

# On the Differences between Jane Eyre & Rouge in Terms of Love

Lin Tan<sup>1,a,\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*School of International Education, Kunming University of Science and Technology, Kunming, China*

<sup>a</sup>*tanlinoo@outlook.com*

<sup>\*</sup>*Corresponding author*

**Abstract:** *Love assumes a paramount significance in the life of an individual, and even more so, the pursuit of love is the highest purpose of life, which shows the loveliness and nobility of love. The exploration of Chinese and Western concepts of love not only facilitates cross-cultural interaction but also enhances individuals' self-awareness and contributes to societal progress. Through the comparison of two iconic works of classical Chinese and Western literature, namely Jane Eyre and Rouge, this article focuses on exploring the variations between the conception of love in Chinese and Western cultures, and the comparative analysis of Jane Eyre and the love experience of Fleur as the entry point, provides a comprehensive and in-depth discussion on the love concept that leads to the different destinies of the two, attempt to gain insights into the cultural variances prevailing between the Chinese and Western cultures by adopting this particular perspective.*

**Keywords:** *Jane Eyre; Rouge; love concept; Chinese and Western culture*

## 1. Introduction

Love is a timeless topic in the history of literature. Through the comparative analysis of Chinese and Western love concepts, we can uncover the differences and similarities in love concepts in different countries, regions and cultural environments, and in this way, we can deeply analyze the life and world views represented by people behind different love concepts, and further reflect the different educational and cultural backgrounds and even the differences in economic systems behind them. This has an important role to play in promoting cultural exchanges between China and the West and strengthening human understanding of ourselves.

## 2. Image Analysis of the Two Heroines

### 2.1 The Heroine of Jane Eyre

Jane Eyre is an autobiographical novel written by Charlotte Bronte.<sup>[1]</sup> This novel chronicles the tumultuous love story between Jane Eyre and Rochester, creating a strong female protagonist who steadfastly maintains her independent personality despite the unpredictable events of life. The central theme of the novel is the equality of men and women in matters of love. In terms of identity, the two people were totally in different classes. The protagonist of the novel, Jane Eyre, is portrayed as an individual who lost both her parents and leads a rather unremarkable life. However, the male lead, Rochester, is initially presented as a member of the nobility. Jane was adopted by her uncle from childhood, but her aunt treated her badly. Before adulthood, Jane had never been loved by her family. This self-insistent personality in Jane is one of the most profound aspect of the novel. Jane was burdened with all the misfortunes that nature and society had given her: Her life was miserable, no parents, no money, and she was just a weak women in the man's world. What added insult to injury is that she was not beautiful. All of these made her not look like the heroine of one of the world's greatest love stories, yet she had the equivalent. She might be insignificant, but she was the master of her own destiny. She might not be pretty, but she deserved to be loved. Jane never felt inferior to Rochester though she was a humble governess, she believed they were equal. Her integrity, nobility and purity didn't be polluted by this secular society. This strong sense of self had been constantly verified in the plot development of the novel.

In England at that time, the only chance for a women to change her fate was to marry a wealthy family

and become an upper-class wife. For women, few could resist the temptation of a man who had so much to offer. But Jane really refused. For Jane with such a strong self-esteem, she felt that Rochester's love was too heavy for her to choose freely. Jane had the ability to earn money to support herself, she didn't need to rely on others to live, so she left Rochester resolutely when she knew he had a mad wife and wandered to Morton alone. In Morton, Jane got the help of the priest St. John, founded a job and had a secure life. Soon after, St. John proposed to her, hoping that she would marry him and went with him to Europe to fulfil god's task. However, Jane knew that the man she loved was not him, she had refused. When Jane returned to Thornfield Manor, Rochester's mad wife set fire to the house and was killed by the fire. In order to save his wife, Rochester had lost his sight. And at this time, Jane declared her love to Rochester without thinking, firmly maintained this hard-won love. Jane knew that there were no more barriers between her and Rochester, and their love were equal, because by this time, Jane had inherited the huge property from her uncle, so that neither of them would be oppressed or bounded. This is the love that Jane was after.

As a woman, Charlotte, the author of this novel, was in an unfair social environment, surrounded by male-dominated society. There was always a longing in her heart for freedom and respect. Therefore, Charlotte poured her inner desire into the image building of Jane Eyre, and succeeded in creating a self-reliant woman. Jane Eyre, of both inferiority but also self-improvement, kept the point that all men are created equal, these colorful psychological characteristics constituted her healthy personality. The appearance of Jane Eyre was a challenge to the deep-rooted social status of traditional women.

