

The Comprehensive Research of Feminism in Edith Wharton's Novels

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Abstract: Chinese literature and foreign literature constitute the world literature system, reflecting the wisdom of human literature and art. The two promote each other and progress together, facing the development of Chinese literature against the background of foreign literature. Based on the theory of literary criticism and comparative literature, this thesis comprehensively uses the literature research method, the psychology research method, the close reading of texts, the comparative research method and the "three theories" research method to evaluate and analyze the feminism often shown in Wharton's novels. This paper deeply understands Wharton's exploration of the ideal social order and ideal new women, and displays from more perspectives the features of this outstanding writer and the social culture at that time, as well as the lasting charm and the value of The Times of her works, so as to provide reference for the creation of Chinese feminist literature.

Keywords: Edith Wharton's Novels; Feminism; Comprehensive Research; Research Status; Main Points

1. Introduction

The existence and development of foreign literature, dependent on human civilization and the progress of world literature, is attributed to highlighting the universal function of literature and its own unique charm. The great significance of studying foreign literature comes from promoting the awakening and development of Chinese literature itself. As China continues to open to the outside world, the impact of foreign literature on Chinese literature has become more obvious, and many writers have absorbed the essence from it to enrich their own artistic style. Foreign literature sculpts the jade of Chinese literature with the attitude of "the stone of mountains". Chinese literature and foreign literature constitute the world literature system, reflecting the wisdom of human literature and art. The two promote each other and progress together, facing the development of Chinese literature against the background of foreign literature. In the age of science and technology information, the forms of literature and art communication are diverse and rapid, which makes each country's unique literature and its way of existence involved in a new mode of mutual collision and integration, which is both a challenge and an opportunity for the development of Chinese literature.

Edith Wharton, an American writer, was born in a prestigious family in New York. She received a good private education and spent most of her childhood in Europe. She wrote more than 40 works, including novels, novellas, travelogues, commentaries and autobiographies. Among them, Old New York, set in the upper class of New York in the late 19th century and early 20th century, earned her a reputation as an excellent folk novelist. In 1905, she published a novel, The House of Joy, which became a commercial success and established her status as one of America's leading novelists. In 1920, her novel "The Age of Innocence" won the Pulitzer Prize for Literature, becoming the first woman to do so. She was nominated for the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1927. In the history of American literature, she has been praised as "social novelist", "psychological realist" and "naturalist".

In view of the existing problems in the interpretation of feminism in Wharton's novels, this topic is based on the theory of literary criticism and comparative literature, and comprehensively uses the literature research method, the psychology research method, the close reading of text method, the comparative research method and the "three theories" research method to deeply interpret the cultural connotation of the female images in the novels. Criticizing the money worship centered on money and pleasure, defending the moral principles worth cherishing and respecting, exploring the psychological changes and spiritual realm of women at the critical moment of life choice, deeply understanding

Wharton's exploration of the ideal social order and ideal new women, broadening the living space of women and realizing the value of women's life.

2. Review of Research Status

2.1 Foreign Research Status

Wharton has always been the focus of academic attention abroad. Entering the new century, Wharton's research has emerged a new direction of development. As Wharton's reputation grew, so did her image. Children's literature, "The Brave Escape of Edith Wharton," portrays a bright, smart girl who is not afraid to break conventions. It tells the story of a girl of noble origin who bravely pursues her dream despite family constraints and social discrimination and eventually grows up to be a famous American female writer. This work provides a new way for people to understand Wharton, and breaks the long-standing prejudice against Wharton in American academia. Since the new century, with the continuous development of feminist theory, the feminist research of Wharton's works is increasingly rich. Since the second feminist movement, Wharton's attention to women's issues has become a consensus among critics. Wharton pays attention to the situation of women and explores the common problems women face in her works. However, she held a conservative attitude towards the first-generation feminist movement and did not advocate the establishment of a new female tradition besides the traditional male tradition. In the new century, foreign scholars began to explore the plight of Wharton as a woman in the creation process, which further expanded the perspective of feminist research. Wharton's aristocratic background seemed to make her a natural spokesperson for conservatism, but the fact that she was able to write popular, insatiable works and achieve great commercial success in an elite setting raised questions about her conservative stance. Therefore, many foreign scholars observe Wharton's novels from the perspective of cultural studies, which on the one hand reflects the desire to lift the curtain of traditional customs, and on the other hand reveals the careful maintenance of traditional rules [1-4].

