

A parallel study of moment in Peking and gone with the wind

Xie Wenyan^{1, a}, Margaret Elizabeth Whitfield^{2, b, *},

¹Yale University, New Haven, CT 06520, USA

²University of California, Berkeley, 200 California Hall, Berkeley, CA 94720, USA

a.wenyan_debra_02@gmail.com, b.margaret_whitfield_3669@outlook.com

***Corresponding Author**

Abstract: Moment in Peking by the Chinese writer Lin Yutang and Gone with the Wind by the American writer Margaret Mitchell are both classics in Eastern and Western literature. The heroines, Yao Mulan and Scarlett O'Hara, have respectively become representative figures of Chinese culture and Western culture. This paper employs a parallel study approach to analyze the two works from the perspectives of characterization, thematic content, narrative techniques, ideological schools, cultural representation, and aesthetic imagery, aiming to deepen readers' understanding of the authors and promote the interpretation of the works.

Keywords: Moment in Peking, Gone with the Wind, parallel study

1. Introduction

Moment in Peking is an English novel completed by Mr. Lin Yutang during his stay in Paris, modeled after the structure of A Dream of Red Mansions. Gone with the Wind is the only novel by the American modern female writer Margaret Mitchell, imbued with a strong romantic color. These two masterpieces were born almost simultaneously, yet their different creative intentions and backgrounds have resulted in the presentation of distinctly different Chinese and Western cultures. Both Lin Yutang and Margaret Mitchell boldly created memorable female images in their works, adopting women as the protagonists, war years as the backdrop, and marriage and love as the main narrative threads. The comparability of the two works is reflected in many aspects, rendering them highly valuable for research.

2. A parallel study of moment in Peking and gone with the wind

2.1. Characterization

Both Moment in Peking and Gone with the Wind are set against the backdrop of war, portraying two brave and resilient female figures, Yao Mulan and Scarlett O'Hara, who pursue freedom and emerge as new-era women after undergoing the trials of war. The image of Yao Mulan embodies the sublime beauty from beginning to end, while that of Scarlett O'Hara grows increasingly full and rounded with the progression of the war. Their distinctive characteristics have left an indelible impression upon the world.

2.1.1. *The oriental feminine beauty of Yao Mulan*

In Moment in Peking, Yao Mulan, born into a scholarly family, was nurtured by a rich cultural heritage from childhood, growing up to be intelligent, studious, sensible, virtuous, and benevolent. Her father, Yao Sian, devoted his life to Taoist principles of following nature, governing by non-action, and transcending worldly concerns [1], while Master Zeng embodied the culmination of Confucian culture, strictly observing human ethics and cultivating moral character. This environment shaped Mulan's composed and optimistic mindset, enabling her to remain unperturbed by predetermined fate and to display extraordinary tolerance and patience uncommon in ordinary women. She transformed from passive acceptance to active adaptation when facing adversity. Her dual identity as both a Taoist daughter and a Confucian daughter-in-law integrated the essence of both cultural traditions, while also embodying modern spirit. Mulan's life transitioned from that of a tranquil young lady to a hardworking mistress of the household, enduring the brutal death of her brother, the loss of her beloved daughter, and her husband's betrayal. With wisdom and

courage, she maneuvered through perilous circumstances to rescue her loved ones at the risk of her own life. When the nation faced crisis, she demonstrated profound righteousness by resolutely sending her son to the battlefield and actively joining the tide of nationwide resistance. This seemingly ordinary woman embodied the merits of multiple cultures. Compared with Scarlett O'Hara, Yao Mulan pursued freedom, advocated democracy, possessed independent judgment, and embraced humanitarianism. Deeply influenced by Western culture yet never losing the fine virtues characteristic of traditional Chinese women [2], she became the epitome of the perfect Chinese female image.

2.1.2. The awakening of western female consciousness in Scarlett O'Hara

In *Gone with the Wind*, Scarlett O'Hara, the daughter of a plantation owner at Tara in the American South, is entangled in constant emotional turmoil with Ashley Wilkes and Rhett Butler, experiencing distinct phases of life before, during, and after the war. From the proud and willful wealthy young lady of her girlhood to the shrewd and formidable woman of wisdom during the war, and finally to the selfish and avaricious young matron in the postwar period, her personality proves contradictory and complex. She is aloof and rebellious yet resilient and kind, stingy and stubborn yet passionate and unyielding in love and hate, unscrupulous in her methods yet persistent and optimistic. Through Mitchell's pen, Scarlett is portrayed as vivid, lively, authentic, and natural. She dares to challenge traditional conventions and boldly attacks the ideology of male superiority and female inferiority, willing to sacrifice everything for her infatuation while repeatedly hurting those who love her. Casting aside her aristocratic status, she toils like a peasant woman, rebuilding her ruined homeland with her own hands. Scarlett is a survivor of life, a rose amid the flames of war.