## **2.2 The Heroine of Rouge**

Love once begun will never end. Rouge is a 1988 Hong Kong film, which is the adaptation of the novel written by Lilian Lee, who told a touching but sad love story.

As a classic Chinese feminist novel, *Rouge* reflected the Chinese female love concept represented by the author Lilian Lee. Chan Chen-Pang, better known as the "12<sup>th</sup> Young Master", was a handsome, wealthy playboy who frequented the brothels prevalent in Hong Kong in 1934, where he met the unique and much sought-after courtesan, Fleur. They began a passionate love affair. [2] Before meeting Chan Chen-Pang, Fleur shuttled among all sorts of men but never moved heart. The two of them fell in love at first sight, all her principles were in vain in front of him. She believed the rich boy was in love with her, but the good time did not last long. Due to the disparity in status, their love was thwarted strongly. It's clearly that their love was doomed when it was found out. Seeing no way to pursue their love, they decided to commit suicide together by swallowing opium. Although Fleur was afraid, in order to pursue love, she was so fearless, while Chan Chen-Pang was more hesitant. Because of his hesitation, Fleur secretly mixed sleeping pills in his wine and fed him opium. She was so afraid that he would leave her alone, but the fate played a big joke on her--- Chan Chen-Pang was saved and didn't die, which means he had left her alone.

It is shocking that she was willing to sacrifice her life for Chan Chen-Pang's pure love. To die for love is a common plot of Chinese classical love novel, such as Zhu Yingtai and Liu Lanzhi, so Fleur can be regarded as the representative of Chinese classical female love image. In *Rouge*, Fleur expressed her loyalty and persistence to love even in a form of paranoia, which was the ultimate in the pursuit of love. Although *Rouge* has reversed the previous feudal female images of humble and submissive on the screen, and turned them into independent female image, what the author wanted to express from the setting of the story is that women are still unable to get rid of the fate of being dominated and sacrificed. Even Fleur was so independent and brave, she was still oppressed by fate. Women choose a man and stick with him, men don't. When Fleur went to see Chan Chen-Pang's mother, they were both women, but Fleur was insinuated impurity by his mother, and was pointed to wake up that Chan Chen-Pang might have changed heart after two or three years. This shows that in the patriarchal society, the whole society agree with this unequal class concept, even women were also acquiesce and helped maintain this social system.

It is incorrect to assert that Chan Chen-Pang didn't love Fleur, and also wrong that he had abandoned Fleur. We can only know that his love not as deep as Fleur's love. On the one hand, 12<sup>th</sup> Master's character was biased towards cowardice. On the other hand, as a male, and the only boy in the family, his responsibility was really heavy. At that time, the society generally believed that how could a young heir be captured by opera. Therefore, it can only be concluded that the unequal love between them, as well as the identity disparity, led to this love tragedy. It's precisely because of the unequal love between them, thus Fleur had to try her best to flatter Chan Chen-Pang. For Fleur, love was her all, so in the end, she made the shocking decision to swallow opium and killed herself.

### **3. The Development of the East-West Concept of Love**

By comparing Jane Eyre's love concept with Fleur's, we can find that the main factor that affects the love concept is the difference between Chinese and Western cultures. Due to these differences, Chinese people are not as bold and confident about love as Westerners, which is one of the main reasons why the two heroines have different love endings. It is worth noting that both novels are well worth studying.

#### ***3.1 Evolution of the Concept of Love in Ancient China***

##### ***3.1.1 The Ancient Chinese Marriage System***

The marriage system in China originated from the ancient times and was basically formed in the western Zhou dynasty, lasted for thousands of years. In ancient patriarchal societies, marriage was not an individual act of the person involved, but a matter of great concern to both families. Therefore, men married women for the clan rather than for the individual. As far as the purpose of marriage is concerned, the first is to extend the family line. Marriage is the basis for the formation of the family and the creation of a kingship, governed by patriarchal laws, with the expansion of the family as the primary purpose.

Under the influence of Confucianism, ancient Chinese people were more subtle in expressing their feelings, including love. Chinese traditional culture stresses moral cultivation, which refers to be introverted and implicit, so people never express their feelings directly, but express them in calligraphy, poetry and painting.

