

Poetic Disillusionment and Immortal Struggles: A Comparative Study of Lin Daiyu and Jane Eyre

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Abstract: Lin Daiyu and Jane Eyre are both well-known characters in world literature. Though they are created by writers from different cultures in different times, many studies have found that they have many similarities and worth comparing. However, there is a lack of comprehensive understanding in Lin Daiyu and Jane Eyre's similarities and differences as well as the factors that influence them. Aiming to compare Lin Daiyu and Jane Eyre experiences and characteristics roundly, this essay not only summarizes previous studies, but also divides into three aspects to compare Lin Daiyu and Jane Eyre, which are personalities, love experiences and growth environment. It is found that Lin Daiyu and Jane Eyre both respect themselves as well as others, with strong self-esteem and the value of equality. At the same time, they both show their courage to resist unreasonable things in society. They both pursue pure love without material desires, while Lin Daiyu regards love as more important than Jane Eyre. Jane Eyre's harsh growth environment with simple relationships gives her tenacity, while Lin Daiyu's seemingly enjoyable growth environment with complicated relationships makes her more sensitive. The different experiences and values of the writers also have a significant influence on the characters they create. Comparing two famous characters from different cultures allows us to learn more about the themes of great literature works and witness the image of a group of people from different historical background.

Keywords: Lin Daiyu, Jane Eyre, personalities, love experiences, growth environment.

1. Introduction

It is such an interesting fact that characters in literature works from different cultural backgrounds and periods have much in common and are worth comparing to find some enlightenment. People have studied much about the personalities and fate of some great female characters, which may be due to the awakening of female consciousness. One of these topics that attracts many scholars is the comparison between Lin Daiyu in *Dream of the Red Chamber* by Cao Xueqin and the main character in *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Bronte. Lin Daiyu and Jane Eyre are the shining pearls in literature.

Predecessors' studies are mainly based on the influence of cultural backgrounds, personalities, and their growth environment on the two characters' divergent destinies. It is found that both Lin Daiyu and Jane Eyre are orphan girls who are dependent on others. However, both have relatively rich knowledge and talents, and they are considered to be exceptionally intelligent. They also share many characteristics like straight forwardness, the pursuit of personality independence, self-respect and a rebellious spirit. Their pursuit of love is also very similar, for they wish to live with their lover freely

and equally, regardless of possessions and social status. Despite so many similarities, they differ in terms of their outlook on life. Lin Daiyu has a rather pessimistic outlook on life, while Jane Eyre tends to be more positive. The two opposite attitudes toward life may become one of the reasons for their different fate [1]. Previous studies also consider the significance of various periods and cultural backgrounds. It is said that Lin Daiyu is the victim of feudal society when women cannot determine their fate and have to depend on others mentally and financially. However, Jane Eyre was created during the development of Western-oriented capitalism in the 19th century, when the idea of freedom and equality was widely spread, and the Western feminist movement rose [2].

Though many previous studies have already comprehensively compared Lin Daiyu and Jane Eyre, they tend to focus more on the factors contributing to their ultimate destiny. This essay mainly aims to closely analyze the different factors that affect the two characters' expression of love and the objects of their rebellion, including the cultural origins from China and the West and the two writers' own experiences. Some scholars often neglect these factors. Most studies have identified the different historical backgrounds the two characters are living in, but more profound research on cultural origins and tradition is needed. What's more. The writer of *Dream of the Red Chamber*, Cao Xueqin, tries hard to convey a sense of disillusionment and nihilism to readers, which is presented by the characters' despair and hopelessness towards their fate. However, the writer of *Jane Eyre*, Charlotte Bronte, conveys the struggling spirit that people can change their destiny through hard work. The different themes that writers aim to present by creating these two female characters have significant effects on the characters' behaviors, their expression of love, and their objects of rebellion. What is more notable is that this difference may be mainly caused by the two writers' divergent experiences and cultural backgrounds, which will be discussed later in this essay. This study will give a comparison between Eastern and Western feminine values as well as the ways that writers from divergent cultural background use to shape characters. By comparing Lin Daiyu and Jane Eyre, this essay is expected to not only help readers understand more comprehensively but also bring enlightenment to the two great works of contemporary women, showing how to implore their lives.

