



## A Literature Review of the Novel *The Great Gatsby* in China

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### Abstract

The novel *The Great Gatsby* has been accepted after experiencing the flexural process in China. The study about it mainly focuses on the topic about disillusion of American Dream, the unique narrative style of the novel, the arrangement of the first-person narrating spokesman, the arrangement of the different narrative levels, the linguistic feature of the novel and the use of symbolism from the angle of comparison between English and Chinese to have a rhetoric reading for different translation versions with the generalized rhetoric knowledge and the relative translation theory.

**Key words:** Literature review; American dream; Narrative strategy; Symbolism

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### INTRODUCTION

The famous novel *The Great Gatsby* of Francis Scott KeyFitzgerald was called the classic works of American literature works in the 1920s. After experiencing the flexural process in China it had been accepted by scholars. In the academic field the study about it mainly centered on the topic about disillusion of American Dream, the unique narrative style of the novel, the arrangement of the first-person narrating spokesman, the arrangement of the different narrative levels, the linguistic feature of the novel

and the use of symbolism from the angle of comparison between English and Chinese to have a rhetoric reading for different translation versions with the generalized rhetoric knowledge and the relative translation theory.

### 1. FRANCIS SCOOT KEYFITZGERALD AND HIS NOVEL *THE GREAT GATSBY*

*The Great Gatsby* was the representative works of Francis Scott Keyfitzgerald who was named as the Crown Poet on the jazz times and the spokesman of the noisy 1920s. Francis was born in a small merchant's family in 1896 in Saint Paul city Minnesota State in the middle west of America. His father was not a successful businessman and her mother came from a wealthy family. Although she inherited a small amount of heritage after her wedding the family finical situation was general on a whole. In September 1908, Francis entered a noble school for the wealthy kids. In 1911, he went to a boarding school in the wealthy family preparing for the entrance examination. In the autumn of 1913 he went to Princeton University to study. In 1917, he joined in the army. During his army service he fell in love with a rich lady named Zelda but he was rejected by her family because of his poverty. He was devoted to writing books and eventually became famous because he published the long novel *This Side of Paradise* in 1920 getting rich remuneration. At last his marriage with Zelda was achieved. After marriage the golden couple lived a flourishing life enjoying themselves often with a lot of guests in their house living in Europe for a great many years. Just owing to live beyond their incomes their life was changed from happiness to sadness. Zelda was sent to the mental hospital because of frequent mental illness. Francis drank alcohol abuse all day despondently and died of the heart disease in Hollywood on 21<sup>st</sup> December 1940.

The young and gifted Francis showed his brilliance in literature who published his works in the school

magazines when he entered in the private school, being praised and emphasized by the schoolmaster. It was fortunate for him to make the acquaintance of the clergyman Cyril Fee, the headmaster of New School who appreciated the talented Francis greatly and guided him to read a great many books supporting him to be engaged in the literature cause actively. The first long novel of Francis was *This Side of Paradise* in which the important character Teya. Darcy was true appearance of the priest Cyril.Fee. The literature friend that he made in Princeton University later helped a lot for his future literature creation. During the twenty years between publication of his first long novel and his death Francis wrote more than 160 short novels which were collected in the collection of *Flappers and Philosophers* 1920, *Tales of the Jazz Ages*, 1922, *All the Sad Young Men*, 1926 separately and so on. Apart from *This Side of Paradise* Francis also published the three long novels which are *The Beautiful and Damned*, 1922 *The Great Gatsby* 1925, and *Tender is the Night*, 1934. Before his death he left one long novel *The Last Tycoon* which was sorted and compiled by his good friend the well-known literary critics, Edmond Wilson and was published in 1941.