The ancient Chinese marriage system was bounded by the feudal system, so ancient Chinese marriages were often at the mercy of parents and matchmarks." As a result of the heightened importance of the bond between a father and son in comparison to that of a husband and wife, despite the general desire for unrestricted love, individuals often succumb to the constraints of arranged marriages. As a consequence, the prospect of free love is relegated to the realms of myth and legend." The story of the cowherd and the weaver maid fully expresses people's longing for freedom of love, but it also reflects their desperation to be bound by fate. They know that destiny plays tricks on people, free love is a fantasy, and marriage is just a shackle of the feudal system. According to the perspective of ancient Chinese society, love was not exempted from experiences of distress, grief, and despondency.

##### ***3.1.2 The Status of Women in the Ancient Marriage System***

The prolonged confinement of Chinese women had resulted in Chinese love poetry always having a sad and mournful tone. In the long history of ancient China, the patriarchal system, centred on the man, has been strengthened. For society as a whole, the marriage relationship is simply the continuation of the old family, not the founding of the new one. It is a matter of one more member of the male family, not the two people. The women also often become a reproductive machine that perpetuates the male heir, whose doom having the ancient deformity of marriage and the low status of the woman. In ancient times, newlyweds were largely in a passive position, with the in-laws having so much power that it represented the clan's power. The male, as the feudal order maker, is constantly indulged and enriched by the existing ruling ideas. Marriage in China requires equal family conditions for men and women, and marriage is premised on the value of the family behind the women. This is reflected in Rouge, where in that times and the loss of human rights in the social context that women are doomed to have no real love concept to speak of. Women are in an oppressed class and even if divorce is sought, it can only be sought by the men's side.

The private ownership of property in the feudal state resulted in the loss of women's social identity in ancient China. Women's labour contributions are not highlighted by the feudal state, the privatization system makes them subordinate to men in the family and deprives them of their independent status, which in turn puts them behind the male, this results in the loss of their social identity. For Chinese women, in a feudal society where men are the center and women are dependent on men for survival, marriage is a matter of life and death. As wives, daughters-in-law, mothers, all the value of women is embodied in marriage and the family. Marriage success means a life of complete happiness and a good wife and mother; if the marriage is not successful, they will be mistreated by their husband's in-laws, or sent home, or suffer hardship and become slaves for life. Marriage is closely related to a woman's fate. Marriage is the suffering of women, but also the hope of women. For thousands of years, marriage is like a hard and merciless iron rope, tying the women's body and mind, deducing scenes of twisted and abnormal joys and sorrows.

### **3.2 The Western Concept of Love**

Male and female love is a brilliant and passionate collision of life force. However, for more than 3000 years, China has been asking people to suppress the love between a man and a woman, which is against the nature of man. On this issue, Westerners hold a completely different attitude from the Chinese.

Compared with Chinese people, westerners have a more open view of love. In Western culture, love has long been a priority, and philosophers have devoted themselves to the topic and its discussion. Since the Renaissance, Western culture has promoted "humanism", the core of which is the promotion of humanity and the pursuit of happiness. Human nature, human rights and human desires have been liberated to a certain extent, and people have been encouraged to enjoy life to the fullest. As a result, compared to China, Western countries are freer and more direct in the way of expressing love, they are free from the fetters of traditional feudalism, and they hold the perspective that love is direct, passionate and bold.

Through the analysis of *Jane Eyre*, we can see the view of love expressed by the heroine: In the pursuit of real love, a girl must be independent to achieve economic status through her own efforts. Only with an independent status will women be equal and respected in love and marriage. Simultaneously, it is equally important for individuals to possess self-respect and dignity, as the cultivation of these traits serves as the preliminary step towards receiving impartial treatment and equality from others. Jane held the conviction that young women should establish their individual career paths, maintain their own social circles, and preserve their personal boundaries. It is her belief that only by recognizing the significance of one's own existence can one ultimately discover an ideal position for love and union in matrimony.

#### **3.2.1 Freedom and Equality, Independence of Personality**

We can see from Western fiction that Westerners advocate a strong independent personality, and they believe that the individual is the first priority, and therefore have a relatively high degree of freedom in choosing the object of their love or life partner. Westerners advocate free and equal love relationships, in which they do not hesitate to rise up in the event that the dignity of human independence is compromised. Jane Eyre eventually returned to Rochester after he had lost both his eyes and his possessions, and did not hesitate to stay with him. This can be seen as a declaration of Western women's demand for equal and independent love. Love will not be affected by the poverty and wealth of the family, the level of education, or the moral inclinations. There are even literary works that reflect love in a way that deviates completely from the ethics of human nature in traditional Chinese cultural concepts.