2. Literature review

There are many studies on Lin Daiyu as she is such a fascinating character in *Dream of the Red Chamber*, her characteristics are commonly regarded as contradictory, for self-esteem and self-abasement, aloofness and enthusiasm, fragility and persistence exist on her at the same time. In the pursuit of love, she regards self-realization as a state of living, which is a synthesis of motivation and personality after she has reached a higher level of needs. However, her aim of self-realization ultimately leads to self-destruction due to her inability to get out of the limitations of the times under the feudal society [3]. Lin Daiyu's tragedy is destined because of her unique personality and the era she lives in, but her short life leaves a kind of ultimate beauty in readers' mind. She has the strong temperament of a poet who lives by 'feeling' and does not take everyday things as her own business. Her self-complex contributes to her ambivalence of self-esteem and self-shame [4]. Lin Daiyu believes that the relationship between people should be honest, and she only needs to be herself instead of pleasing others. However, her temperament, taste and the ideal life she pursues are seemingly incongruous in the society she lives in, which lead to her final tragedy [5]. However, some statements in this study are too extreme to agree with. It claims that what Lin Daiyu thinks and says is neither modified nor concealed, completely ignoring the reaction of others and without calculating the consequences [5]. Lin Daiyu indeed disdains to follow the trend and never flatters, being sincere and honest, but she does keep good manners and always considers the feelings of others.

Previous studies on Jane Eyre mainly focus on the perspective of feminism. Her most significant personality may be the ability to be neither humble nor pushy, finding a perfect balance between arrogance and self-abasement. The survival of Jane Eyre is a metaphor for the flexibility and strength

of women's lives and the difficulty of women's survival in the cracks of a male-dominated society. Her courage to pursue a true lover is also a denial of marriages in her times based on monetary status, and her contempt for the hypocrisy of the upper-class society is a challenge to the social power discourse at that time [6]. Facing extreme difficulty and unfairness, she never complains about the situation or gives up herself. Instead, she stubbornly fights against her fate and pursues her happiness; she was born poor but despises money, longing for love but protecting her dignity, which makes her image noble and respectable. A harsh growth environment awakens her tenacity. In this way, she develops an independent personality. Jane Eyre's inner qualities contribute to creating her unique beauty, which is very different from Lin Daiyu's ultimate beauty from appearance and inner qualities. The image of Jane Eyre breaks the traditional concept of beauty and sublimates the idea of inner beauty [7]. It is said that Jane Eyre is the first female character to proactively express her love to a male character in the history of English novels, promoting the development of feminism [8].

3. Analysis

This essay mainly compares Lin Daiyu and Jane Eyre from three aspects: their personalities, love experiences, growth environment, and the mutual effects of the three aspects. Finally, this essay will briefly analyze how the two writers' different experiences and statuses influence the two characters' ultimate destinies.

3.1. Personalities

There are many similarities between Lin Daiyu and Jane Eyre in terms of personalities. A significant point is that they both have a strong self-esteem, and they try very hard to protect it. Their self-esteem exactly comes from their sense of inferiority [9]. Lin Daiyu's parents both passed away early, and she has to depend on Jia mansion financially, which leads to her self-abasement and sensitivity. When she first comes to Jia mansion, she pays attention to every step and not easily say a word, for fear of being laughed at. She was under a lot of psychological pressure, which made her sensitive and suspicious [10]. Her efforts to make herself look decent indicate her sense of inferiority and strong self-esteem. Jane Eyre likewise lost her parents early and had to live with her, aunt who maltreated her seriously. Without any property, she falls in love with Mr. Rochester, who is a wealthy nobleman. The vast gap in social status contributes to the increase of Jane Eyre's self-abasement and the motivation to protect her self-esteem. She claims that she is 'poor, obscure, plain and little' but not 'soulless and heartless' when Mr. Rochester tells her that he is going to marry Miss Ingram [11]. However, Lin Daiyu's strong self-esteem ultimately overwhelms her, while Jane Eyre's leads to her increasing tenacity and independence. Lin Daiyu is delicate, and her weakness lies not only in her body but also in her mind. Under the influence of feudal ethics, where women have no status in society, she cannot leave Jia Mansion and fend for herself [9]. Her self-esteem increases the psychological pressure and the fear to be looked down upon, which makes her illness worse. For Jane Eyre, her self-esteem strengthens her to be unyielding towards unfairness and power. She has the opportunity to live independently.

