

The Influence of Social Environment on Personal Character Development: A Case Study of Pip in *Great Expectations*

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Abstract: Charles Dickens, the esteemed author of *Great Expectations*, is renowned for his realistic portrayals of society. He presents readers with a vivid reflection of the values and beliefs of the Victorian Age, while exposing the inherent unfairness and hypocrisy that permeated society. This paper is a case study, aiming to explore the profound influence of the social environment on personal character development, according to different life stages of Pip. Albert Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory and Lawrence Kohlberg's Moral Development Theory can be combined to interpret Pip's character development and moral evolution. During Pip's childhood and gentleman life, he encounters people of various social backgrounds. As the social environment changes, Pip's character evolves as well. He turns from a pure and innocent child to a gentleman with hypocrisy, only to ultimately rediscover his innate goodness. Through Pip's character development, it becomes evident that social environment plays a critical role in shaping one's character, while innate nature and personal choices are equally essential. The study emphasizes the significance of maintaining a balanced mindset and dispelling illusions, cautioning against the allure of unrealistic aspirations or possessions that can lead one astray in life.

Keywords: Character Development, Social Environment, *Great Expectations*, the Victorian Age

1. Introduction

Charles Dickens, the esteemed author of *Great Expectations*, is celebrated for his insightful portrayals of society, capturing vivid reflections of the values and beliefs prevalent during the Victorian Age. Dickens' works are characterized by attacks on social evils, injustice, and hypocrisy. And his enduring legacy has secured him a place as one of the greatest novelists of the 19th century. Throughout his lifetime, Dickens wrote fifteen novels and numerous short stories, each providing a unique interpretation of the Victorian Age. *Great Expectations* is the thirteenth of Dickens' novels, and it is also his second novel to be fully narrated in the first person. "*Great Expectations* is a work concerned with the effects on the human character of sudden access to wealth" [1]. And it is recognized as "the most perfectly constructed and perfectly written of all Dickens' works" [2].

Through the protagonist, Pip, Dickens explores the profound influence of the social environment on personal character development at various stages of life. This research delves into the transformation of Pip's character, which provides valuable insights into the critical role that the social environment plays in shaping one's character.

1.1. Research Gap

Scholars have done a lot of research on *Great Expectations* and its protagonist Pip's growth, adopting perspectives including psychoanalysis, structuralist analysis, narrative features analysis, feminism, and post-colonialism, etc. For instance, Wheeler (2014) analyzed the relationship between Pip's personality development and changes in the social environment from a psychological perspective [3]. Structuralist analyses spotlighted formal and narrative techniques in conveying the novel's themes. Cotsell (1990) called attention to structural patterns and their role in idea transmission [4]. Feminist highlighted female characters and gender dynamics. Raphael (1989) reinterpreted Miss Havisham, analyzing responses to her expectations and disillusionment [5]. Postcolonial studies situated *Great Expectations* within Britain's imperial context. Said (2012) explored connections between Dickens and imperialism [6], and Jacobson (2000) examined links between childhood and empire in Dickens' works

[7].

The existing research covered cross-disciplinary fields from psychology, literature to politics and history, demonstrating the academic value of the novel. However, studies tend to have a one-sided perspective, rarely integrating different theories for comprehensive analysis. In this study, Social Cognitive Theory can analyze the dynamic interactions between individuals, environments and behaviors, enabling a more comprehensive and systematic analysis of Pip's different developmental stages. Moral Development Theory can specifically analyze Pip's moral reasoning levels under different growth environments, a dimension that has received little attention in previous research. Both theories emphasize environmental influences on individual growth, compensating for the overly one-sided focus on the inner world of individuals in previous research. Moreover, both theories can draw on psychology's systematic theoretical frameworks and empirical research traditions, making literary analysis more scientific and persuasive, which has also been a gap in previous research.

