as his worldwide reputation as a poet and the consistency of his writings, the *ethos* of his rhetoric can be regarded as excellent, but he did not enable the voiceless acquire
their own voices. I think this is the limit of *ethos* in modern intellectuals—whom Foucault calls “universal intellectuals”—including Tagore.

**Logos**

Tagore believes that whereas Europe is a space “where peoples had their racial unity from the beginning” (*Nationalism* 117), Asia, represented by India, had “the race problem” “from the beginning of history” (14). He supposes that Europe was racially and religiously homogeneous, but Asia was not. Nonetheless, even as early as 1902, Tagore had already written that “there [had] been a great and deep unity among the different races of Asia” (qtd. in Majumdar 77). Then, what made him regard Asia as one unity? What did he think of the spirit of the East? Two justifiable reasons are found for Tagore’s Pan-Asianism in his texts: the first is the unity of Asia as a space sharing Indian religions and cultures, such as Buddhism and Hinduism, and the second is the homogeneity of Asia as a victim of Western colonialism and imperialism (O. Lee 335).

First, Tagore is convinced that East Asian countries, such as Japan and China, are coupled with India by Buddhism, and Southeast Asian countries and India are connected by Buddhism and Hinduism. In other words, India is located in the center of Asia as a representative of Asian religions and cultures. When he won the Nobel Prize, he emphasized the fact that he “represented the East” and “got [his] reward for [his] Eastern friends” (*The Essential Tagore* 186). In a letter to Jawaharlal Nehru, Tagore stresses that it is necessary to restore “the historic forces of Asiatic unity” grounded in ancient Indian civilization:

> India’s great awakening had crossed deserts and mountains, the overflow of her glorious epoch of culture touched far continents and left permanent deposits in distant shores of Asia. In my visits to China and Japan, and to Siam, Java, and Bali, I felt profoundly moved to find how the communion of our culture had persisted even up to our own days. (748)

His faith in India as a land where Asian ancient civilizations originated sustains the first reason why Asia should unite. His Asian solidarity, with Indian culture at its core, is revealed in several of his poetic works, too. However, I intend to focus

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5 “Woman of the Sea” is a good example among them. It was written on Tagore’s journey around Southeast Asia in 1927, on the ship leaving Bali, where he discovered ancient cultural ties
only on the second reason because the purpose of this essay is not to examine the “Asian value” or “Asian spirit” in his Pan-Asianism but to analyze its logos as idealism, which regards everything in the universe—from each human to Asia to the entire world—as composed of two elements, the material and the spiritual.

The second reason is related to the notion of Asia as a counterpart to Europe. Tagore appears to have embraced the European discourse of “One Europe” and exerts himself to develop and expand it in his own rhetoric. Tagore’s feelings for Asia need to be understood in the context of colonialism and of “the West’s browbeating of Asia” (Dev 176). In many parts of his writings, Tagore insists that Asia should unite for humanity against the immoral West. The Asian countries that should band themselves together against their common enemy, European nations—which are depicted as “evil,” “malefic,” “predatory,” and “mechanically efficient”—become relatively “spiritual” human beings, finally embraced by the pronoun “we” (Nationalism 85). Because the immoral West overwhelms the East, Tagore equally binds Asian people and countries with “we” rhetoric through his writings. His rhetoric of Pan-Asianism begins with an assumption that “our” Asia is a unity of “hearts,” of “man,” and a “bond of love” (75-76).

Therefore, Tagore’s Pan-Asianism means anti-imperialism and anti-colonialism as well as cosmopolitanism and universalism, and it is based on human equality and liberation. For him, problems only in India, or only in an Asian country alone, or only in a European country, are not isolated. All countries are connected by basic common problems. International, foreign, and domestic problems cannot be separated but are connected to each other. Europe and Asia, thus, should not be considered separate—they influence each other. He believes that World War I, caused by the Western “aggressive spirit of nationalism,” will not be confined to Europe but sends “disastrous effects” to “the peoples of the East,” as Western imperialism had colonized Asian countries (Selected Letters 333). Naturally, he asserts that Asian peoples should fight against European “barbarism” (333).

