



On Kitty's Growth in *The Painted Veil* from the Perspective of Feminism

Song Yasi¹, Hou Yanfang²

School of Foreign Studies, Yangtze University, Hubei, 434023 PRC China

Received: 30 Aug 2023; Received in revised form: 03 Oct 2023; Accepted: 12 Oct 2023; Available online: 19 Oct 2023
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Abstract— *The Painted Veil*, serving as one of the most famous classics of the well-known English writer, William Somerset Maugham, mainly aims to talk about the heroine's awakening of self-consciousness under the society at that age. Using his own special writing style, the writer portrayed a vivid and realistic heroine--Kitty, who finally became world famous and made a significant growth in a spiritual level. In this novel, Kitty's social and family conditions were influenced by her birthplace, marriage and specular experience. After a broken marriage and miserable love affair relationship with John, Kitty grew a lot and saw the value of life profoundly, and she longed for a freedom away from the constraint of women physically and spiritually. Under the respective of feminism, this thesis is designed to take an analysis of Kitty, the root cause of Kitty's former position as a female, and Kitty's hard work in the process of breaking away from the status of traditional female. This thesis includes five parts. The first part leads a generalization of the author as well as the *Painted Veil*. The second part is designed to generalize the development of feminism and its connotation. The third part aims to analyze the cause of Kitty's former position, as well as the process of Kitty's growth influenced by feminism. The fourth part explores the calling of Kitty under her cognitive growth in the influence of feminism. The fifth part is the conclusion.



Keywords— *Kitty; The Painted Veil; feminism*

I. INTRODUCTION

William Somerset Maugham (1874-1965), is a famous British novelist, playwright and essayist. He studied at King's School in Canterbury and Heidelberg University in Germany, and then went to St. Thomas Hospital in London to study medicine and to obtain the qualification of surgeon. William Somerset Maugham is recognized as one of the most popular and popular British writers all over the world in the 20th century, and is known as "the best storyteller". His novels are witty and humorous, often hiding pity and sympathy for human nature in sarcasm. In 1952, Oxford University awarded him an honorary doctorate. In 1954, the King of England awarded him the title of "Honorary Attendant".

As William Somerset Maugham was supposed to go to

work as a doctor, it led to a style of calm, object, simple, sharp and incisive as well as ironic in his writing, which was very close to the Chinese writer, Lu Xun. And what interests him most is not sights or scenery but people with different characteristics, so the writer, William Somerset Maugham, portrays his characters with meticulous observation, and depicts their mental actions like reeling silk from cocoons, which grasps the crux accurately.

Kitty was a good-looking yet superficial and vainglorious English lady. In the age of getting married, she had not gotten ready to find a spouse. Under the pressure of her mother and young sister, and worrying about the situation that she might be too old to have a decent marriage as a woman, she married Walton Finn hurriedly. In the 1920s, she left London, her hometown where she was born and bred there from a very young age, and then she went to

Hong Kong with her husband because of his work, and at that time Hong Kong was an oriental colony which was too unfamiliar and strange to her.

Kitty gradually got bored with her marriage as her husband, Walton Finn, whose character was of an unsociable type, stiff and farouche, and his face was moderately looking. She then had a secret relationship with Charlie Tang Sheng by chance, an English man who worked as Hong Kong's deputy secretary general. After discovering his wife's relationship, Walton started his scary and weird payback: Kitty had no choice but had to follow him to a Chinese village which was poor and extremely dangerous. Because in there Walton served as a doctor to find a treatment for the local plague, and they were so close to death.

They experienced the surge billows including death, emotion and people in there. In such an aesthetic, exotic yet threatening village, Kitty's fantasy finally broke, instead, she uncovered the painted veil over the life's screen, striving to find a glorious way of growth.

