

# The Comparison of the Chinese and Western Culture From the Analysis of Du Shiniang and Marguerite

Kai Li

Tianjin Polytechnic University, Tianjin, 300387, China

**Abstract:** Love is the permanent carrier of human cultural interpretation, and love also is the constant focus of the Chinese and Western cultural differences. As the most extensive and profound social accumulation in the human social life, culture is a continuous process of creating and developing. Chinese and Western cultures are originated in China and Europe respectively, and they are belonged to the different nationalities. Therefore, although there are some commonalities between the two cultures, the differences are obvious.

**Keywords:** Culture; Struggling spirit; Difference; Love

## 1. Introduction

“The Lady of the Camellias” was the masterpiece of Alexandre Dumas Fils’s first famous literary works, which was a novel depicting the love of one prostitute called Marguerite.

The novel “The Courtesan’s jewel box” was written by Menglong Feng and it was the 32nd volume of the work “STORY TO CAUTION THE WORLD”. The novel depicted a epic of love tragedy. The heroine was the capital courtesan- Du Shi Niang.

Two ladies’ life experience and ending were very similar even though the backgrounds of the two novels were so different. Still and all, there are obvious differences between the two characters in terms of images, attitudes and so on. We can analyze and compare the Chinese and Western culture from the analysis of the two ladies.

## 2. The Analysis of the Two Protagonists

### 2.1. Life background

Du Shiniang was in the Ming Dynasty (AD 1573-1620) and Marguerite was in the era of July dynasty (AD1830—1848) in French. During their own living time, China was under the rule of the feudal landlord class, but in French, the capitalism had been highly developed and the feudal personal dependence was no longer there and the constitution stipulated that citizens should enjoy equal and free human rights.

For Du’s life background, although the commodity economy started to emerge, the thinking of the whole society was still under the confinement of feudal ethics. Marriages must follow the clanlaw of feudalism society, the concept of the families should related by marriage equal in social status. And for Marguerite , the prostitutes were still physically free although the society had a strict so-

cial hierarchy and despised prostitutes at the bottom of society.

The ladies, like Marguerite, did not belong to the procuress and would not be coerced into prostitution by any procuress. In Du’s life, she was belonged to the procuress, and as the important bargaining chip, money still needed to depend on the role of the feudal forces to militate. But for Marguerite’s “freedom” , her society made them “voluntarily” subjected to be played, devastated or oppressed for the aristocratic bourgeoisie by the hypocrisy of morality, unemployment and hunger.

In The Courtesan’s jewel box, Du lived a looking luxury but actually humiliating and painful life. She was a beautiful and passionate woman. She hoped to get out of this kind of life and demanded a real free and normal life. She was the licentious object of the feudal aristocracy, and she was a wanton in the eyes of the most people as well as she was the money-making tool of the procuress. Although with all her efforts, she still failed to achieve her life goal.

However, there was always an invisible but powerful force dominating their fate-the system of the authority and social moral evaluation criteria. In the “loving life” of Du and Marguerite, Buzheng Li (Jia Li’s father, ) and Duval (Armand’s father) , these two figures were on behalf of the system of the authority and social moral evaluation criteria. The moral judgment stifled Du and Margaret’s rights and opportunities of pursuing their love and happiness.

### 2.2. Life attitude

Although Du was subjected to humiliation and suffering, she was not disappointed with pessimism and gave up herself, and she still had a positive attitude toward life. She was sold to the brothel when she was young. She

was forced to serve the whoremasters at the very young age (younger than eighteen). But she still hoped that she could separate herself from the whorehouse and married to someone she loved and got the real love one day.

Marguerite gave herself up with hopeless in her heart. She loved luxury and libertine life, hit the bottle, envied the beautiful clothes and diamonds, and therefore she was willing to jump to her prostitute's life. Moreover, she went on the spree was going to abandon her lung disease, so she could give up her life quickly.

Du Shiniang finally failed to break the control of feudal ethics, but her enthusiasm and the pursuit of the freedom and love were indeed impressive. Du was looking for her suitable man carefully with whole aspect investigations, finally she found Jia Li (the man who was deeply loved by Du) was the man who she could entrust her lifetime. She was adept at scheming to make long-term plans and preparations for her own wishes. She predicted that the marriage between her and Li would be opposed by Li's family and the society, so she made the corresponding arrangements. She privately accumulated a number of valuable gold and silver jewelry as the material foundation of the future life.