Lin Daiyu and Jane Eyre are both kind-hearted and sincere to the people around them, which is considered to be an obvious point. They both treat others with a pure heart and respect others. Jane Eyre's principle is 'people treat you well, then you treat others well, which I have always wanted'. She believes that although the status of people is different, the amount of property is different, the appearance is different, and people are all equal in terms of personality [10]. In Lowood school, Jane Eyre's 'fingers quivered' with 'impotent anger' when she witnessed Miss Scatcherd's unfair and cruel punishment of her friend Helen Burns [11]. She cares for Helen very much when Helen is seriously ill and accompanies Helen through thick and thin. When Jane Eyre becomes the governess of little

Adele, knowing she is abandoned by a French dancing girl who has bad morals, Jane Eyre becomes more affectionate and caring for Adele instead of discriminating against her. Lin Daiyu at the same time, always treat others equally and kindly. Lin Daiyu and her servant girl Zi Juan are like sisters and friends who support each other. Zi Juan once blames Lin Daiyu for being 'too impetuous' after Lin Daiyu has a quarrel with Jia Baoyu, and Lin Daiyu accepts it silently instead of getting annoyed. When the servant girl Xiang Ling asks Lin Daiyu to teach her poetry, Lin agrees immediately and explains poems to her patiently. Lin Daiyu even lends her collection of poems to Xiang Ling and marks out the key poems that should be read. Lin Daiyu's concept of equality is very similar to Jane Eyre's, which is so advanced in the hierarchical feudal society.

What's more, Lin Daiyu and Jane Eyre both have rebellious spirits toward the society they are living in, which is a very important point related to the themes of the two novels. However, Jane Eyre's rebellious spirit is expressed in her words and deeds, while Lin Daiyu's is hidden more deeply which needs us to discover slowly. In Lin Daiyu's times, women without knowledge and talent are regarded as virtuous. However, Lin Daiyu not only reads poetry and shows her talent, but also dares to read banned books like *Romance of the Western Cracker*, which is a kind of resistance to feudal society. Her pursuit of independent personality and marriage freedom is the resistance to the traditional value of marriage. Her sensitive and suspicious temperament is also the resistance to the surrounding wordy environment in Jia mansion, which is a measure to protect herself and avoid following the hypocritical trend. Jane Eyre's rebellious spirit is more strong and complete. Facing Mrs Reed's cruel maltreatment and slander, she bravely says, 'I am not deceitful; if I were, I should say I loved you, but I declare I do not love you' to Mrs. Reed. She fights against John Reed who always bully her. In Lowood school, she tells her friend Helen that 'I must resist those who punish me unjustly', showing her determination to resist injustice. The love between Jane Eyre and Mr. Rochester is so improper under social pressure, as there is a huge gap of social status, but Jane declares that 'it is my spirit that addresses your spirits, just as if both had passed through the grave and we stood at God's feet equal -- as we are!' [11]. Her value of equality is also a resistance to the traditional values in her times.

3.2. Love experience

Lin Daiyu and Jane Eyre not only share many qualities in their personalities, but also in their love experience. Their pursuit of love has similarities as well as differences. It is obvious that they both meet difficulties in love. As it mentioned above, the marriage between Jane Eyre and Rochester has a huge gap of family and social status, which puts them under extreme social pressure. However, Jane and Rochester both have rebellious solid spirit, so as long as they love each other, the worldly demand is not an obstacle to them [10]. The historical background also moves some obstacles for them. In the 19th century, Britain experienced the baptism of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment. People have more emancipated mind and are eager to seek freedom [10]. This makes the marriage between a poor governess and a wealthy nobleman more socially acceptable. Another difficulty in this marriage may be more significant, which is the existence of Rochester's 'insane wife'. For the love between Lin Daiyu and Jia Baoyu, the biggest problem may be the constraints of feudal ethics and the interference of feudal parents such as Wang Furen and Jia Mu. In feudal society, free love between teenage boys and girls is banned, and they have to follow their parents' orders and the match-maker's words [10]. However, Lin Daiyu's parents passed away very early and there is no one to advocate marriage for her. The existence of Lin Daiyu's 'rival in love', Xue Baochai, is also the extra obstacle for the love between Lin and Jia.