#### **3.2.2 Love reigns supreme**

Westerners are bold in their pursuit of love, their expressions and their actions. Unlike Chinese expressions of subtlety and caution, Westerners are straightforward, and they will express their feelings directly when they meet the object of their desire, rather than hiding it.

Compared to the ancient Chinese way of choosing a spouse who throws an embroidered ball under ethical and moral supervision, the Western way of expressing love is open, even extraordinarily fanatical and reckless. People can speak openly about their feelings, and public opinion tolerates and supports them. People tend to openly show affection for the object of their affection in their personal lives, without much moral scruples. Even daring to express his love directly at the first meeting and going downstairs to the girls to play the guitar that night, although this trend is also gradually emerging in modern China, it was rare in ancient times.

## **4. The Main Reasons for the Difference**

### **4.1 The Different Values**

#### **4.1.1 Chinese Traditional Values**

Traditional Confucianism, as China's ruling ideology, promoted the ideological concepts of *The Three Followers*, *The Four Virtues*, *The Three Principles* and *The Five Constants*, and it emphasized the distinction between men and women, which had largely constrained the development of emotions between men and women in ancient China. In feudal societies, a woman tended to live in the boudoir and had little chance of coming into contact with the opposite sex before marriage, even never met her husband before marriage. All these notions had undoubtedly limited the pursuit of love. For example, Li Shang Yin wrote in his *Untitled* that "The silkworm does not die until the silk is exhausted, and the wax

torch is dried until the tears are gray". The words of the poem do not have the words of love, but they are a subtle expression of the heartfelt feeling of steadfastness to love and the heartfelt connection of those who love each other. It can be seen that Chinese traditional view of love is an implicit and introverted one.

#### **4.1.2 Western Values**

The western maritime civilization put a high value on love and believed that sweet love could help men succeed in their careers. For example, some time ago, we heard a story of the famous football star, who gave up an ongoing football game and went back to the hospital to be with his wife because she was giving birth to a child. And this caused a lot of discussion in the worldwide. At home, there is no doubt that such important occasions should be about business and not about women, yet in abroad, people hold the point that the football star loves his family and they understand his choice absolutely. This is unbelievable in China, not to mention the fact that even if a loved one of a Chinese athlete dies unexpectedly during a race, the athlete must endure the heartache to play a full game.

What's more, Westerners' love without restraint and without fetters also caused them to be bold and direct in their expression. When a Chinese people say "I love you", it represents a promise, just like the promise made by Chan Chen-Pang to Fleur in *Rouge*, which made Fleur wait him a lifetime.

### **4.2 Differences in the Social Status of Chinese and Western Women in Ancient Times**

#### **4.2.1 Ancient Chinese Women's Social Status**

During the long history of feudal society, Confucianism was deeply rooted in Chinese people's mind. Confucius, as the founder of Chinese ruling thought, said "female and villains are hard to deal with", which put women in an unequal social position for a long time and clearly belittled women, fully reflected the idea that men were superior to women at that time. More unfortunately, during the long history of feudal society, women themselves affected by this patriarchal influence had also developed a submissive character and were more dependent on men. Such as what Chan Chen-Pang's mother had told Fleur in *Rouge*. In such social environment, Chinese women had a low social status and lacked the right to choose their own marriages, their marriages were usually arranged by their parents, which was then called "parental orders and matchmaking".

#### **4.2.2 Ancient Western Women's Social Status**

Different from the traditional British women's literature, *Jane Eyre* has opened a new chapter in the development of women's equal rights in the new era <sup>[3]</sup>. It has made positive contributions to solving the contradictions between men and women in social class and improving the status of women in society, so that contemporary western feminist culture can be widely spread under the trend of global integration development.