By comparison, Scarlett O'Hara vividly embodies the values of contemporary Western women and capitalist society. In addition to sharing some of Scarlett's traits, Yao Mulan also possesses the unique traditional virtues of Eastern women, which sufficiently demonstrates that Eastern and Western cultures hold different criteria for appreciating beauty.

2.2. Thematic content

The heroines in both works live in a typical patriarchal society. The novels revolve around the love and marriage stories of the female protagonists, reflecting the views on love and marriage among young people from prominent families against the backdrop of war. Both marriages lack a foundation of love, and the differences in the authors' content arrangement and thematic selection lead to different outcomes.

2.2.1. Confucian-Taoist syncretism and marital endurance in turbulent times

Moment in Peking narrates the feuds, affections, joys, and sorrows of the Zeng, Yao, and Niu families in Peking over more than thirty years, from the Boxer Rebellion in 1901 to the War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression, incorporating a series of events including Yuan Shikai's usurpation, warlord conflicts, the May Fourth Movement, and the outbreak of World War II. Through panoramic presentation, it fully reveals the unpredictable historical landscape of modern China. In such a special historical period, Yao Mulan's attitude toward love was extraordinary—possessing love did not necessarily mean complete possession. Although her union with Sunya appeared to be a well-matched marriage, it was her acquaintance with Kong Lifu before the engagement that truly allowed Mulan to experience the sweetness of love and the sense of self. The constraints of feudal ethics rendered her powerless to pursue happiness in love, forcing her to seal this affection deep within her heart. Mulan's marriage conformed to the outdated convention of "parents' command and matchmaker's word." Lacking the courage to resist, she gradually submitted, striving to conceal the pain of marrying without love and endeavoring to be a virtuous wife and good mother [3]. Thus, the separation of love and marriage in Yao Mulan's life powerfully demonstrates the impact of patriarchal society on women; gentleness, magnanimity, and unwavering loyalty became the typical criteria for evaluating women in traditional patriarchal society. Furthermore, Mulan learned the resilience of Taoism and the magnanimity of Confucianism, balancing the injustice of fate before hardship and finding happiness in marriage through forbearance.

2.2.2. Breaking through desire and the disillusionment of marriage amidst warfare

Gone with the Wind is based on the American Civil War. The merciless war ended the idyllic life of the aristocratic young lady Scarlett O'Hara, who, relying on her resilience and courage, rebuilt the plantation and became a representative of the emerging bourgeoisie in the postwar era. The novel is not merely a woman's coming-of-age story, but also a microcosm of the social reality in the Southern states of America. Scarlett is an unwavering idealist in matters of love; her view of love embodies a contradiction between exclusivity and uncertainty, while her concept of marriage reflects an attitude where purposefulness and capriciousness coexist. Scarlett devoted nearly her entire life to guarding her adoration and worship of Ashley Wilkes, while repeatedly rejecting Rhett Butler's genuine affection. She married Charles out of spite, and later, in order to survive, did not hesitate to violate ethical principles by marrying Frank. Her marriage to Rhett Butler served merely to satisfy her material and spiritual needs. The common thread among her three marriages was the absence of a foundation of love, driven solely by the fulfillment of her own desires and needs. Ultimately, Scarlett's marriage ended with Rhett's departure. In her sorrow, she came to understand what kind of love she truly desired, no longer pleading with hopeful anticipation.

In their approaches to love and marriage, Yao Mulan and Scarlett O'Hara, with their contrasting personalities and divergent values, are destined for different outcomes, as the saying goes, "Character and values determine destiny" [4].