1.2. Theoretical Background

Social environment significantly impacts personal character development, shaping behaviors, attitudes, and values. This background explores two key psychological theories, namely Social Cognitive Theory and Moral Development Theory. Applying these two theories for analysis not only enriches perspectives, but also enhances the theoretical value and empirical basis. This can effectively make up for some of the deficiencies in previous research, and provide new possibilities for an in-depth understanding of the novel.

Social Cognitive Theory, proposed by Albert Bandura, emphasizes that individuals learn behaviors, beliefs, and values through observation, imitation, and social interaction [8]. This theory provides a crucial framework for understanding the impact of the social environment on the process of character development. As Pip navigates through different life stages, he interacts with individuals from diverse social backgrounds and learns from their behaviors and attitudes.

Moral Development Theory, introduced by Lawrence Kohlberg, outlines stages of moral reasoning through which individuals progress as they encounter moral dilemmas and challenges. The theory posits six sequential stages, categorized into three main levels: pre-conventional, conventional, and post-conventional. The pre-conventional level involves moral reasoning that is driven by external influences, such as social values and status. Individuals at this stage make moral judgments based on self-interest and gaining rewards or avoiding punishment. The conventional level involves conforming to social norms and beginning to consider internal moral principles and ethical values. Individuals are influenced by the desire to gain the approval of others. The post-conventional level involves moral reasoning based on internalized moral principles of justice and human rights. At this stage, moral judgments are made based on universal ethical values and self-reflection [9]. As individuals mature and confront ethical situations, their moral reasoning advances from self-centered motivations to internalized ethical principles. In *Great Expectations*, Pip's moral development is evident as he confronts various moral dilemmas and undergoes character transformation.

1.3. Research Value

This research offers unique contributions in the fields of literary studies, education, sociology, psychology, and history: Firstly, it demonstrates how to use theoretical frameworks to analyze literary works, providing methodological samples for other researchers to reference. It not only advances the academic development of literary studies, but also offers examples for other humanities and social science research. Additionally, through the multidimensional analysis of a fictional character, the paper provides an intricate case study. This can furnish education professionals with more abundant perspectives to understand youth growth, and help them grasp the educational function of literary works. Moreover, the research presents the profound impact of social environment on individual growth, which can prompt readers to recognize the significance of actively shaping growth environments. Furthermore, the paper analyzes different stages of character development, which can assist psychologists to apply it to practical psychological consultation. Finally, the paper helps readers gain deeper insights into the social values of the Victorian Age. Connecting the textual analysis with specific historical context enhances the research value and allows readers to understand history through literature.

2. The Influence of the Victorian Age on Charlie Dickens and *Great Expectations*

As ethical literary criticism emphasizes, “ethical environment is the space that literature existence in the history”^[10]. Similarly, as a figure created by Charles Dickens, the evolution of Pip's character is closely linked to the ethical environment in which he lives. Therefore, to truly comprehend and explicate the changes in Pip's character, we must analyze and explain his surroundings.

As a renowned 19th-century writer, Charles Dickens lived during the Victorian Age, an era known for its strict moral code that greatly influenced his works. This is evident in his novel *Great Expectations*, which reflects the distinct ethical and moral values of the time period in areas such as religion, economy, culture, and aristocracy. These values in the Victorian Age included evangelism, Benthamism, as well as the ideals of gentlemanhood and family, all of which reflected Dickens' deep-rooted humanistic beliefs. He utilized these values to advance his humanitarian ideals in his works and to assess the state of morality. For Dickens, morality serves as a guiding banner, inspiring people to embrace love and strive for a better society.

Standing as a magnificent chapter in British history, the Victorian Age is marked by the prominence of positive moral values such as responsibility, self-help, disinterestedness, diligence, and the significance of family. These values exerted a profound influence on individuals during that era. Consequently, it is no surprise that we readily encounter these ethical values in Dickens' novel *Great Expectations*. While Pip is a fictional creation by Dickens in *Great Expectations*, these ethical values have a great influence on Pip's character transformation throughout his journey of growth.