In all the works of Francis, the most representative works should be *The Great Gatsby* which was so popular with the critics after its publication. A great many authority reviewers and famous writers wrote articles in succession to praise the works for its deep thought and original creation in arts, thinking highly of its historical and artistic value and making Francis' reputation to an unprecedented height. The well-known poet and literature critics T.S. Eliot calls *The Great Gatsby* the first step that American fiction has taken since Henry James. His good friend, a famous literary and social critic in the contemporary American literary world, Edmund Wilson sent a letter to him, saying, "it is no doubt that this is the best works that you wrote". It is well-constructed, vividly described, and with the most beautiful language. The literary critic H.L. Mencken pointed, "I think this is the best novel that you have written so far. Every page has the excellent words and languages which you have weighed. The structure of the novel is rigorous and proper with the pure and fresh language." The famous literature historian Brooks said in his letter, "In my opinion this is the most excellent novel that you have written, full of creativity, meaningful and thought-provoking. The characters and plots are unforgettable for ever." Hemingway also thinks that this is absolutely a first-class works. The literary critic Nathan, the celebrated woman writer Villa Kaiser, Edith Wharton, Gertrude Stein and so on, they all sing high praise for the novel. The American literary critic Gilbert Seldes made the most famous remarks in the magazine *The Dial* where he acted as a chief editor saying,

Francis is not only mature but also masters his own literature gift flying freely in the literary field with his two wings. He

discarded all his hesitation and pretension and abandoned the people of the same times with him and predecessors far behind.

Francis' good friend, Perkins realized that it was an unusual great works after he read through all the pages of the novel. Then he wrote back to Francis praising the main idea, narrative techniques, symbolism and figure of speech, characterization, stylistic feature and artistic presentation techniques.

With the development of New Criticism Movement in the 1950's and the literature and art thoughts of reception aesthetics in the 1960's, the tendency of the literature study has converted from the author-centered or paper-centered position to the reader-centered position. The literature criticism ways have been changed radically. People have a strong interest in Francis once again, looking at his creative ideas and artistic styles with a new vision, rediscovering his works which contain deep thoughts and proactive warning role. Furthermore, his outstanding position in literature history in the 20<sup>th</sup> century was established, and his works have been getting the universal attention in the literary world.

Since 1960s the works of Francis have been republished again and again, especially the works *The Great Gatsby* which has almost become the important classic works in the American literature known by all men. *The Great Gatsby* has been universally thought to be the most distinctive sign of Francis' creation thought and the artistic style, the most excellent works of all Francis'.

The main idea of the novel is that Gatsby is a poor child in the middle eastern part of America falling love with a girl from the respectable family whose name is Daisy. When the First World War broke out Gatsby went to overseas to take part in the war. When he returned with military medal Daisy had already married to Tom Buchanan from Chicago, a rich young man. Gatsby thought that it was his poverty that caused him to lose Daisy. If he had had enough money more than Tom, he would have retaken Daisy. As a result with the dream of love for Daisy and devotion to love affair he began the tenacious struggle. He tried to earn money even by any means, accumulating a great deal of wealth promptly. He bought a luxurious villa on the bay on the opposite side of Daisy's house holding the grand banquet frequently to attract Daisy. With the help of his neighbor Calloway, Daisy's cousin he eventually met her again after their departure for five years announcing to her his unchangeable love. Although she was moved by his loyalty and persistence, tempted by his existing wealth and deeply disappointed with her rude and unfaithful husband, eventually she had no courage to discard her husband. After a fierce confrontation between Tom and Gatsby the restless Daisy killed Tom's mistress, Mrs Wilson driving her car on her way home. After Tom and Daisy conspired well they decided to make Gatsby be responsible for this accident. As a result Gatsby was killed by Wilson who came to take revenge. The couple of Daisy went to spend holiday leisurely without giving a message. The novel reappears the sound and the impetuous of the

jazz ages of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which is one of the reasons why so many people would like to review this classics.