2.2 Domestic Research Status

Wharton's works were introduced to China at a very early age. Mr. Lu Shuxiang translated Ethan Frome, a novella depicting the life of the bottom class in the United States during the Anti-Japanese War. In the eighties, two of her major novels, "House of Mirth" and "The Age of Innocence," were introduced into the country. In 1997 Mr. Bloom translated a series of Wharton novellas and published them under the title "Old New York. In the new century, domestic scholars study Wharton and her works mainly from the following aspects: from the perspective of the theme of her works, writing skills and other aspects of comparison with other writers. Among them, there are more Henry James and Edith Wharton, both well-known writers in the history of British and American literature and close friends. Domestic critics tend to study the literary connection between them. To interpret Wharton's novels from the perspective of feminism, women's narrative discourse had not been established in Wharton's era. However, when women's creative discourse was suppressed, Wharton was still recognized by male critics, which must have her unique narrative strategy. To study Wharton's works from the perspective of ethics, Wharton supports and promotes the religious ethics of humanism, pays special attention to gender equality in the family, and expects that the interests of individuals and society can achieve harmony and unity. This paper studies Wharton's works from the perspective of space, takes the space transformation shown in the novel as the object, attempts to restore the tragic relationship between space and Lily as well as the causes of the heroine's tragic fate, so as to reveal the confinement of the city to people and the anxiety of future people's living state in the city. The author interprets Wharton's works from the perspective of consumerism, explores the awkward situation of the leisure class in terms of identity and morality during the social transition period, and analyzes the self-loss and gradual moral decline of people under the attack of the consumer culture during the social transition period in the United States [5-8].

2.3 Review of Research Status

Domestic and foreign academic researches on Wharton mainly fall into three categories: first, from the perspective of feminism. Some feminists try to find feminist footprints in Wharton's own marriage, family and childhood. Some analyze the feminist characteristics of Wharton's writing by reading the text carefully. Second, from the perspective of naturalism. Critics of naturalism believed that Wharton,

who was born in the upper class of New York, described the humanistic features of the old New York in the late 19th century as an insider. On the one hand, she exposed the conservatism and hypocrisy of the upper class of New York, and on the other hand, combined with the general environment of social development in New York, she revealed the contradiction between the spiritually barren individual and the indifferent material society. Third, from the perspective of comparative literature, Wharton is compared with other writers to do parallel research or influence research. The academic circles abroad have rich research results on Wharton, involving a wide range of his works, and have paid a lot of attention to his travel notes and short stories. The content and literary form of her works should be reconsidered and studied both as a whole and in parts. By redefining "realism" and "naturalism", Wharton is placed in the discourse of new historical criticism, and combined with the cultural theory of "self-identity" of common interest, the history of her characters is analyzed. Her work is also seen as part of the complex cultural and political environment of the twentieth century. The translation of Wharton's works also started earlier in domestic academia, but a complete research system has not been formed yet. There are few related monographs, and there are many duplications of review methods and perspectives. Most of the criticism of Wharton has focused on "Old New York" novels, such as "The House of Fun" and "The Age of Innocence", while the rest has been less scholarly. This study will break through the limitations of domestic research and study the enduring charm and time value of feminism in Edith Wharton's novels from a comprehensive perspective.

3. Main Research Methods

3.1 Literature Research Method

According to a certain research purpose or topic, through the investigation of literature to obtain information, so as to comprehensively and correctly understand a method to master the research problem. Literature research method is widely used in the study of literature field, its function is to understand the history and current situation of related issues, and help to determine the research topic. Forming a general impression about the subject of the study facilitates observation and interview. Getting a comparative picture of the real situation helps to get a full picture of the problem.