2.3. Narrative techniques

2.3.1. *Implication concealed within the text*

When creating *Moment in Peking*, Mr. Lin Yutang was deeply influenced by *A Dream of Red Mansions*, employing the fundamental creative method of realism imbued with profound philosophical significance. The three general titles—"The Daughters of a Taoist Family," "Tragedy in the Garden," and "Autumn Songs"—contain the profound meaning of Taoist doctrine. The greatness of *Moment in Peking* also lies in its being a linked long novel that integrates philosophy, casual conversations, historical romances, customs, and the joys and sorrows of the characters. The novel not only draws upon the creative techniques of Western works but also follows the narrative-centered expressive methods of traditional Chinese novels, featuring static psychological descriptions and interspersed narration and commentary. The fate of the heroine Yao Mulan serves as a main thread of the novel; from childhood to youth and then to married life, all plotlines progress almost linearly in chronological order, enabling readers to easily follow the thread and anticipate what follows. At the writing level, the characters in the novel are virtually incarnations of various figures in Chinese society. Many scholars believe that corresponding characters with similar personalities can be found in *A Dream of Red Mansions*, which represents a comparative creative technique.

2.3.2. *Straightforward realistic expression*

Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind* comprehensively presents the social landscape of the American South and the vicissitudes of fate among various characters amid tremendous social transformation. Adopting a distinctly female observational perspective, she boldly employs realistic techniques to meticulously depict the social activities of her characters. Unlike other female writers, her prose mirrors her forthright personality. Mitchell sketches the image of a Southern belle who holds her head high during the war through a series of female silhouettes, conveying women's unique charm in a gentle yet resolute manner. Mitchell excels at revealing character traits through descriptions of the eyes, bringing figures to life with just a few strokes. She dislikes ornate diction and avoids complex sentence structures, remaining faithful to facts and depicting the images emerging in her mind with clean, crisp precision.

It can thus be seen that Chinese novels emphasize implication concealed within the text, leaving room for readers' contemplation, while Western novels strive for realistic narration and straightforward expression of the author's emotions, presenting story outcomes in a direct manner. Differences between Eastern and Western cultures lead to variations in literary standards; nevertheless, literariness shares common ground at certain intersections of human experience. Outstanding literary works are products in which universality and distinction shine together [5].

2.4. Ideological schools

2.4.1. *Taoist philosophy and humanistic sentiment*

Moment in Peking reveals Mr. Lin Yutang's Taoist affinity, patriotism, compassion, and humanistic thought, comprehensively introducing ancient Chinese culture to the world and serving as a significant cornerstone in the project of East-West cultural exchange. The entire work is permeated with Taoist spirit throughout, in the hope that modern humanity may rediscover the lost peace and kindness through Taoist philosophy and become aware of life's transience, unpredictability, and precious beauty. Created in the early days of the War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression, the work was written to "commemorate the brave men who sacrificed their lives for the country at the front." It not only illuminates the injustice and absurdity that war brought upon the nation but also prophesies the inevitable downfall of the invaders who acted against heaven and committed numerous iniquities. Lin Yutang's works are not lacking in joyful emotions and leisurely tones, seemingly devoid of a tragic sense of life. Yet when confronted with tragic fate, he disdains both the pessimists' arguments and the ignorant theorists who struggle against fate, advocating instead a poetic approach to "treating life kindly" and "enjoying life." Furthermore, in his cross-cultural dissemination, Mr. Lin Yutang arrived at a mode of Chinese humanistic thinking [6], employing intuitive insight to apprehend and comprehend certain schools of Chinese thought in his creative works, seldom providing authentic and unadulterated explanations of their conditions and essence.

2.4.2. *The awakening of women and the national spirit*

Gone with the Wind reveals to us the gradual revival of female consciousness, which serves as a hallmark of the nascent stage of the women's liberation movement. The rebellion in thought and behavior represents a redefinition of independence, equality, and self-confidence; women ought to pursue a path of self-reliance, self-improvement, self-respect, and self-esteem. Caught between family, marriage, and ethical morality, Scarlett O'Hara's consciousness and will are constantly filled with thoughts of defying moral norms, leading to her inability to maintain independence and her loss of the right to pursue equality, ultimately resulting in the failure of her three marital choices. Yet simultaneously, she proves through her own practical actions that she is fully capable of controlling men, freely detaching from or attaching herself to them at will, thereby satisfying the realization of female self-awareness and completing the pursuit of women's own rights. Furthermore, the work reflects the connotation of national spirit from an epic perspective. Scarlett's immortal artistic image serves as a spiritual symbol of the American nation; her indomitable struggle encapsulates the cultural sedimentation of American history and spirit. She instills a strong sense of national pride and a seemingly simple national sentiment into Tara plantation [7]. Scarlett's spirit of daring to confront harsh reality precisely embodies a positive, vigorous, and vibrant new social force during the American Civil War period.