II. FEMINISM

2.1 The Source of Feminism

In the history of human society, the concept of human rights has a history of more than 200 years, but the concept of human rights does not include women's rights in a long historical period. As early as 1791, when Olympe de Gouges, the woman leader of the French Revolution, issued the Declaration on Women's Rights and Women's Citizenship, or the Declaration on Women's Rights, the feminist movement began. The Declaration on Women's Rights and Women's Citizenship begins with a clear statement that "women are born free and have equal rights with men."

The first campaign of feminism began in the late 19th century. The movement laid emphasis on the equality between males and females in their life-long span, which was also known as the sexual equality including the equal rights of civilization and official status, the aristocratic privilege and monogamy, accentuating that there was no difference of intelligence and power between males and females. The most important goal for feminism was to achieve the equality of labor both in family and society in order to let women have their rights to take part in official situations, which was developed as "feminist campaign" afterwards.

2.2 The Development of Feminism

First-generation feminism (from the second half of the 19th century to the beginning of the 20th century):

Feminism in the West began with the French Cultural Revolution and the Enlightenment of the bourgeoisie, which had emerged in the second half of the 19th century. In October 1789, after the outbreak of the French Revolution, several women traveled to Versailles in Paris, demanding the same rights as men, and opening up the beginning of feminism. In 1790, the French playwright Gorky published the Declaration on Women's Rights and called for 17 requirements for women's rights. This declaration later became a programmatic document for the women's movement. In 1792, the British writer M. Wolsstonecraft published a book on the defence of women's rights, in which women were to be treated on an equal footing with men in the fields of education, employment and politics. In the mid-19th century, the center of the women's movement moved from Europe to America. By 1920, the United States had passed laws guaranteeing the right of women.

Second-generation feminism: Modern feminist. This phase is the most important phase of western feminists, from the beginning to the end of the 1960s. Feminists have shown that, despite significant progress in efforts to achieve equality in the political and economic spheres, women's inequality in social life has not been significantly improved. This contradictory situation drove feminists into deep thinking and formed a unique feminist theory. There are three main groups: socialism, liberalism, feminists, radicalism.

Third-generation feminism: postmodern feminist. "Feminism" and "Green Feminist" have emerged in the elimination of binary opposites between men and women. On the one hand, they confirmed the achievements of the women's movement to protect women's social rights, and on the other, they doubted the attempts of feminists to undermine traditional family models. Postmodern feminism is still in the development phase and is divided into two main groups: theory and composition theory. The theories have different starting points, but are the goal of emancipating women who are built on the recognition of traditional family models.

2.3 The Influence of Feminism

Feminists had many significant consequences in Western society, including women voting for a more equal pay divorce proposal and the emergence of a "no-fault divorce" Safe abortion and tying the right to education at the university Feminist Law had a huge impact on the legislation of China and other countries of the world.

Feminist movement has brought about a great increase in the employment rate of women in America and Europe. In 1950s, the employment rate of married women in America was only 11%, even lower than that in 1920s. After the climax of women's movement in 1960s and 1970s

accompanied by the civil rights movement with strong left-wing color, the employment rate of married women in the United States rose to 50% in 1978. In 1997, it reached 61%. During the economic boom in the early years of the 21st century, the "choice feminism" that agreed to "return to the family to teach each other" revived, and the employment rate of married women once fell back to 54%. After the outbreak of the world financial crisis at the end of 2008, the employment rate of married women in the United States rose because of the increasing pressure of life.

III. THE GROWTH OF KITTY'S FEMININE CONSCIOUSNESS

Kitty's process in her growth is composed of the progress from the lack of consciousness of feminism in the beginning to the progress that she finally woke up and realized the power and equality of women. Fighting against a society which was mainly managed and controlled by the male characters rather than female characters, Kitty met a few respectable females who had given her a very profound influence and taught her indispensable lessons, which led to the heroine's wokeness as well as metamorphosis in the end. Ultimately, with her new, grand dream as well as her value as a new female, Kitty finally transformed into the list of the fighters who fight for the rights, equality and power of all the women in the world, she knew very well that women were not a tool or commodity of men, they had their own dreams and missions in the purpose of having the rights to take actions to purchase their businesses and values.