Great Expectations tells the story of Pip, an orphan boy adopted by a blacksmith's family, who experiences a rise and fall of luck and great expectations. Through this journey, Pip learns valuable lessons about finding happiness, the meaning of friendship and love, and ultimately becomes a better person for it. It is commented that “the main success of *Great Expectations* is that Dickens successfully depicted the development of Pip's character”^[11]. As readers, we are able to witness both the bitter and sweet moments of life through Pip's character development, and we come to find that his tragedy are largely the result of the social environment he is exposed to.

3. The Influence of Social Environment on Pip During His Childhood

As Social Cognitive Theory emphasizes, observational learning and cognitive processes mold individual behavior and personality. In *Great Expectations*, Pip's character development is influenced by observing diverse characters with varying values and aspirations. For instance, connections with hypocritical relatives lead to his timidity and sensitivity, exposures to the cruel aristocratic class drive his ambition to become a gentleman, while interactions with industrious working people instill values of kindness and simplicity.

3.1. The Influence of Hypocritical Relatives

During the Victorian Age, there was a noticeable disparity between social classes. As a result, individuals during that era were driven to seek financial prosperity as a means to improve their lives. In *Great Expectations*, Mrs. Joe Gargery and Uncle Pumblechook are no exception to this prevailing mindset. Their hypocrisy serves as a clear reflection of the prevailing values of the Victorian Age, which are heavily influenced by Benthamism. Benthamism refers to the philosophical and ethical teachings of Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832), an influential English philosopher and social reformer. Bentham believed that the moral worth of an action should be determined by its consequences and the overall happiness it produces for the greatest number of people. “The greatest good for the greatest number” is the goal of utilitarianism which maximizes the utilities of a population^[12]. It is plausible that the ideas of a great novelist from the last generation can be linked to Bentham. Dickens, who was influenced by politicians trained in Bentham's school during his early years, frequently addressed abuses in his novels^[13].

In *Great Expectations*, Pip suffers greatly from his relatives, particularly his sister and uncle. As an orphan, Pip is unable to experience parental love. Mrs. Joe Gargery, as his sister, should have taken on the role of a mother and provided Pip with the love and care he needed. Unfortunately, Mrs. Joe Gargery is more concerned with maintaining appearances and pretending to be a good caregiver. Despite her claims that she is responsible for raising Pip, she actually maltreats him and fails to provide him with any tender care. Mrs. Joe Gargery's reputation in the community is built on the fact that she

raises Pip “by hand”, while this reputation is merely a facade she uses to show off to her neighbors:

She almost always wore a coarse apron, fastened over her figure behind with two loops, and having a square impregnable bib in front, that was stuck full of pins and needles. She made it a powerful merit herself, and a strong reproach against Joe, that she wore apron so much. Though I really see no reason why she should have worn it at all: or why, if she did wear it at all, she should not have taken it off, everyday of her life ^[14].

This is a vivid depiction of a hypocrite. Mrs. Joe Gargery uses all she owns to exaggerate the hardships she has endured and to show how hard-working she is. Her actions are mainly driven by a desire for praise and admiration from outsiders. To her, having a good reputation is of utmost importance. However, once she obtains a favorable reputation, she feels entitled to bully Pip. Her hard hand constantly falls on Pip, and all the things in daily life can become tools for punishment. She seems always on a rampage, abusing Pip as if he were an object without human dimension, or just a thing to represent her reputation. Instead of finding comfort in his sister, Pip becomes very scared of her:

I had known, from the time when I could speak, that my sister, in her capricious and violent coercion, was unjust to me. I had cherished a profound conviction that her bringing me up by hand, gave her no right to bring me up by jerks. Though all my punishments, disgraces, fasts and vigils, and other penitential performances, I had nursed this assurance; and to my communing so much with it, in a solitary and unprotected way, I in great part refer the fact that I was morally timid and very sensitive ^[15].