2.5. Cultural representation

2.5.1. *Pluralistic integration and resilient renewal*

Mr. Lin Yutang adopted the most turbulent period in Chinese history as the creative backdrop for Moment in Peking: the Boxer Rebellion opens the narrative curtain, while the full outbreak of the War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression brings the novel to its close. Despite enduring the ravages of war, unity is ultimately achieved. Unified Chinese culture constitutes a pluralistic cultural system integrating Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism, and other traditions; the three quotations from Zhuangzi in the novel suggest Mr. Lin Yutang's intention to present a complete picture of Chinese culture. The protagonist Yao Mulan embodies the openness of Taoism and the propriety of Confucianism—she whistles, performs Peking opera, and appreciates antiques, yet she obeys her father's command with resigned acceptance and marries a man she does not love. Yao Difei, returning from studies abroad and encountering wartime chaos, adheres to the Confucian precept that "while parents are alive, one should not travel far," yet incorporates new elements such as men wearing suits and ties and women donning brassieres, illustrating how Chinese culture, with its vast inclusiveness, has assimilated Western culture after the clash between East and West. Moment in Peking employs Eastern family-nation stories as cultural representation, presenting the profound and extensive Chinese culture authentically to Western readers. From the foreshadowing of historical events

to character portrayal and the arrangement of Chinese folk customs, all aspects reflect the integrity and inclusiveness of Chinese culture, particularly demonstrating resilience and "self-renewal capacity" during periods of social transformation and cultural change—qualities unmatched by Western culture.

2.5.2. *The heroic legend and individualism*

The novel *Gone with the Wind* reflects the cultural representation of the Western heroic legend. Scarlett O'Hara's heroic temperament represents the ideal personality and behavioral model admired by Westerners; her life strategies are based on the accumulation of American culture and serve as a true portrayal of the life experiences and value orientations of the American people. The individualistic heroic style of creation reveals the collective personality traits of the American nation and the psychological qualities commonly shared by its citizens. The male protagonist Rhett Butler is unruly and cynical, deeply loving Scarlett yet never receiving her true affection. He is shrewd and wise, adept at management, obscure and unknown yet filled with ambition. He is broad-minded and ready to help others, and what is most commendable is his genuine self-knowledge. As a capitalist in 19th-century capitalist society, Butler could confront himself seriously and overcome hardships during this special historical period, making him an indisputable strong figure. The blood of Western heroes flows through his veins, and he embodies the cultural representation of Western spirit.

2.6. Metaphorical imagery

Metaphor is a linguistic phenomenon and rhetorical device that operates upon human thinking and reasoning processes to achieve artistic and rhetorical effects, facilitating deep-level conceptual understanding—that is, a cultural act of perceiving and comprehending one thing through another. The creations of both *Moment in Peking* and *Gone with the Wind* employ metaphorical imagery to interpret life and articulate existence, endowing the works with immortal philosophical connotations.

2.6.1. *Hongyu as a metaphorical image of traditional Chinese culture*

Hongyu is a special character created by Mr. Lin Yutang in *Moment in Peking*, possessing the delicate beauty of a classical Chinese woman and the morbid beauty reminiscent of Lin Daiyu. Profoundly nurtured by both Chinese and Western cultures, Mr. Lin Yutang's unique life experiences enable him to interpret traditional Chinese culture from a dual cultural perspective. The image of Hongyu serves precisely as a metaphorical image of traditional Chinese culture; her circumstances imply the survival state of traditional Chinese culture gradually losing its dominant position in a special environment, while her panic metaphorically represents the author's insightful observations upon witnessing the current state of traditional Chinese culture. Having endured hardships and suffered invasions, traditional Chinese culture is steadily retreating to a defensive position, with its excellent elements gradually diminishing, struggling in confusion and degenerating into a morbid, vulnerable culture. Mr. Lin Yutang metaphorically projects the actual condition of traditional Chinese culture—"inherent merits, yet also numerous weaknesses"—onto the figure of a classical Chinese beauty, vividly and graphically explaining to the West the characteristics and qualities of traditional Chinese culture.