## 2. THE RESEARCH OVERVIEW OF *THE GREAT GATSBY*

Francis and his works experienced a long process of disapproval, reluctant acceptance of full affirmation. As a whole before foundation of the new China Francis' works almost had no translation. It was so rare about the study of Francis' works. Chinese readers were naturally strange to Francis. During the 1950s the main task for the new China was to restore the national economy and reform social order, which just got rid of the wars year after year and sufferings from domestic strife and foreign aggression. So the study and translation for American modern literature developed slowly. At the end of 1950s and the beginning of 1960s China achieved some breakthrough achievements in American modern literature study, but because of the limitation of the specific political climate and historical situation, Francis was not so popular in China and his works were not published in Chinese version. From 1966 to 1978 owing to the influence of the cultural revolution, the study and translation of American literature in China almost came to a full stop in China. At the end of the 1970s Francis' main works were still no Chinese version publication. Bound by far-left view the academic world held the negative and critic attitude towards this man of letters. In one academic monograph published by People's Publishing House in 1979 there were some comments about Francis' novels. The capitalists' being fond of alcohol, crazy betting and eroticism were advocated in his novel, *The Story of Jazz Age*. In his another works, *The Great Gatsby*, the secret wine dealer was boasted into a hero highly praised. Francis was the typical representative of the literary author owned by the monopoly capitalists in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a trumpeter who beautified the evil deeds of capitalists in American big boom period. Until when the severe economic crisis broke out in 1929 the lasting prosperity of American economy was empty. This revealed Francis' evil soul. Such comment had a certain representative in Chinese academic world at that moment, causing the researchers who'd like to study American literature never to be brave enough to concern Francis. By the 1980s the big change had happened about the comment for Francis and research methods. From a new angle some famous scholars who got rid of the sensitive political topic and the formed final conclusion began to discuss and analyze Francis' creation thought and artistic style realistically. In this way Francis and his works began to be accepted by Chinese academic world.

In the Chinese scholars' introduction about Francis Dong Hengzhuan's viewpoint is the most worthy to pay attention. He is the first man to study and introduce this American writer in Chinese mainland. He can be called

the most authoritative scholar in study Francis. At the beginning of 1979 when the academy just recovered Mr. Dong published an article *Art in the Original* in which he analyzed Francis' creation thought, artistic feature and the style comparing him with Hemingway, Dreiser, Steinbeck and other modern writers of America. This was the first time that Mr. Dong had helped Francis to restore his reputation and social status which should have been his. Francis has not so many works but the modern Americans like to read his representative works *The Great Gatsby* which has become a famous modern literature works. People can review American brilliant luxurious life but the disillusioned mood and even the sadness which is sober but no way to go. All of this arose readers' resonance. There is the gap between the rich and the poor in Today's America. Where there is disparity between the rich and the poor people would like to make a dream to become a rich man. But in reality disillusion is the shadow of dream accompanying the people who are dreaming always. Although Francis has been dead for 40years his works are still popular in America. Apart from the reason of the thought his excellent and peculiar style is also a factor making in American readers unforgettable.

In 1986 Dong Hengzhuan, Zhu Hong, Shi Xianrong, Li Wenjun and other famous scholars compiled the book *A Brief History of American Literature* and had it published in People's Literature Publishing House. In this book, the writer made the first comment about Francis' literature career, creation style, writing style, artistic feature and language character showing this writer's views before Chinese readers faithfully, an important writer in American modern literature history. At the same time it also shows that it is meaningful to study this writer. After that Francis' works began to be accepted gradually by Chinese reading world and literature criticism world. The study about Francis also was developed step by step and the true value of Francis was also explored further. Since the 1990s the acceptance for Francis has changed a lot. During this period the published American literature research achievements thought highly of Francis' creation practice and artistic achievements from their own different narrative angles with a certain long space such as Wang Changrong's *Modern American Novel History*, Chang Yaoxing's *American Literature Brief History*, *American Literature Background Overview* compiled mainly by Shi Zhikang, Chang Yaoxing's *Choreography American Literature Course*. In the translation version Qiao Zhigao translated the novel into 《大亨小传》 published by Today's World Press in Hong Kong. In mainland from 1983 to 2005 there have been more than ten versions. In 1983 professor Wu Ningkun published this novel whose Chinese version was 《了不起的盖茨比》. In 1983 the Chinese translation version 《大人物盖茨比》 was published in People's Publishing House of Liao Ning translated by Fan Yue. In 199 the Chinese