After receiving the Nobel Prize, his fame took him across continents on lecture tours through which he spread his thoughts to the world about modern nations and nationalism. He stands up for his belief that finding a way to cope with Western nationalism is “the task set before the thinkers of all oriental nations who have faith in the human soul” (Nationalism 153). He argues that all Asian countries

with India. The poem’s apparently romantic and fantastic narrative implies a “historical and political allegory in its theme of union, parting, and reunion,” showing the poet’s historical and cultural understanding of Asian solidarity—“the ancient links between India and other Asian countries, the severance of those ties, and the renewed prospect of cultural interaction” (Selected Poems 419).
should unite to fight against nationalism. His anti-nationalism is a concept derived from anti-imperialism and anti-colonialism against the Western dominant ideology that the stronger prey upon the weaker. This is why Tagore believes in Asian solidarity, and at the same time, he strongly criticizes the imperialization of Japan.

Tagore had great expectations for Japan, at first. After witnessing the rise of Japan after the Russo-Japanese War, he was proud of not only India but also Asia in general because he found, in the bold confidence of Japan, an alternative value to replace Western power. Later, his three official visits to Japan, taken in spite of his disappointment with Japan’s political and social atmosphere of the day, also show that he regarded Japan as an alternative Asian power (J. Kim 68). After returning home discouraged from his first visit to Japan in 1916, Tagore wrote an essay titled “Nationalism in Japan” and published it in a book, Nationalism. In his writing, he criticizes Japan for misusing Western nationalism, but tries to persuade Japanese readers. Despite the Western invasion of Asia, Japan did not become a colony but fought against the West and developed its own strength. Therefore, Tagore argues that, if Japan will do its job well, it could open up a new horizon of world history. It seems that “Nationalism in Japan” was written with his hope that Japan would not walk down the path that Western imperialism had taken.

Tagore’s concept of “One Asia” against “One Europe” is inherently derived from his imagination of geographic topography: for him, Asia is located on the opposite side of the world from Europe. He is aware enough of the globalized world as “the larger one,” a book in which “all national histories are merely chapters” (Nationalism 119), yet, in his mind, the world consists of two great civilized areas—the East and the West—like a twin-pan balance. Tagore uses expressions to depict the world as a kind of a balance of two antagonistic but simultaneously complementary civilizations. They are geographically located on opposite sides of the Earth but have in fact had continual cultural exchanges since the dawn of history. Tagore supposes the world to be like a huge balance with two pans, each of which cannot maintain equilibrium without the other. He recognizes the differences

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6 It is also said that Tagore visited Japan five times, including visits in which he traveled to other countries via Japan.

7 After Tagore visited Japan, intellectuals in Japan walked a very different path from what Tagore had hoped. One example is Yone Noguchi, who had continued to communicate with Tagore but finally showed the very Japanese nationalism that Tagore had criticized. Noguchi insists that Japan’s invasion of China in 1937 was to protect Asia from Western imperialism, and asks Tagore in a letter to support the Japanese attack on China because it is consistent with Tagore’s argument for Asian solidarity. Tagore replies that he cannot accept Japan’s invasion of China and that such action is nothing but the Japanese nationalism he had most opposed—not a resistance to the West, but a copy of the West.
of the East and the West, but at the same time, believes that these two worlds should coexist and live together. Their relationship ought to be “complementary to each other” (Nationalism 26). However, he deems that at that time, they hold the “hatred” which “darken[s] the atmosphere” of the whole world with its “poisonous fumes,” even though they are located at each “end of the world” (The Essential Tagore 215). The violence of the West does not bring destruction only upon itself but desecrates the whole soul of mankind, including the East (215). The situation is as if the arms are not balanced by one weight. Neither the East nor the West can exist alone without the other. In Tagore’s rhetoric, the world is not a spherical Earth, but a great board balanced with two side pans, each of which cannot help being influenced by the other’s forces.