All of these harmful experiences are detrimental to Pip's growth and contribute to his timidity and other weaknesses in his character. Similarly influenced by Benthamism, Uncle Pumblechook's love for Pip is hypocritical as well. As a member of the wealthy bourgeoisie, he exemplifies the selfishness and snobbishness of his class. He presents himself as a preacher of justice and kindness; however, he has a habit of fawning over those with higher social status. He never shows any genuine sympathy to Pip. His false affection for Pip is revealed during the breakfast before Pip's first visit to Miss Havisham's manor:

Mr. Pumblechook and I breakfasted at eight o'clock in the parlour behind the shop, while the shopman took his mug of tea and hunch of bread-and-butter on a sack of peas in the front premises. I considered Mr. Pumblechook wretched company. Besides being possessed by my sister's idea that a mortifying and penitential character ought to be imparted to my diet - besides giving me as much crumb as possible in combination with as little butter, and putting such a quantity of warm water into my milk that it would have been more candid to have left the milk out altogether - his conversation consisted of nothing but arithmetic ^[16].

Their different diets show the hypocrisy of Uncle Pumblechook. Clearly, a hypocritical relative like Uncle Pumblechook or Mrs. Joe Gargery will never have a positive influence on the development of Pip's character. Cheadle (2001) gives the reason why they treat their relatives in such a manner: Dickens recognized that in a society with different classes, people's anger towards their own social position made them want to maintain the hierarchy. They found comfort by mistreating those who were below them, as a way to make up for their own frustrations ^[17].

3.2. The Influence of Industrious Working Class

In the Victorian Age, there was a noticeable decline in religious belief compared to previous times, due to the dual power of scientific progress and the Industrial Revolution. Nevertheless, religion still served as a crucial spiritual pillar for the majority of people during this era. Under this background, a religious culture reform broke out. And the evangelical movement happened during this extraordinary period. Evangelicalism, characterized by values such as responsibility, diligence, and thrift, played a significant role in shaping societal perspectives on social inequality and advocating for the liberation of human freedom. In the Victorian Age, evangelicalism permeated all segments of society, leaving its mark not only on the common people but also on the social elite. Although Joe and Biddy are fictional characters created by Charles Dickens in *Great Expectations*, they embody the ethical values associated with evangelicalism prevalent in the Victorian Age. Their adherence to evangelical principles profoundly influences Pip's behaviors throughout his journey of growth. They represent the kind and hardworking working class, offering Pip much-needed encouragement.

Pip's industrious, kind, and simple character owes a great deal to Joe, Pip's brother-in-law. However,

Joe lacks authority within the family controlled by Mrs. Joe Gargery. Similar to Pip, Joe is a victim of Mrs. Joe Gargery's cruelty. Despite the cruel circumstances, Joe provides Pip with comfort and happiness, and is a shining example of the industrious working class. Joe sincerely does all he could for Pip and protects Pip from his wife's abusive behavior. He tells Pip that: "I wish it was only me that got put out, Pip; I wish there warn't no Tickler for you, old chap; I wish I could take it all on myself; but this is the up-and-down-and-straight on it, Pip, and I hope you'll overlook shortcomings" [18]. Pip is deeply moved by Joe's sincere words and is filled with gratitude towards him. During the Victorian era, individuals from lower social classes faced significant barriers to accessing education. Despite that Joe is not well-educated and even has difficulty in spelling his own name, he takes it upon himself to help Pip learn and acquire knowledge. Joe is a great source of encouragement for Pip, praising him when Pip makes progress and offering constructive criticism when Pip makes mistakes.