Due to the cultural differences, Lin Daiyu and Jane Eyre's expressions of love are very different. Jane Eyre's expression of love is more sensible, passionate and forthright, while Lin Daiyu's expression of love is more sensitive, implicit and poetic. When Mr. Rochester tells Jane Eyre that he

is going to marry Miss. Ingram, Jane's reaction shows an explosion of strong emotions, however, in a rational way to express her values of love. The interaction between Jane and Rochester is portrayed in detail, and the novel's communication is very long and impressive. However, in *Dream of the Red Chamber*, the communication between Lin Daiyu and Jia Baoyu is shorter and love is expressed more implicitly. Lin Daiyu is introverted and reserved, characteristic of most of the women in feudal society. Her expression of love is expressed by reflecting on natural things, which leads to many of her moving poems. As the society at that time didn't allow free love between boys and girls, Lin Daiyu and Jia Baoyu's love is like a tacit understanding between their hearts. The most obvious expression of love between them may be what Lin says to Jia: 'It is for my heart' [12].

What's more, Lin Daiyu and Jane Eyre's pursuit of love also shows similarities and differences. Both Lin Daiyu and Jane Eyre do not obey the worldly values of love in their times, and they pursue equal and genuine love, seeking their real soulmate regardless of property and social status [10]. Their pursuit is true and pure love without any material desires. When Mr. Rochester buys Jane Eyre clothes and jewels, she cannot stand him dressing her up like a doll and she insists on working as Adele's governess to support herself. This proves that Jane Eyre falls in love with Rochester not because of Rochester's wealth at all. Jane Eyre and Lin Daiyu's pursuit of love is also very similar as they care much about their dignity in love. When Jane Eyre discovers that Mr. Rochester has already had a wife, she chooses to leave for that she will never sacrifice her dignity to become Mr. Rochester's mistress. Lin Daiyu also tries hard to protect her dignity in love. When Jia Baoyu expresses his love by using the words from *Romance of the Western Chamber*, Lin Daiyu immediately becomes angry because this is regarded as very improper at those times and hurts Lin's dignity. However, there is a significant difference between Lin Daiyu and Jane Eyre's pursuit of love. Due to different historical and cultural background, Jane Eyre has pursuit of both love and work, while Lin Daiyu puts all her hope on love and marriage. Jane Eyre lives in the 19th century of Britain where the status of women rises and female consciousness awakens. She can pursue a meaningful life, live independently and support herself by working. For Jane Eyre, love may only be part of her life, just like people in the modern society. However, in Lin Daiyu's times, women are not allowed to work and pursue self-actualization, which makes Lin Daiyu regard love as her whole life.

3.3. Growth environment

The growth environment of Jane Eyre and Lin Daiyu is also worth comparing. Although both of them have lost their parents early and have to depend on their relatives, it seems that Jane Eyre has a much harsher growth environment than Lin Daiyu. Jane Eyre has been maltreated by her aunt, bullied by her cousin and tortured physically and mentally by the harsh environment of Lowood school. In contrast, Lin Daiyu seemingly enjoyed the life of a noble lady with the caring of her relatives and servants [10]. As a result, Jane Eyre develops tenacity and unyieldingness in her hard growth environment, while Lin Daiyu develops sensibility. It is obvious that they both face difficulties during their growth, but Jane Eyre's difficulty comes from the extreme growth environment, while Lin Daiyu's difficulty mainly comes from her inner heart. Jane Eyre's growth environment has relatively simple relationships than Lin Daiyu. It is also plausible to say that Lin Daiyu is overwhelmed by dealing with such a complicated relationship in Jia mansion. This may have a significant impact on Lin's personality which is sensitive and suspicious.