However, this rhetoric, stressing the two sides, is likely to foster dichotomous and black-or-white thinkers. Tagore himself is not free from this diametrical-opposition framework. For instance, he thinks the East and the West each bring “torches” or “darkness” to the world: the West was dark when the East was bright, and the West is bright when the East is dark (Nationalism 66). There are vast numbers of conflicts in the world, but they are always conflicts between pairs of forces: “labour and capital,” “the man and the woman,” “the greed of material gain and the spiritual life of man,” the “selfishness of nations” and the “ideals of humanity,” “the ugly complexities” of commerce and the beautiful nature of man, and so forth (Nationalism 72-73). Everything in his universe is composed of two opposed components. If there is good, there is evil naturally, and every organism, including a human being, has a physical body and a spiritual soul simultaneously.

This strategy of explaining everything as two extremes makes audiences view the world from too-simple, unsophisticated, and one-dimensional perspectives, but it also helps them understand very clearly and easily the rhetor’s message. Tagore utilizes rhetoric based on this diametrical-opposition framework not only for the latter reason but also to establish One Asia as a counterpart and antipode of One Europe. Therefore, it is not surprising that he associated the East with goodness, spirituality, humanity, love, and natural beauty, while connecting the modern West with evil, materialism, commercialism, and artificial and violent science.

Although dichotomous rhetoric has the effect of sharply dividing the two worlds, Tagore does not believe that this confrontation is permanently fixed. He dreams of the two civilizations ultimately coexisting in balance and harmony, but the reality was that the “bad West” continued to invade the “good East.” He predicts that the inhuman policies of modern Western nations, like “bloodhounds of Satan,” would be able to reach Japan or any other Asian country and give rise to mankind’s
“miseries” (102). He reproaches modern Western nations for their ruthlessness and lack of spirituality, and at the same time warns Asian countries against the infection of Western contamination. He supposes that, since the West is not only different from the East but also seriously on the wrong track, the East should not follow in the path of its counterpart.

Following this wrong track of the West was Westernization, Tagore thinks. He distinguishes Westernization from modernization and modernism. The “mere imitation” is only Westernization or Europeanization, not modernization, and “true modernism” is “freedom of mind,” “not the imitation of the outer features of the West” (93-94). Tagore, who regards the value of freedom and equality based on humanity as the highest virtue of humankind, conceives of modernization and modernism as ideal values that both the West and the East should pursue, not the West’s monopoly. Therefore, for him, Asians should aim for modernization and modernism but remain wary of Westernization because that is mere imitation.

According to Tagore, imitating “other people’s life” is like unethical “plagiarism,” and duplication is an evidently immoral “forgery” (qtd. in Chung 191). For this reason, he declares that “imitating others is destruction” (qtd. in Dev 171). For him, the balance of the world should not be a balance of physical equilibrium created by one side copying the other unilaterally. After all, if both sides of the balance are equal, even in shape and content as well as in weight, then it does not have any reason to exist as a twin-pan balance. Therefore, this rhetorical logic is persuasive and effective for Tagore’s argument that the East must be united and urgently block Western forces.

Balancing the world’s two-arm scale requires adjusting the weight tilted to the West. The current situation of the day was not an advisable or normal state, and mankind should find balance between these two worlds as soon as possible. For this, the countries in the East first needed a sense that they belonged to One Asia, as the European nations had a consciousness of One Europe. Tagore indicates that English people fought for Spanish people’s freedom in Spain, even though the British government acquiesced in the civil war, but no Asian country protested against Japan’s aggression toward China nor fought for its neighbor (The Essential Tagore 213-14).

Tagore first admired Japan as a main practitioner of Asian values that would bring Asia into unity in the future, but later, he was greatly disappointed with the Japan that mimicked and imitated the bad West and used violent force in other Asian countries, as Western nations did, in the name of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere, thereby discarding the true values of One Asia. As Western
countries unite themselves, Eastern countries should also stand together, Tagore thinks. In order to restore the balance between the feeble and vulnerable East and the solid and strengthened West, he believes that Asian countries and peoples should unite to have a sense of belonging together.