translation version 《了不起的盖茨比》 was published by Bei Yue Publishing House translated by Wang Jinghua. In 1996 the Chinese translation version 《了不起的盖茨比》 was published by Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press translated by Wang Xiaomei. In 1996 the Chinese translation version 《长岛春梦》 was published by Bei Jing Kyushu Book Publishing House translated by Wu Ningkun. In 1997 the Chinese translation version 《了不起的盖茨比》 was published by Liberation Army Art Press translated by Wu Ran. In 1997 the Chinese translation version 《了不起的盖茨比》 was published by Shang Hai Translation House translated by Wu Ningkun and other people. In 1999 the Chinese translation version 《了不起的盖茨比:夜色温柔》 was published by Yilin Press translated by Wu Ningkun and Tang Jianqing. In 1999 the Chinese translation version 《了不起的盖茨比: 简写本》 was published by Shanghai Translation Publishing House translated by Ningning. In 2001 the Chinese translation version 《了不起的盖茨比 :夜色温柔》 was published by Beijing Yanshan Publishing house translated by Jia Wenhao and Jia Wen Yuan. In 2002 the Chinese translation version 《了不起的盖茨比》 was published by Xinjiang People's Publishing House translated by Wu Yu. In 2004 the Chinese translation version 《了不起的盖茨比》 was published by Overseas Chinese Press translated by Chenghuang. In 2005 the Chinese translation version 《了不起的盖茨比》 was published by China Book Company translated by Tang Yongkuan, Wang Jinhua and Lujing. In 2005 the Chinese translation version 《了不起的盖茨比》 was published by Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press. In addition a large number of Chinese—English contrasted books or annotation books were published in China. Such as 《灯绿梦渺》 published by Shanghai Translation Publishing House in 1982 and noted by Zhou Dunren, 《了不起的盖茨比》 published by China Translation and Publishing House in 1993 annotated by Pan Shaozhong. 《了不起的盖茨比》 published by Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press annotated by Sun Jianhua. All of these translation versions and annotated versions fully show that Chinese readers are fond of this classics of Francis and they accept this novel. About the study of this novel “on a whole the study about Francis has not been complete and systematic, which is far from the further and elaborated study about Hemingway and the other American writers of the same times. The study is mainly developed from the following three aspects.

### 3. ABOUT THE MAIN TOPIC OF THE DISILLUSION OF AMERICAN DREAM

The translators of this novel and the annotators of the annotation versions analyzed and commented the main topic in the preface part, in the introduction of the

writer and even in the translation postscript part. Just as Professor Wu Ningkun pointed that Francis was not a historian who was on looking, but he was indulged in the pursuing of booze in the Jazz Times completely emerging himself to his own works. Just because of that reason he could vividly reappear the social feature, flavor of life and emotional rhythm of that age. The most important thing is that he was able to look on coldly and appreciated disappointments with the lights on and people scattering after wine waking up when he was immersed in it. He measured everything with the severe moral standards and expressed the sadness of the lost generation of the postwar for the disillusion of American Dream. That is to say *The Great Gatsby* is an elegy of Jazz Times, an American tragedy same with Dreiser's representative works. Some compilers of the literary history also made comment on the Francis' derivative works. For example, in 1986 the Overview and Selected Reading of Contemporary American History edited by Qin Xiaomeng commented *The Great Gatsby* as an endless elegy for American Dream and Jazz Times. The Choreography American Literature Course compiled chiefly by Chang Yaixin said, “he equated his own experience with the experience of America instinctively, reflecting the pulse of times and appearance by chance when in depicting himself. When reading his story intensively, a basic format can be found: there was always dreams in the beginning and struggle followed, but in the end all were disappointment and despair which were the style of modern American life.