Marguerite was extremely negative on her life, and her heart pain went even farther than Du. When Marguerite regarded Armand's enjoy as a real love, she did not hesitate to give all of herself to Armand. Perhaps because she saw enough of the unctious, she was more desiring for true love. After Marguerite became Armand's lover, in order to pay for the huge sum of spending, she still had to smile to entertain other men. So finally, Armand's vanity and suspicion were the real strangling of Marguerite's love.

### 2.3. Struggling spirit

Du's struggling spirit was the most prominent and touching feature in the novel. When she knew that she was betrayed because of Li's blandishments for money by making use of her love, she realized that the long term pursuing dream was broken. But she did not reconstruct their last relationship by opening the jewel box to show the valuable jewelry. Although her inner pain and anger could be imagined, she did not scold Li's ungrateful behavior or fully vent her inner grief and then found another lover with her treasure chest. In the face of a deadly blow, Du showed unusually calm, strong and determined. She naturally refused to stoop to compromise to be the plaything of the sinister and venomous rich man.

But it appeared that Marguerite's struggling spirit was not as strong as Du. Although Marguerite also presented the struggling spirit somewhat, she was getting rid of the coercion as well as the inducements of the aristocracies and dandies. Love gave the sublimity to Marguerite, and she determined to abandon all the vanity and luxury she already possessed. She resolutely sold all the jewelries

and antiques to live in the seclusion together with Armand. But she was lacking of Du's unyielding struggling spirit, Marguerite was not only gave out her health, but also her love in the glamorous career of the high-end prostitute. She wanted to wash away all her attachments, thoroughly reform herself and start a new life again. But she finally regained the previous self-sacrificing life under the pressure of the bourgeoisie's hierarchy and died with hatred.

Du saw through Li's selfish soul and realized that she chose the wrong Mr. Right. She also saw that there was no place for her to get the real love in the relentless reality clearly. She was still a commodity which can be bought and sold. Thus, she sang a Symphony of struggling spirit at the cost of her life, she drowned herself with the jewel box. Her magnificent feat raised a strong complaint against the feudal ethics. She was burying her beautiful dreams but saving her independent personality.

### 3. The Comparison of the Two Culture

As the most extensive and profound social accumulation in the human social life, culture is a continuous process of creating and developing. From the spatial scale, culture is spread in every corner of the social life; and from the time scale, culture is continued throughout the whole history.

Chinese and Western culture are originated in China and Europe respectively, and they are belonged to the different nationalities. Therefore, although there are some commonalities between the two cultures, the differences are obvious.

As the lower-class women, Du Shiniang and Marguerite, neither in the Chinese feudal society or in the French capitalist society, had the same tragic fate. The two different prostitutes, in spite of having many different characteristics in the pursuit of love, both were failing to escape the destiny of destruction. Through the description of their love tragedies, the two novels showed the independent personality and status they should have. The novels expressed noble praise of the two ladies' personalities and condemned the male-dominated society of insulting and trampling to women. Two works voiced the progressive humanitarian thoughts. It showed that their fates were closely linked with their patriarchal society, and the common social reason was their male-dominated culture strangled the personality and dignity of the female.

The Courtesan's jewel box exposed and accused the cruelty of feudal ethics through the tragedy of Du's persecuted and affronted love, and the work eulogized the good quality of Du Shiniang and her persistent pursuit of happy life. The *Lady of the Camellias* had an impact on the development of the criticism drama. The work put forth effort to describe the love tragedy between Armand

and Margaret and criticized the bourgeois social mores, family life and ethics.

As the most famous literary work of Alexandre Dumas fils, *The Lady of the Camellias* expressed the humanitarian thought, and it embodied the true love, compassion, tolerance and respect of the human world. The work was universally welcomed because it embodied the love of human nature, which resonating with people's feelings.

The Courtesan's jewel box made a profound revelation of the feudal ethic forces and praised the indomitable struggle for love of ladies, which can make readers obviously feel the reversed thought and trend of humanism in the late Ming society.

#### 4. Conclusion

In Chinese culture, "love" is emphasized the "big/great love". Confucianism, the system of ethics and rituals and the traditional beliefs are deeply rooted in Chinese culture. Chinese culture bases on family, it pays more attention to individual responsibilities and obligations and requires each person must strictly comply with and adapt to his established identity in the family relations network or the entire social structure. These requirements can not be exceeded. In western society, people pay more attention to their self-feelings. Therefore, "love" is the "love of individual".

Love is the permanent carrier of human cultural interpretation, and love also is the onstant focus of the Chinese

and Western cultural differences. With the different national ethics, politics, economics and histories, the Chinese and Western cultures are different. In the continuous improving but never be perfect society, there always exists a difference in the position for the women comparing with the men as well as the overall humanity.

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