Although stressing the current imbalance between the East and the West, Tagore insists on One Asia as a counterpart of One Europe on the two sides of the world balance—his ultimate goal, after resolving the disequilibrium, is to achieve world peace, co-prosperity, and “wholeness and wholesomeness of human ideals” (*Nationalism* 22), because he has a strong faith that the world is one. He asserts that the world should be developed not by any monopolistic power of force but by a harmonized, whole “moral adjustment” of a “whole world of men” (123). According to Tagore, the West had not gone astray constantly since the beginning of history. He points out, as an example, the fact that “[p]olitical martyrs who had suffered for the honor of their people were accorded unreserved welcome at the hands of the English” in Europe, in the past (*The Essential Tagore* 210). He is convinced that it is nationalism based on imperialism, colonialism, and materialism that misleads the West in the twentieth century.

Tagore believes that all communities—the East, the West, nations, ethnic groups, and religious groups, as well as the world as a whole—must balance and harmonize two elements in themselves. According to Tagore’s rhetoric, the world is a balance consisting of the East and the West, and the East and the West are each composed of two vital elements—the spiritual and the material. Each country in Asia or in Europe is also a balance consisting of the two elements. This relationship or network is similar to a fractal structure: “Fractals are shapes that are self-similar, meaning they have the same structure at every scale. As we zoom in on them, we find smaller copies of the larger macro-structure” (Boeing 7). Tagore, who recognizes the world through this structure, is consistent in his rhetoric.

In fact, fractals have no beginning and no end, but in Tagore’s rhetoric, the smallest balanced entity is a human. The human being is composed of soul and body, and, to Tagore, a balanced human is healthy and ideal. Small and large communities composed of human members likewise should have a harmonious balance of spirit or soul and material or body to maintain their ideal state. This idealist concept that a community consists of soul and body leads easily to a metaphorical conception that a community is an organism. This reminds us of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel’s organic worldview. His entire philosophy “proceeds from an organic vision of the world, a view of the universe as a single vast living organism” (Beiser 80). Constantly referring to the state as an organism
throughout his book *Philosophy of Right*, what he “means by ‘the concept’ or ‘the idea’ of the state is indeed its organic structure” (239). This similarity may be because Tagore and Hegel share a monotheistic or pantheistic religion or worldview, although it is necessary to consider that the latter’s relationship to pantheism and religion is still disputed.\(^8\)

However, as Frederick Beiser notes, this is not a uniquely Hegelian view but the common ideal vision the German romantics shared in the eighteenth century. The romantic ideal of unity with others was revealed as the concept of organic world and state. Furthermore, the view of a community as an organism is more historical and universal. It has been traced back to earlier “Indo-European foundation myths of tribes and nation,” according to which “royal and caste lineages” are “descendants of the body parts of mythical founder figures” (Musolff 81). Ancient Greek philosophers and politicians used the organism metaphor for their philosophical and political aims of *polis*: “A body is composed of parts, and must grow proportionately if symmetry is to be maintained. . . . The same is true of a city. It, too, is composed of parts; and one of the parts may often grow imperceptibly out of proportion” (Aristotle, *Politics* 1320b 33). Plato and Aristotle argue that the *polis* should be “an organism, where the whole cares for each part and each part lives for the whole,” and it seems that “Hegel and the romantics had a very idealistic conception of ancient Greek life” (Beiser 37-38).

Like Plato, Aristotle, Hegel, and the German romantics, Tagore also perceives the world and communities as an organism. He particularly emphasizes that an organic community is composed of spiritual and physical parts. The nation, the source of the nationalism Tagore tries to defeat, is also one of the communities. Is it also metaphorized in his texts as an organism or person consisting of spirit and body? Tagore is as negative about nation as he is about nationalism. It should be noted here that Tagore distinguishes “nation” from “Nation.” While “nation” is a general noun meaning a “political and economic union of a people” under a single specific government, he uses the proper noun “Nation” to refer to each nation’s common working system “for a mechanical purpose” (*Nationalism* 19). According to him, “Nation is neither British nor anything else; it is an applied science and therefore more or less similar in its principles wherever it is used” (28).