There are a great many thesis papers of the disillusion of American Dream published in the domestic academic journals. For example *The Explanatory Translation of American Dream* written by Wang Ping and Wang Weiping dwelled on the emerging developing and evolving of American Dream revealing American Dream illusory. *The Great Gatsby: Inheritance and Transcending of American Dream* written by Chen Zhiyun analyzed the disillusion of American Dream pursued by Gatsby pointing out that American Dream was idealized and materialistic while the realization of the transcending was by the means of hardship and death. Mao Yanan's *The Broken American Dream—the Cultural Interpretation of The Great Gatsby* interpreted the reasons for the origin, evolution and disillusion of American Dream from the angle of culture. The novel made people realize that Gatsby's failure was not only his own failure but also the failure of life goal and its value shown by American culture. Du Zhongxiu's *Disillusion of American Dream---A Brief Analysis of Symbolism in The Great Gatsby* analyzed the essence and disillusion of American Dream through the symbolism in the novel pointing that the ideal based on the materialism was only the weapon of self-destruction. Zhang Lilong's *American Dream's Evolution and Disillusion—An Analysis of The Great Gatsby* gave a historical review of the evolution of American Dream

analyzing the disillusion of American Dream caused by the contradiction between ideal and reality. At last in this paper it was pointed that American Dream was an indispensable ideal, a part of American culture. *The Disillusion of American Dream—the Interpretation about Francis’ The Great Gatsby* written by Zhen Chenggong and *On the Necessity of Gatsby’s Tragedy* written by Zhou Xinping discussed the necessary factors causing Gatsby’s dream broken and his death from the essence of Gatsby’s dream, character and other social reasons. Meanwhile there are also studies about the disillusion of American Dream in some masters’ and doctors’ papers. Such as Zhou Jianping’s thesis paper *the Prototype Interpretation of The Great Gatsby*, Yu Chunrong’s master thesis paper *A Castle in the Air—the Root of Gatsby’s Dream Disillusion*, Liu Lingjing’s thesis paper *On Francis’ American Dream Disillusion from the Angle of Consumer Culture*, Sun Jianping’s thesis paper *American Dream’s Disillusion—Rereading Francis’ The Great Gatsby*, Wang Zhongjian’s thesis paper *Nothing to Pursue—About Francis’ The Great Gatsby* and so on. All these papers analyzed the history transition from the historical angle. Combined with the truth of that time it was pointed that at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century American Dream had been degenerated and went bad becoming illusory and drawing the conclusion that American Dream went broken at the same time Gatsby’s tragedy doomed. The paper *American Dream Disillusion Lost in Jazz Age—A Comment on The Great Gatsby and Tender is The Night* written by Hua Suyang comparing Francis’ two different novels which reflected the topic of American Dream. Yang Cuiping’s thesis paper is *The Necessity of American Dream Disillusion from the Death of Eden Gatsby and Sharman*, in the paper the topic is about the different protagonists’ American Dream and writers compared these protagonists’ destiny exploring the disillusion history of American Dream.

#### 4. ABOUT THE STUDY OF NARRATIVE STRATEGIES

Such kinds of thesis papers were published in the domestic journals like Cheng Aiming’s article *A Simple Comment on Narrative Art of The Great Gatsby*. The writer fully analyzed the narrative techniques and the particular art effect employed in this novel from the angle of narratology. Cheng Aiming thinks that from the angle of narrative the narrator Nick’s story seemed the main thread running through the whole novel appearing and disappearing from time to time from beginning till ending while Gatsby’s story was only a part of Nick’s one. But from the content of the story and the main point Gatsby’s story was in fact the main body of the novel. Therefore the main narrative clue of the novel is only a background and a stage, but in fact a play about

*Gatsby*. This kind of narrative style and the art effect are quite expertly planned. “This works is not only limited in the single perspective. According to the need of the story plot the novel changes the narrators and narrative perspectives constantly. Sometimes the means of transformed narrative perspectives are used making the narrative developed in a diversified way. Different aspects are united together as if the different lens were changing forming a picture to reflect Gatsby’s story.” He still thinks that the success of Francis lies in his creation of the character Nick who is half in the story and half outside the story taking advantage of the special position of this person to put the writer’s two different viewpoints together into the novel *The Great Gatsby* which is different from the traditional function of the first-person and the third-person narration having a special art effect. Cheng Aiming’s thesis paper which is rather profound and academic, is the representative works of this kind of study articles. The other thesis papers analyzed the narrative structures of the novel from the narrative manners and narrative levels, narrative time, narrative space structure, like Bu Bei’s paper *The Narrative Structure and Function of The Great Gatsby*. In the article the writer thinks that the well-arranged structure of the novel shows the perfect combination of the form and content of this works, a rare specimen of good writing in the narrative novels. This novel builds the text from the different narrative levels showing the whole story full of skills. In the arrangement of narrative time this novel follows the cycle of seasons and at the same time adjusts the speed and order of time with the characteristic of non-linear development about the modern novels. In addition, the “east part” and the “west part” in the space of the novel, “East Egg” and “West Egg”, “New York” and “Ash Heap” all these contrasting structures surpass the metaphor of the geographical significance, revealing the deepening the topic.