The three aspects the essay has discussed, which are personalities, love experiences and growth environment, have a mutual effect on shaping characters. For instance, the growth environments have influenced their personalities. As it has mentioned, the harsh environment gives Jane Eyre tenacity and rebellious spirit, while the complicated relationship in Jia Mansion develops Lin Daiyu's sensitivity and suspicion. What's more, the growth environment affects the objects they resist to, though they have the same rebellious spirit. Jane Eyre's rebellion is to resist the oppression of the

outside world, while Lin Daiyu's rebellion is mainly manifested in her contempt and disdain for the hypocritical environment and feudal society. Their personalities also affect their love experiences. Due to Lin Daiyu's innocence and frankness, she never tries to please others and always protects her self-esteem, which makes her considered as mean and disliked by those feudal parents. As a result, they finally choose Xue Baochai as Jia Baoyu's bride, leading to Lin's love tragedy. Jane Eyre is a strong-willed woman who always keeps a clear mind. She is thoughtful, insightful and always protects her dignity, which makes Mr. Rochester find her interesting and lovely. Mr. Rochester falls in love with Jane because he needs an independent and intelligent woman. In this case Jane Eyre's personality contributes to her success in love [10]. Growth environment also influences their pursuit of love. Jane Eyre is born poor and experiences a lot of unfair treatment in her childhood, so her pursuit of love is mainly equality. Lin Daiyu, however, grows up in the society that teenage boys and girls are not allowed to love freely. So, her pursuit of love is freedom and a promise of marriage.

3.4. Writers' experience

Finally, this essay will briefly discuss the influence of writers' experiences on the characters. Cao Xueqin, the writer of *Dream of the Red Chamber*, was born in Nanjing Jiangning Zhi Zao Fu. He lived a wealthy and luxury life in his youth. However, his father was dismissed from his post and his house was robbed leading to the decline of his family. Cao Xueqin is significantly influenced by Buddhism and Taoism, which increases his sense of disillusionment, repentance and indifference to the whole life. The character Lin Daiyu is created with a sense of ultimate beauty and disillusionment, who comes with purity and returns to purity. In other words, Lin Daiyu is created for a beautiful tragedy, and she cannot escape from her own destiny. In contrast, Charlotte Brontë was born in a country pastor's family and her mother died very early. She was sent to a charitable institution and a few years later she worked as a governess. Her experience is so similar to Jane Eyre, the character created by her. As an orphan girl who was born with no property and low status, Charlotte Brontë gives Jane Eyre the spirit of resistance and the pursuit of equality. She put her belief into this novel, that everyone is equal and can have a meaningful life through efforts, which is quite different from the feeling of futility and nihilism in *Dream of the Red Chamber*.

4. Conclusion

This essay compares Lin Daiyu and Jane Eyre from various perspectives. It is found that Lin Daiyu and Jane Eyre share many qualities in their personality, despite being created by writers from different cultural and historical backgrounds. They both have strong self-esteem which originated from their sense of inferiority. They are both kind-hearted and sincere to others with great value of equality. More importantly, they both have rebellious spirit and courage to the society they are in. The love experiences of Jane Eyre and Lin Daiyu have some similarities and differences. They both meet difficulty in love. Jane Eyre's expression of love is more sensible, passionate and forthright, while Lin Daiyu's expression of love is more sensitive, implicit and poetic. They are similar in the pursuit of equal and genuine love without any material desires, and they both protect their dignity in love. However, Jane Eyre only considers love as part of her life, while Lin Daiyu regards love as her whole life. Jane Eyre's growth environment is much harsher than Lin Daiyu's, but the relationship is simpler to deal with than Lin's, which contributes to their different personalities. This essay also relates the two characters' experiences with the writers. Cao Xueqin tends to retreat from society and be tired of the worldly life, which reflects on Lin Daiyu's pessimistic attitude towards life. Charlotte Brontë tends to seek for equality and independence, which reflects on Jane Eyre's resistance to the unfairness and efforts in protecting self-esteem. This essay compared Lin Daiyu and Jane Eyre in comprehensive ways, including characters' personalities and experiences themselves, and the experiences and values

of the writers. Few of previous studies have included all these elements, and this essay forms a relatively rounded system discussing the effects of factors respectively and mutually. Through comparing the two famous characters, some enlightenment may be brought to women in the modern society on how to achieve an ideal life and develop independent personalities. However, this essay does not discuss the effects of some other important characters in the two novels on Lin Daiyu and Jane Eyre. Some seemingly insignificant supporting characters may have a great influence on the destiny of the main characters, which is expected to be further studied in the future.

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