As a new notion in the early twentieth century, Nation is sophisticated, strict, and regulated, but it lacks humanity. It is a community that has lost its balance.

\(^8\) Tagore’s father, Debendranath Tagore, adopted and elaborated the syncretism of Ram Mohan Roy, who “founded the Brahmo Sabha, a reformist society aimed at . . . bringing [Hinduism] closer to a monotheistic religion like Christianity” (Mishra 220).
between its spiritual and material sides. Therefore, although Nation is personified in his rhetoric, this does not mean that it is metaphorized as a human being with a warm heart. In his writings, it is negatively described as an “evil” “machine,” “device,” “organization,” and “abstract being” (23, 24, 131, 132). Basically, Tagore’s idea of Nation is based on the conception of Nation personified, but it is a half-human who lacks a soul. It is a being that has lost its humanity.

Thus, in Tagore’s writings, the Nation is conceptualized not as a human but more as a beast or monster that has only its body without spirit or soul, and its concept is transformed and developed into the concept of a machine. The emphasis on Nation as a soulless and spiritless existence is grounded in Tagore’s rhetoric. In Tagore’s texts, Nation is expressed as a “mechanical organization” and a “political laboratory,” with government functioning as “applied science” not as a “living thing,” and this “hydraulic press” or “steam-roller” produces “scientific products” by using its “engines” (20, 22, 28, 29, 35). These expressions contain a warning that the government and administration of Nation would turn all human organizations and individuals into soulless and lifeless machines like itself.

In Tagore’s rhetoric, Nation is not an inanimate object, but a being roaming around in search of prey. In a nutshell, it is a machine zombie. Tagore remarks that this machine zombie called Nation, which disrupts the balance of spiritual and material, has come from the West, which disrupts the balance between East and West. This “modern product” of “commerce and politics” as “national machinery” is “manufacture[d]” by the “Creator” in “the West” (16-17). Now not only the West but the whole world is threatened by the “Nation of the West” with its “tentacles” rooting into the soil around the world (18).

Tagore thinks that this spiritless machine named Nation has a negative impact on humankind because “success is the object and justification of a machine, while goodness only is the end and purpose of man” (23). It impinges on every human individual who should maintain the balance between spiritual and material. Tagore describes how the machine of Nation transforms human beings into soul-destroying, unbalanced beings: when the “engine” of a machine Nation becomes huge, humans fall further and further into “parts of the machine”; the humans who have become the parts of the machine run society without any “pity or moral responsibility”; and even if the nature of human beings attempts to reveal its empathy, humanity is entangled in the power of the machine by the noise and cry of the “ropes and pulleys” (23-24). Eventually, humans become dominated by the machine. Tagore warns that the “bloodless” Nation “may pierce into the very core of our life” and
“threaten the whole future of our people with a perpetual helplessness of emasculation” (25).

In many parts of his writings, he describes how such a ruthless, emotionless, machinelike Nation renders human lives inhumane. Using “iron chains,” “hammer,” “turn-screw,” “steam-boilers,” and so forth, it seems proud of its “gluttony,” “giant power of mechanical organization,” and “terrible strength and velocity” that accelerates humankind’s “moral corruption” (37, 45, 55, 57). These expressions are based on Tagore’s forebodings about the industrialization and materialization of human society at that time. He uses a dichotomy here again by dividing humans and mechanical things, portraying humans as positive and machines as negative. It is his warning that in this dichotomous world, machines will eventually overwhelm humans. The machinery of Nation will turn human “souls into commodities and life into compartments, which, with its iron claws, scratches out the heart of the world” (60). However, the machine will not even know “what it has done,” because machines are soulless and heartless (60).