2.6.2. *Characters around Scarlett as metaphorical images of western cultural values*

In *Gone with the Wind*, metaphorical imagery is embodied in the diverse characters surrounding Scarlett. Scarlett's mother, Ellen, is benevolent, wise, gentle, and kind—a paragon of a virtuous wife and good mother, serving as the role model for Scarlett's childhood. The mere thought of her mother brings Scarlett inner peace and strength. Scarlett's desire to become a refined lady like her mother hints at the life she aspires to and the trajectory of her character development. The death of her mother symbolizes the collapse of Scarlett's moral defenses and the beginning of her willful behavior, with various unconventional acts contrary to traditional values occurring in succession. Only when thinking of her mother does Scarlett feel shame and guilt within her heart. Thus, the mother metaphorically represents the moral norms that constrain Scarlett, playing a regulatory and guiding role. Her father, Gerald, symbolizes the force within Scarlett that rebels against traditional morality—a kind of ignorant, fearless, primitive, and wild conquering power, precisely the force that fosters Scarlett's rebellious consciousness. When the unrestrained father encounters Ellen, his inner state transforms from exuberance to tranquility, finding spiritual sustenance and a source of

happiness. This episode symbolizes the process by which natural force submits to civilized morality, and the father's spiritual transformation foreshadows that Scarlett's life trajectory will likewise operate in this manner.

3. Conclusion

The two masterpieces, *Moment in Peking* and *Gone with the Wind*, reveal similarities within differences and differences within similarities. While the two works diverge considerably in characterization, thematic content, narrative techniques, ideological schools, cultural representation, and metaphorical imagery, both present readers with the rich and colorful female images of their respective eras, leaving an indelible impression. They are representatives of Eastern and Western cultures, each occupying a significant place in the history of Eastern and Western literature, embodying the evaluative standards and requirements that Eastern and Western cultures impose upon women. Yao Mulan is graceful and intelligent, gentle yet resilient, clever and capable, transcending the mundane [8]; Scarlett O'Hara confronts reality head-on, never compromising, proud and isolated, brave and tenacious [9]. Faced with love and marriage, Yao Mulan sacrifices love for duty, while Scarlett loves and is loved with magnificent passion. In a predominantly patriarchal society, both works authentically reflect the awakening of female consciousness, reenacting women's resistance against fate and their pursuit of ideal love. The prerequisite for women to pursue happiness and control their destiny is undoubtedly the capacity for independence and an indomitable spirit. The cultural representations in both works reveal the unique charm of Chinese and Western cultures, reflecting the inherent regularity of literature as well as the universality and value of literary works.

4. References

- [1] L ü Jian lan. The Transmission of Taoist Thought in Lin Yutang's *Moment in Peking* [J]. *Journal of Mudanjiang University*, 2015, 24(4): 65-66.
- [2] Li Zhihong, Yan Min, Qiu Chunguang. China's Scarlett O'Hara—An Analysis of the Character Yao Mulan in *Moment in Peking* [J]. *Movie Review*, 2009(13): 107.
- [3] Wang Lan. Views on Love and Marriage from a Female Perspective—A Comparative Study of Jane Eyre and Yao Mulan [J]. *Times Literature*, 2008(4): 114-115.
- [4] Du Qiuzhi. Equally Stunning Beauty Yet Entirely Different Endings—A Comparative Analysis of the Female Protagonists in *Gone with the Wind* and *Waterloo Bridge* [J]. *Journal of Shang Qiu Normal University*, 2013, 29(10): 83-85.
- [5] Ma Yueran, Ouyang Jianghe. My Heart in the Pre-Qin Period [J]. *Du Shu*, 2006(7): 9.
- [6] Wang Jingke, Hu Yongxi. A Brief Analysis of Lin Yutang's Chinese Humanistic Thought [J]. *Journal of Heze University*, 2006, 28(4): 2-5.
- [7] Duan Suping. The Attachment to Homeland in *Gone with the Wind* [J]. *Journal of Anyang Normal University*, 2011(6): 81-83.
- [8] Lin Yutang. *Moment in Peking* [M]. Nanjing: Jiangsu Literature and Art Publishing House, 2009: 144-161.
- [9] Margaret Mitchell. *Gone with the Wind* [M]. Yan Bian: Yan Bian People's Publishing House, 2010: 126-179.
- [10] Liu Xuanyu. A Typological Comparison of Love in a Fallen City and *Pride and Prejudice* [J]. *Foreign Language Education and Teaching*, 2014(12): 81-82.
- [11] Cao Shun qing. *An Introduction to Comparative Literature* [M]. Beijing: China Renmin University Press, 2011: 89-110.