As Western culture gradually developed through the influence of ancient Greek culture, aristocratic democracy prevailed in ancient Greece until modern Western progressive thinkers became increasingly dissatisfied with the dominance of the original political culture and began to advocate the pursuit of human morality, freedom, equality and fraternity. This background had led to a self-centered morality that was common to many people. Also, the concept of love presented a situation where the free love and pursuit of happiness was dominated by oneself. In such an environment, the self-consciousness of Western women was stimulated to boldly confront the domination of marriage by others and pursue their own love. The girls would actively participate in some social activities with boys in order to find suitable romantic partners. This open and social atmosphere gave women an environment in which they could find free and happy love and escaped from unhappy marriages.

Western women have full autonomy to choose who they want to marry before they get married, they only need to judge on the basis of their own feelings and not on the basis of their parents. They believe that marriage is a purely personal matter, a matter for the two people themselves, no outside interference is allowed. Furthermore, when there is a rift in their marital relations, they will bravely resist and end this relationship without any hesitation, even if they are married, they will divorce decisively, whereas in China, when it comes to divorce, they will think much and hesitate because there is too much social opinion to take into account, so Chinese women are not as free and relaxed as women in western countries when it comes to divorce.

### 4.3 Different Economic Systems

#### 4.3.1 China's Economic System

China has always been a self-sufficient natural economy, thus created a more conservative and introverted culture. Basically, ancient people could live a lifetime relying on a piece of land, so the preference was for ambiguity and stability. Moreover, China's ancient civilization, which originated in the Great River Basin, belongs to the agricultural civilization. The "agricultural civilization character" had made the Oriental people pay attention to ethics and morals, seek common ground and seek stability, and adopt the principle of peace in dealing with the world. A classic Chinese classic story, *Dream of the Red Chamber*<sup>[4]</sup>, depicts the love stories of a group of talented men and women of high society, and they are all tragic love stories. For its reasons, feudal ethics has a lot to do with it. Even if their families were prominent, they couldn't get their own happiness: love was not free and marriage was not autonomous. The family were always paramount and the elders were the masters. This is the identity of value, and the difference between Chinese and Western philosophies.

#### 4.3.2 Western's Economic System

The ancient Greek civilization of the West, which originated along the Aegean Sea, belongs to the maritime civilization. Farming in Europe was not as important as it was in China in ancient times, so Europeans at that time had developed a tendency to explore outward, and the culture of the whole society was more outward-looking. Moreover, Western countries entered the industrial economic era very early after the industrial revolution, and the "Industrial Civilized Character" had created a stronger spirit of struggle and legal consciousness among Westerners to defend their own interests, and to act on the principles of independence, freedom and equality in the world.

## 5. Conclusion

What kind of cultural edification people often receive determines what kind of ideas they have and how they deal with problems. Through the analysis of the two classic Chinese and western novels, we can see not only the love views shown by the two novels, but also the cultural differences between China and the west. The characterization of the protagonists by the two authors is exactly the embodiment of the cultural differences.

There are huge differences between the traditional Chinese and Western concepts of love, which are reflected in the literature. The two classic novels, *Jane Eyre* and *Rouge*, each represents Chinese and Western love concept. This paper presents a comparative study on the love view of the heroines in the two novels, and analyzes the evolution of the love concept of the Chinese and Western people, with the Chinese culture tending to be implicitly conservative and the Western culture being enthusiastic and bold. Ultimately, an analysis is conducted on the rationale behind the dissimilarities in the perception of love within various cultural contexts between the Eastern and Western regions. This is primarily due to three factors: traditional values, the social status of women and the differences in the economic systems of the two regions<sup>[5]</sup>.

Combining these two literary works with the background of the authors' time can help us better understand the cultural differences between the Chinese and the western, thus promote the cultural exchange of the Chinese and the Western. Moreover, love is an emotion that belongs exclusively to human beings, and the study of the concept of love can help us strengthen our understanding of ourselves and promote social development.

## References

- [1] Lamonaca Maria. "Jane's Crown of Thorns: Feminism and Christianity in 'Jane Eyre.'" *Studies in the Novel*, vol. 34, no. 3, 2002, pp. 245–63.
- [2] Li B. (1984). *Rouge*. China People's Publishing House, 1993.
- [3] Bronte Charlotte. 1963. *Jane Eyre*. New York: Airmont.
- [4] Cao X. (2005). *The Dream of the Red Chamber*. Translated by H. Bencraft Joly. Gutenberg.
- [5] Ben C. P. Lam, *Dialecticism in romantic relationships: An examination in Chinese and American cultural contexts*, *Personal Relationships*, vol. 29, no. 4, 2022, pp. 699–726.