Finally, Nation will perfectly dominate the human soul and make humans fight each other. The “machine must be pitted against machine, and nation against nation, in an endless bull-fight of politics” (44). The fights among machine nations are the world wars. The machines are becoming more and more powerful and increasingly encroach on the human soul. They will “grow on to an unimaginable corpulence, not of a living body, but of steel and steam and office buildings, till its deformity can contain no longer its ugly voluminousness” (58-59). At the end, they will begin to “crack and gape, breathe gas and fire in gasps, and [their] death-rattles sound in cannon roars” (59). Tagore warns that World War I will continue to expand. Through his writing, he hopes not only “to express the experience of war,” but also “to anticipate and contribute to the political changes that [they] provoked” (Featherstone 182). Since he wrote his book Nationalism during World War I, and World War II broke out before his death in 1941, unfortunately, he died knowing that his prediction was right.9

Tagore believes that the cause of colonization and World War I is the Western Nation, which lost its balance of spirit and body and was disrupting the balance of the East and the West. This is based on his idealism, which emphasizes the logic of equality. He thinks that Western nationalism is a doctrine and aspiration for the

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9 Nationalism was published in 1917, and three chapters in this book were written and lectured on abroad in 1916. “Nationalism in the West” was a lecture Tagore gave in the United States in the winter of 1916-17, “Nationalism in Japan” was based on two lectures from June to July 1916 at the Imperial University of Japan and at Keio University, and “Nationalism in India” was written in the United States in 1916 (Nationalism 7).
soulless machine of Nation, and “a great menace” for all the peoples in the world (Nationalism 133). He stresses that “the spirit of conflict and conquest is at the origin and in the centre of the Western nationalism,” which evolves into “a perfect organization of power but not spiritual idealism” (33). In short, the unbalanced Western nationalism that destroys humanity is the enemy of all human beings. Therefore, for Tagore, all Asian countries should unite to fight for emancipation from the machine of Western Nation to restore our humanity.

In terms of the logos of Tagore’s rhetoric, although his idealism can lead readers into binary thinking and black-and-white logic, the philosophy penetrating his rhetoric, which regards the world as a balance, is logically persuasive because it is premised on the existence of the Other in an equal position. As Hegel insists, “the self knows itself through the other” in “the same status” as “the other knows itself through the self” in “the same status” (Beiser 177).10 Tagore shares the concept of a personified community to express an ideal community, but he uses rhetoric based on the logic of equality, thereby blocking the justification of colonialism that Western nationalist rhetoric engendered through the logic of hierarchy. He thinks that the root of colonialism, imperialism, and nationalism is the state of communities with spiritual and material imbalances—imbalances between humanity and materialism—and he claims that the East and the West should work together to overcome the world problem. His rhetoric fits his argument that nationalism should disappear because it is egocentrism causing wars and conflicts with Others. Thus, it can be said that the logos of his rhetoric is idealistic—in both contexts—and effective.

Pathos

Tagore was able to come up with a rhetoric premised on Otherness, due to having been a poet in a colony. Although he was male and of the Brahmin class in India, his experience as a colonial in England and as one of those oppressed by imperialism in his motherland allowed him to see himself through the eyes of the Other from a young age. This is because the powerless have to see themselves through the eyes of the powerful, and colonized people cannot help recognizing themselves only as the Others of their others. It is no coincidence that not only Tagore but also many modern intellectuals from other colonies had similar cognition and insight of a world in which “we” and “Others” coexist. However, the

10 Hegel calls this “common structure of self-awareness in mutual recognition” “spirit” (Geist)” (Beiser 177), but Tagore does not argue for Asian spirit in this way.
colonizers, with the power and hegemony of the times, did not need to contrive rhetoric about coexistence with the Other because they did not see or were not conscious of the Other’s gaze.

Tagore’s Pan-Asianism can be regarded as an expanded nationalism or pan-nationalism. His rhetoric, however, established on the logic of equality for the weak and disqualified and on an idealism stressing the balance between the spiritual and the material, is very different from nationalist rhetoric. Everyone who has a body knows what a sense of balance is, and all organisms in the world, including humans, are presumed to know that balance in their own bodies and balance with the outside world are very important in life. Because he uses idealism based on these universal senses and concepts, his rhetoric can be easily understood by and persuade the audience or readers. Nonetheless, it is hard to say that the pathos of Tagore’s rhetoric was actually successful, in terms of the relationship between his message and the target audience of that time.