Joe's influence on Pip extends to his strong sense of dignity, which he values greatly. When Miss Havisham interviews him, Joe doesn't want any premium as he believe that he can earn a living through honest labor. Joe endeavors to be a diligent and responsible man according to the doctrine of evangelicalism. By observing Joe's attitude towards life and work, Pip strives to work and live like him. Pip regards Joe as his best friend, and Joe's positive influence on Pip is evident in their interactions. For instance, when Pip returns from Satis Manor and lies to Mrs. Joe Gargery and Uncle Pumblechook, Joe keeps the secret and advises him to always tell the truth in the future.

Similarly, Biddy leads an honest, straightforward life and never complains about her circumstances. She is a determined girl who makes the best use of every chance to improve herself. In the novel, Biddy shares her knowledge with Pip, and Pip confides in her, trusting her completely. As they get closer, Pip even finds charm in Biddy. Both Biddy and Pip are poor from birth and grow up under adverse environment, and they have a strong desire to improve their lives. Like Pip, Biddy grows up in a hopeless environment. Unlike Pip, she is always optimistic and does everything with great patience.

Joe and Biddy are representatives of the Evangelicals during the Victorian Age. Pip learn behaviors, beliefs, and values through observing and imitating them. As a result, Pip is indirectly impacted by evangelicalism. Through the connection with Joe and Biddy, he acquires innocent and virtuous inner qualities.

3.3. The Influence of Cruel Aristocratic Class

The Victorian Age witnessed the influx of a large number of capitalists into society, who sought to challenge the prevailing aristocratic ethical values. Although the social status and influence of the aristocratic class diminished compared to previous times, they still controlled the most aspects of the society. They used to look down upon people from the bottom of the society.

In the development of Pip's character, the aristocratic class plays a significant role, with Miss Havisham serving as an example. As a wealthy heiress, she falls into her half-brother's scheme of taking her money. Her half-brother and Compeyson conspire together, with Compeyson suddenly becoming the ideal person for her to marry. On the scheduled wedding day, everything is in order except for the presence of the bridegroom. After being cheated, she isolates herself in Satis House without a beam of sunlight. She uses her adopted daughter Estella as a tool to take revenge on men. Estella is proud and scornful girl, having been taught to be cold towards men. The poor Pip is strongly attracted by her as soon as he enters the Satis Manor. However, Estella laughs at him, causing him to feel ashamed of his hands, of his boots, and of his social status and friends. He falls into false values, believing that becoming a gentleman is the key to winning her love.

The aristocratic class form a new environment for Pip which leads him down a path of false ambition. Pip becomes consumed with a desire for social status and looks down upon those in lower positions, including his dear friends. At the same time, Biddy becomes lovelier; however, Pip fails to recognize her value, as he always imagines how happy he will have been with Estella. Despite his growing passion for Estella, social status makes their relationship forbidden and unattainable. By learning from the cruel aristocratic class's attitudes and behaviors, Pip's character changes.

4. The Influence of Social Environment on Pip During His Gentleman life

As Moral Development Theory suggests, individuals progress through stages of moral reasoning when facing moral dilemmas. Initially, Pip is driven by external influences, such as social values and status, which align with the "pre-conventional stage" of moral development. However, his interactions

with the idle dandy life and diverse London upper class lead him to reflect on his actions and values. This can be viewed as the “conventional stage” of moral development, where individuals begin to consider internal moral principles and ethical values. Ultimately, under the influence of genuine friendship and love, Pip gradually realizes the significance of kindness, authenticity, and love, no longer pursuing vanity and social status. This internalized moral perspective reflects the “post-conventional stage”, where individuals’ moral decisions are based on internalized moral principles and self-choice. He shifts from seeking approval to developing his own moral compass and regains his nature.

4.1. The Influence of Idle Dandy Life

During the Victorian Age, the majority of the upper class resided in London. However, as Pip begins his ideal gentleman life in London, he discovers that the city is not as glamorous as he has imagined. Pip finds himself overwhelmed by the unfamiliarity of everything he encounters. The idleness of the dandy life causes great sufferings to Pip. The other two students of Mr. Pocket are typical examples of this life: “Drummler, an old-looking young man of a heavy order of architecture, was whistling. Startop, younger in years and appearance, was reading and holding his head, as if he thought himself in danger of exploding it with too strong a charge of knowledge”^[19]. Drummler’s innate sense of nobility makes him look down upon others: “In a sulky triumph, Drummler showed his morose depreciation of the rest of us, in a more and more offensive degree until he became downright intolerable”^[20].