Meanwhile some domestic and foreign monographs also concern the study of the narrative strategies on this novel. For example in Booth’s book *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, there are many chapters touching upon the study of the narrative strategies about *The Great Gatsby* such as in Chapter Six about onlookers and narrating spokesman; in Chapter Seven *The Use of Reliable Argument* certain about the successful use of flashback. In *Narrative as Rhetoric: Technique, Reader, Ethic, Ideology* written by Phelan James Chapter Five Reviewing Reliability: Nick Carraway’s multifunctions gave a reliable survey, analyzing the multi-narrative methods and fewer narrative methods adopted by Nick which affirms the important role played by Nick about the multi-functions on the narrative logic. In Shen Dan’s article *the Study of Narrative and Stylistics* Chapter Nine *the Classification, nature and function of Different Narrative Perspectives* narrates the narrative perspectives based on the novel

*The Great Gatsby* to analyze the narrative function of the first person, the specific double focus of the first-person retrospective narrative and difference between the first and the third narratives.

## 5. THE STUDY ABOUT SYMBOLISM

There are some academic journals about the discussion of symbolism on this novel such as Hu Ming's *The Interpretation of Symbolism on the Great Gatsby* in which the symbolism was used in the novel *The Great Gatsby* from the three aspects: the symbolism of things, the symbolism of color and the symbolism of characters. In this article the origin of the word "symbolism" was discussed and the symbolism of different things has been analyzed. For example "the green light" has been endowed more symbolism meanings which symbolizes the fine things and the nice life pursued by Gatsby who spent his whole life. It is also the embodiment of money, success and recognition. In the novel the ash valley symbolizes the abnormal social environment and people's spirit desert. The color blue represents dream and non-worldly factors. The color yellow is a main symbolism color which represents wealth and luxury. The snobbish rich men are always connected with the yellow color—Daisy was called golden girl. Jordan has withered yellow hair. Gatsby wore the golden tie. In the party girls wore the yellow skirts. When mentioning the symbolism of the character the writer thought that the success of the novel *The Great Gatsby* lied in the writer's experience becoming the whole nation's experience. The large success which Francis got was the analogy between Gatsby's personal life and American culture and history. The writer adopted symbolism to express their disappointment of the lost generation after war to America, their worry about the traditional value and ideal and their sadness about the disillusion of American Dream. The other papers analyzed the skills of describing the character images from the angle of the color such as Li Xi's paper *On the Role of Color Description in Portraying Characters in The Great Gatsby*. In the article the color green is the symbolism of hope and dream and at the same time the expression of vigor. The color green is also the symbolism of disillusion

which can be used to express Gatsby's life full of hope and dream. When the writer used basic colors to portray Gatsby he employed blue, white, yellow, golden, silver and pink to enrich his image according to his mood and wish. He analyzed the symbolic significance of color deeply. The master's and doctor's thesis papers are involved in the usage of symbolism such as Chen Yuxing's paper *the Symbolism in The Great Gatsby*, Zhu Zhenming's paper *The Great Gatsby Under the Perspective of Symbolism*, Yu Na's thesis paper *American Dream—the Embodiment of Symbolism in The Great Gatsby*.

## CONCLUSION

Francis' novel *The Great Gatsby* experienced a long process in China. Many Chinese scholars studied more aspects on this novel which are meaningful for the learners. The translation of the title, the topic of the disillusion of American Dream, the study about the narrative strategy and the symbolism of this novel are all useful and important aspects for all of learners to study further.

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