In the early days, his poetry was welcomed in Europe, and he was able to be the first non-European to win the Nobel Prize. The Western poets who praised Tagore, such as Yeats and Pound, accepted him as an Oriental religious savior or sage. His Western admirers placed him “in the light of a mystical religiosity that went sharply against the overall balance of Tagore’s work” (Sen). Tagore was expected to teach mysticism and “save Europe from the dire predicament of war and disaffection . . . in the early twentieth century” (Sen). European newspapers published many articles portraying Tagore “not so much as a poet, but as a ‘prophet’, an ‘oriental sage’, a ‘seer’ from the ancient East” (Kämpchen 112). Perhaps his physical appearance also contributed to this image: “his long, flowing hair, his greying beard, his long and majestic robe gave him the halo of the archetypal ‘prophet’ and ‘sage’ as they live in popular imagination” (113).

Before and after World War I, however, European mainstream intellectuals expressed disillusionment with his literary works, which they misunderstood as only mystical texts on sutras. György Lukács rated him as “a wholly insignificant figure” (Lukács), and Graham Greene disparaged his work, saying “I cannot believe that anyone but Mr. Yeats can still take his poems very seriously” (qtd. in Sen). Finally, even Yeats wrote in 1935, “Damn Tagore,” blaming the “sentimental rubbish” of his later books for ruining his reputation (Letters 835). Imre Bangha diagnoses European intellectuals’ change of view and attitude toward Tagore as “a disillusionment within European culture” facing the war, which “did not allow orientalist discourse to creep in so easily” (63).

However, this mystical and sentimental image of Tagore in Europe contrasted
sharply with his actual political performance. As analyzed earlier, his ideas are very anti-imperialist, anti-colonial, and anti-nationalist, and his rhetoric that expresses them is built on the logic that the East and the West are equal. Western readers made up an oriental, exotic, and religious image of Tagore, and when he did not actually fit the image but tried to persuade them with words that made them uncomfortable, they dismissed him without hearing his message anymore. In other words, his rhetoric failed to gain sympathy from his Western readers. Then, why, in terms of *pathos*, did his rhetoric, which was relatively rational and reasonable, not succeed?

One hint for answering this question is found in the fact that, in contrast to Western Europe, Tagore’s popularity increased after World War I in Eastern Europe. Several of Tagore’s works were introduced in the years following the Nobel Prize in 1913, and in 1921 and 1922, many of his works of various genres were published in Eastern Europe (Sohn, “Tagore’s Literary World” 27). Eastern Europeans accepted him actively because they thought he was a strong critic of Western Europe’s imperialism as well as the nationalism of fascism and Nazism that emerged after World War I (28). This response from his Eastern European readers is because they, like Asian readers, were oppressed by Western European imperialism and nationalism and shared a similar experience with Asian readers.

Patrick Colm Hogan calls this phenomenon “situational identification” (26). According to his view, readers or audience can “develop a sense of intimacy” with the author or rhetor directly when they “sense a sharing of unstated feelings, ideas, inferences, expectations” (26). In contrast, they feel removed from the author or rhetor when they “are forced to unfold presuppositions” which they “always assumed tacitly to be shared by everyone” (26). Therefore, in the aspect of situational identification, readers can sympathize easily with the author who is supposed to be in the same position as their own because they do not need to unfold many presuppositions to understand the author’s message and rhetoric. This is why Tagore’s rhetoric was accepted in Eastern Europe but not in Western Europe after World War I.

The lectures against nationalism by Tagore in the United States and in Japan, later published in his book *Nationalism*, also failed to find sympathy with the audience. At the time, “several emergent European nation-states, such as Germany, Italy, the United States and Japan, discovered nationalism as a powerful means to challenge the supremacy of Great Britain and France” (Duara 326). Tagore advises these American and Japanese audiences, who were ardent admirers of nationalism, to abandon evil European nationalism and remain faithful to the spiritual values of
the East. As a result, Tagore’s popularity faded in these nations. Especially in Japan, where he was called a “poet of a ruined country” with great criticism, and later his book *Nationalism* was banned. Ironically, the Japanese imperialists who also used the same Pan-Asian rhetoric under the name “The Great East Asian Public Rights” had no sympathy with the “One Asia” of Tagore’s rhetoric.