3.2 Psychological Research Method

It is mainly characterized by the cross penetration of literature and psychology, and studies literary phenomena with the help of the principles, principles and categories of psychology. Psychology is integrated into literary studies to analyze the complexity and deep structure of characters and to make different definitions of typical. The complex relationship between subject and object and the aesthetic effect of works are studied, and the study of subject is brought to the central position. It is used to reasonably explain various identity construction and narrative strategies.

3.3 Close Reading of Text Method

Close reading of text originates from an important school of semantics in Western literary theory in the 20th century. Semantic analysis is regarded as the most basic method and means of literary criticism, which is the classic method of new criticism theory in Britain and America. Based on the text, respect the text, focus on the text. Through careful and repeated reading, I fully explore the rich connotations contained in the text, pay attention to the details of interpretation and structure analysis, read out the understanding and perception of the text, read out the profound emotions contained in the language.

3.4 Comparative Research Method

This method is developed from comparative literature. Through the comparative study of different works in the same period, different works in different periods, different criticism methods, especially the comparative study of Chinese and foreign literature and literary theories, the general basic laws of literary development can be obtained from the comparison. For example, the difference between Chinese and western aesthetic consciousness, the relationship between different cultural traditions and national aesthetic psychological structure, the cultural inheritance and the rise and fall of different social systems, etc.

3.5 "Three Theories" Research Method

Using "system theory", "cybernetics" and "information theory" to study literature is the inevitable result of natural science to social science. The subject of creation and the subject of appreciation establish the information connection with the object (information source and work), and the product is neither the subject nor the object. It is impossible to get the true meaning of literature in any open and isolated environment. The use of universal connections to grasp objects is very effective in the study of complex literary phenomena.

4. The Main Point of View and Innovation

4.1 The Relationship between Wharton's Life and Creation: "Life Is Like Drama, Drama Is Like Life"

Wharton grew up in luxury, with her father's library, a European education, a rebellious personality, and a brilliant talent that poured into "Eden Frome" her feelings about marriage and affairs. Wharton's zest for life was intermittent and deeply hurt. Through the years her most passionate emotions have been preserved for her writing, which has shaped her real life.

4.2 Suggests an Ideal Way for Women to Cope with Difficult Situations

In *The Age of Innocence*, May, keenly aware of the subtle changes in life, recognizes the severity of problems, clearly recognizes her own weakness, and chooses to solve problems in a soft rather than a tough way. As a relatively weak party in the marriage relationship, even if she feels strong negative emotions, she is calm and restrained, maintains a resolute and tenacious attitude in the face of crisis, actively adjusts herself, and protects her own interests to the greatest extent [9, 10].

4.3 An Interpretation of Identity Writing from the Perspective of Cultural Conflict and Change

Wharton's identity includes both self-identity and social identity. The deep implication behind the writing of identity is helpful to further understand the connotation of the novel. In the process of identity authentication, individuals are inevitably affected by cultural factors. The collision of various cultures is one of the causes of identity anxiety. The trend of the development of *The Times* is irreversible, and the identity of individuals must conform to the development of *The Times*.

4.4 Interpret from the Perspective of Naturalism

Naturalism is an extension of realism, aiming to show real life truthfully, and pay attention to the impact of the natural and social environment of human existence on human character and destiny. Wharton's writing period was a transitional stage from realism to naturalism in American literature. Although Wharton's naturalism emphasizes the important role of environmental factors, it lays more stress on the pillar role of spiritual power in life. As long as human beings have a positive belief in life, they can eventually break through various difficulties and obstacles and face life proudly, which is also the revelation of the naturalistic tendency in Wharton's novels to human life.

5. Conclusions

The rule of survival formulated by men is the golden rule that women need to follow in their life. Becoming a "family angel" in the eyes of men is their only destination. Women enter marriage out of consideration of interests and status, but often suffer indifference and estrangement under unequal constraints and requirements. The value of the study of feminism in Wharton's novels lies in advocating that women should not be addicted to the dependence of others, need clear self-recognition and firm spiritual belief, explore and make use of their own advantages in the limited environment, and bravely move forward to the ideal life.

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