There is no genuine friendship among Mr. Pocket’s students, who spend their days idling away without purpose. The state of idleness tortures Pip, and the pain increases when Herbert and Pip follow Startop to join a club called “The Finches of the Grove”. In this club, the object of which seems to provide chances for the members to dine expensively once a fortnight, “to quarrel among themselves as much as possible after dinner, and to cause six waiters to get drunk on the stairs”^[21]. It is here that Bentley Drummler, who Pip despises, openly declares his intentions to pursue Estella. The revelation, that Estella has feelings for someone like Drummler, is unbearable for Pip. The cruel fact that Estella marries Drummler afterwards almost drives Pip crazy, since the real purpose for Drummler to marry Estella is only to satisfy his vanity. After that, Pip lost half of his “great expectations”, and the other half is also in danger.

The fundamental reason for Pip betraying his nature is his adoption of bourgeois ideas, which bring him nothing but an uneasy existence. What happens during the dandy life has a profound impact on Pip’s character development. He begins to reflect on his actions and values.

4.2. The Influence of Diverse London Upper Class

In Pip’s gentleman life in London, two significant influences come from Jaggers and Wemmick, exemplifying different aspects of the upper class society. Jaggers, with his calculating and ruthless behavior, represents the dark side of the upper class. While Wemmick, with his sense of integrity and loyalty, stands for the positive and honorable side.

Pip is deeply impressed by Jaggers’s belief that money holds utmost significance. He quickly learns from Jaggers to spend money luxuriously and judge people in terms of their financial worth. He feels ashamed of Joe’s simple manners and looks down upon poor people since they are coarse and common. Jaggers, who is also hypocritical, pretends to be innocent, pure and free from crime, even though he is actually at the center of many dirty businesses. Under Jaggers’s guidance, Pip takes hypocrisy for granted and acts accordingly. Although Jaggers is aware of Pip’s “great expectations” from the very beginning, he refrains from disclosing the truth, as it will not benefit him in any way. Jaggers’s negative influence has terrible consequences: the once-childish Pip falls even deeper into his illusions and becomes further removed from his nature. He abandons sincerity and simplicity in favor of pursuing luxury and wealth.

Luckily for Pip, he encounters Wemmick, Mr. Jaggers’s clerk, during his London life. From Wemmick, Pip learns the difference between reality and appearance. In capitalist society, people play multiple roles and may wear different masks in different situations. At the law office, Wemmick, whose motto is always “get hold of portable property”, speaks in a cold and decisive manner. However, at his home in Walworth, Wemmick’s smile is not merely mechanical but genuine. He is a creative individual who has designed many interesting devices, and a hard worker who shows obedience to his elderly father. Wemmick’s friendship with Pip is warm and loyal, despite his position as Jaggers’ clerk.

Importantly, it is Wemmick's influence that makes Pip feel remorseful for looking down upon Joe.

4.3. The Influence of Genuine Friendship and Love

In British history, the Victorian Age was often referred to as “the Age of Empire”, and it evoked a profound sense of national significance among the people of that era. One of the key factors contributing to this sentiment was the flourishing of culture, which saw the emergence of numerous new concepts. Among these, the notions of the “new gentleman” and the “ideal family” stood out as particularly influential.

As the Victorian Age progressed, undergoing development and reform in various fields, the concept of the gentleman underwent significant transformations. With the rising status of the middle class in society, there emerged a new perception of the gentleman. The concept emphasized self-help, self-control, and personal dignity. It encouraged individuals to strive for self-improvement and conduct themselves with a sense of respectability. As the concept of “new gentleman” advocated, a real gentleman should care about something other than money. One of the main values was disinterestedness.