**Conclusion**

Based on his global reputation, Rabindranath Tagore opposed dominant discourses with the conscientiousness of a universal intellectual and with his effective rhetorical logic, which, based on his idealist philosophy, consequently produced a strong *ethos* and *logos*. Through his idealistic faith in the world as a twin-pan balance, Tagore struggled to strike a blow against nationalism, imperialism, and materialism and showed his readers his ideal world: one in which “One Asia” and “One Europe”—the spiritual and material and the soul and body—coexist in equality and peace. Rooted in his philosophical idealism, Tagore created an advanced rhetorical logic that presupposed the Other coexisting with us from the beginning, instead of the rhetoric of exclusion and rejection. Therefore, his rhetoric of Pan-Asianism appealed to the powerless rather than the powerful. However, his international target readers were powerful European, American, and Japanese intellectuals, and unfortunately, he did not receive emotional sympathy from his main audience. Through this failure of Tagore’s rhetoric, we can reaffirm the importance of *pathos* as much as of *ethos* and *logos* when idealism works as a rhetoric or discourse.

Additionally, I ask two questions about Tagore’s rhetoric, aside from the problem that his idealism is prone to dichotomous thinking and black-and-white logic. First, can Asia really be bound in one unit? Like nationalists, Tagore also uses rhetoric to categorize “imagined communities” (i.e., nations) into expanded “re-imagined communities,” such as Europe and Asia. Tagore’s rhetoric is also problematic due to categorization in other respects. It embeds the violence of homogenization and equalization of internal members. Here the problem is that all kinds of “categorization can suppress internal differences,” just as nationalist rhetoric did (Rhee 509). This shows that Tagore’s rhetoric may leave the same problem with nationalism intact.

For instance, in Tagore’s “One Asia,” imperialist Japan and colonial Korea in the early twentieth century were bound together within a border as homogeneous and equal Asian countries supposed to have opposed European imperialism and
nationalism. However, grouping them into one category and erasing their differences does not solve their present problems or face the past squarely, and it can create more conflicts and troubles in the future. Just as domestic problems are not solved by nationalism, the rhetoric of re-imagined communities, Tagore’s Pan-Asianism, cannot solve international problems.

Second, did humankind really have an ideal society in ancient times? Can we find it only in remote ages? Tagore’s rhetoric is oriented toward the past as an ideal. He says that the West was in a state of harmony in the past but now is not, whereas the East has thus far maintained the spirit of the past:

The lamp of ancient Greece is extinct in the land where it was first lighted, the power of Rome lies dead and buried under the ruins of its vast empire. But the civilization, whose basis is society and the spiritual ideal of man, is still a living thing in China and in India. (Nationalism 78)

The purpose of this message is to point out the problems of current Western culture and give pride to Asians. However, the rhetoric that idealizes ancient society and laments how modern society has fallen so much in the East and West is seemingly too conservative and naïve. Although his rhetoric was half-successful in terms of ethos, logos, and pathos, it seems too trite and outdated, and is ineffective due to its orientation toward the conservative past.

Tagore’s ancient East is a safety zone into which the oppression of Western imperialism and nationalism could not reach, an era free from dangerous modern spaces of violence and conflict. Although he was not able to go back to that place and time, Tagore does not abandon hope for a future in which this ideal past would come again. Indeed, this is the very ideal place of which he sings in his poems: “Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high; / Where knowledge is free; / Where the world has not been broken up into fragments by narrow domestic walls” (Gitanjali 154). Despite his rhetoric seeming perhaps a bit hackneyed, the reason even modern readers are moved by his poetry is because of his strong beliefs, which are based on his consistent rhetoric as well as this beautiful ideal he dreamed of.
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