Herbert, as a good friend of Pip in *Great Expectations*, embodies the concept of “new gentleman”. In the novel, Herbert’s disinterestedness gives Pip the confidence to help his patron Magwitch, despite the dangers and difficulties involved. As roommates, Herbert instills more positive attitudes in Pip and offers him a genuine friendship. With the assistance and influence of Herbert, Pip adjusts his moral values and embarks on a journey of learning to genuinely care for and treat his friends and family. Pip’s assistance in securing a position for Herbert at a merchant’s house fills him with immense joy and brings tears to his eyes. Witnessing the positive impact his “great expectations” have on someone else deeply moves him.

In the Victorian Age, family was considered as a holy place that nothing could compare with. It received a prominent seat in people’s daily life. Furthermore, it even became a symbol of men’s success in that era. Therefore, people at that time used to make a distinction between family and work.

Wemmick serves as a prominent symbol of family culture in *Great Expectations*. Through his unwavering love and care for his own family, Wemmick conveys to Pip the profound sense of warmth and belonging that can be found within a family. While he must earn a living, he chooses to keep his personal life separate from his professional life and distance himself from the cruelty of the human world. He treats Pip with kindness and does everything in his power to help him, assisting with Herbert's job search and even aiding in the plot to help Magwitch escape. Wemmick exerts a significant influence on Pip’s transformation and his yearning for family. The hardships Pip endures during his childhood, the bewildering experiences he faces in the bustling city of London, and the inherent contradictions within his “great expectations” all arouse his eagerness for the family.

Magwitch, a thread throughout the novel, provides Pip with fatherly love. His most striking feature is sincerity. Magwitch feels a strong obligation to repay Pip for his generosity in bringing food to him in the childhood. During his exile, he asks another man to bring Pip his hard-earned money. His idea of turning Pip into a gentleman brings Pip dramatic change and immense pain. His coming back makes Pip almost scared to death. His being watched on makes Pip upset. His being arrested and sentenced arouses great pain and sympathy in Pip. Throughout the novel, Pip's feelings towards Magwitch have undergone several changes. At first, little Pip is frightened by Magwitch's threats, and later he feels pity for him, assuming he is lost or dead. When Magwitch suddenly comes back, Pip has repugnance, and wants to abandon him. With the persuasion of his friend Herbert, Pip shows sympathy for Magwitch, which at last evolves into sincere respect.

After the death of Magwitch, Pip loses his property and finds himself in deep debt. No one but the kind-hearted Joe comes to rescue him, even though Joe has been shunned by him for a long time. Joe not only pays off Pip's debts with his hard-earned money, but also takes care of him during his illness. Joe’s forgiveness is obvious in his intentions to put upon his father's tombstone that “Whatsume'er the failings on his part, Remember reader he were that good in his hart”^[22]. This epitaph not only applies to Joe's attitude towards his dead father, but also towards Pip when he loses his “great expectations”. No matter what Pip has done, he always treats Pip as well as before, which has great influence on Pip's final awakening. Joe deliberately keeps his distance from Pip's London life to avoid embarrassing him with his simple manners. However, Joe is always present in Pip's mind, reminding him of the importance of positive moral values. Pip learned a valuable lesson: the bourgeois interpersonal relationships are based solely on money, and without it, nothing can be achieved. The real virtue exists

in common people like Joe, who judges others based on their inner qualities rather than their wealth.

In the end of *Great Expectations*, Dickens portrays a harmonious picture of Joe's life with Biddy, which reflects his faith in the industrious working class. Biddy finally finds happiness with Joe, indicating another life of Pip if he has never submitted to the false moral values. Through Pip and Biddy's life experiences, it is implied that even in identical social circumstances, individuals may develop distinct characters. Pip's moral growth leads him to make different choices.

5. Pip's Nature and His Great Expectations

Pip's character is undoubtedly shaped by the social environment, yet it is not solely determined by it. His intrinsic nature also plays a vital role in his character development. For instance, Pip selflessly helps the convict Magwitch, remains devoted to his love for Estella, and shows great generosity towards his friend Herbert, reflecting his simple and kind nature. His remorse towards Joe, which appears constantly in the novel, is a testament to his inherently good nature. However, Pip's temporary indulgence in the corruptive forces of money and social status leads him to become selfish, snobbish, and indifferent. Fortunately, Pip ultimately abandons his misguided ideas and returns to the right path.

The "great expectations" can be interpreted as Pip's strong desire to become a gentleman and win Estella's love. This burning desire is fueled by two strong forces: Miss Havisham's hatred for men and Magwitch's gratitude towards Pip.

Miss Havisham's hatred originates from her own blind love for a bad guy, causing her to lose not only her wealth but also her ability to love. She raises Estella as her adopted daughter, instructing her to utilize her beauty and cold-heartedness to break men's hearts. When Pip falls in love with Estella, Miss Havisham leads him to develop delusions of "great expectations". Pip believes that Miss Havisham will help him become a gentleman and marry Estella, and then his "great expectations" will completely come true.

In fact, Pip's "great expectations" are based on the money earned by the convict Magwitch in Australia. After Pip discovers the truth of his "great expectations", it is like a joke that fate plays on him. He feels extremely shameful, as in his mind money earned by a convict is dirty. He wants to escape from the embarrassing situation, while he has nowhere to go. He cannot seek refuge with Joe, whom he has shunned for too long, and he feels sorry for treating him so poorly. His hypocritical uncle would not accept him either. The Satis Manor has no room for him as well. After intense inner conflicts, he finally decides to stay with Magwitch and help him flee the country. This decision marks the transformation in Pip's character. After a long period of illusion, Magwitch's return helps Pip finally realize that the hypocritical and cunning members of the upper class cannot provide him with "great expectations". He learns to appreciate the true value of people and their deeds, rather than their social status or wealth. Pip's changing attitude towards Magwitch is a sign of his retrieval of virtue:

For now, my repugnance to him had all melted away, and in the hunted wounded shackled creature who held my hand in his, I only saw a man who had meant to be my benefactor, and who had felt affectionately, gratefully, and generously, towards me with great constancy through a series of years. I only saw in him a much better man than I had been to Joe^[23].

6. Conclusion

Charles Dickens' works are deeply influenced by the ethical values of the Victorian Age, including evangelism, Benthamism, the notions of gentleman, and the significance of family, etc. These values have a profound impact on the character development of the novel's protagonist, Pip. The interplay of Social Cognitive Theory and Moral Development Theory helps to interpret how Pip's character unfolds. Throughout the novel, the people he meets and the values he observes all play significant roles in shaping him. Initially, Pip is heavily influenced by external factors, but as the plot progresses, he undergoes a transformation, developing his own set of values and principles. This journey from impressionable to morally conscious is a central aspect of his character development in the novel.

Analyzing the social environment and personal character development reveals a close association between the two. The environment can be both nurturing and destructive in shaping one's character. Interestingly, even under identical social circumstances, different individuals may develop contrasting characters, as innate nature and personal choices are also crucial. In *Great Expectations*, Pip undergoes

a journey of self-discovery as he strives to break free from his social class and achieve his “great expectations”. This journey serves as a profound lesson, urging readers to have faith in human virtues and to avoid being captivated by unrealistic desires.

Overall, *Great Expectations* delivers a profound message about the complexities of character development and the significant impact of the social environment on an individual’s growth. Through Pip’s transformation and experiences, readers are urged to understand the importance of staying true to one’s moral compass amidst social pressures and desires. The influence of social environment on personal character development is a topic worthy of further research, as it can greatly aid the upbringing of children today.

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