3.1 The History of Kitty's Life

Influenced by her life experience and practice, Kitty's transition embodied her sense as different roles in family, marriage and employment.

First, Kitty's family was not lucky. Kitty changed her attitude to the family when her 25-year-long marriage failed. Her family believed Kitty's failure was a disgrace and she despised it. The family was sharp and mean to Kitty, and her passion and reliance to her family had changed. This change referred to the awareness-raising of women in the family. Since then, Kitty knew that her mother did not play a positive role as a wife in her family. Therefore, Kitty began to shine in the family.

Second, Kitty had an awareness of marriage. On the one hand, Kitty's first revival of marriage, the one from the unhappy marriage with her husband, whom she did not love at all; Kitty revealed her adultery against her irrational and unhappy marriage. Kitty was brave to seek her love with her heart, showing her consciousness waking up in marriage, but her love was an innocent liar and was flirting; In a way,

Charlie's betrayal gave Kitty a deep lesson, a selfish man wasn't worth loving, which led to Kitty's further growth. In addition, the love of Walden and Mandarin to Kitty was impressed by her, realizing that love depended only on the love and good qualities of both sides, who were also feminists. At the same time, Kitty realized that the appearance of women in marriage was less important than their virtue, and that women should not use their utterances to flirt with wealthy men.

On the other hand, Kitty's change in attitude also reflected her women's rights. From one aspect, the nun of the monastery had a profound impact on Kitty, which marked the beginning of her awareness of her employment. Kitty was surprised by the work of selfless nuns in the poorest areas without rewards and vacation days. Kitty thought she should go to work and prove her skills. When it went to a deeper aspect, the work in the monastery was the liberation of Kitty's soul, pushing her to recover. The work made her better and freed her mind, which was a sign of Kitty's mental growth.

3.2 The Characters within Huge Influence on Kitty

3.2.1 Mrs. Justin--a Controller of Kitty's Marriage and Values

If the readers can delve into the characteristics of Mrs. Justin, Kitty's mother in *the Painted Veil*, they will know and understand why Kitty is so shallow, vainglorious woman who was lack of sympathy before her growth of feminism. As a mother, Mrs. Justin had a significant and deep-rooted effect on Kitty. With the disposition of vainglory, crankiness, self-serving and tendency of control, Mrs. Justin had made an exquisite plan and direction of her two daughters as soon as they were born, especially Kitty, as she was good-looking, her mother saw her as a beautiful commodity for marriage. Mrs. Justin had poured into the ideologies crammed with calculating for her. Growing up in this atmosphere, Kitty had copied all these old and monstrous ideologies onto her mind, and then grew up as a traditional girl like most of the girls in that time's situation who loved vainglory and circled around men to cater them.

Mrs. Justin grew up in a family of lawyers and had four sisters. Under her father's suggestion, she married Bernard Justin, who was thought as very promising at the time. Unfortunately, Mr. Justin was a very ordinary lawyer, and was not rich enough for Mrs. Justin to think about leading a glorious life. For this reason, Mrs. Justin was constantly forcing her husband to make friends with lawyers, judges, and other promising politicians and wives who were useful to her. In Mrs. Justin's life values, there were only people who were useful and useless to her. Only when someone's status was satisfying could he be useful to her. In the process of raising her two daughters, Mrs. Justin also followed this

principle. Under the guise of "love", she passed on the values of "I do everything for you" with her children. For the plain-looking young daughter Dori Si, Mrs. Justin had given up her request because she could not help her dream of living a life as a master; for her eldest daughter Kitty, Mrs. Justin was full of calculating emotions for nurturing, because she held a strong belief that Kitty's beauty depended on her, which could surely let one lead a life as a famous family.

In Kitty's limited world, her mother had shielded her pattern with a world of vanity. Mrs. Justin only paid attention to the material supply, but did not pay attention to the spiritual filling of Kitty, and finally made Kitty get lost on the journey of life.

3.2.2 Charlie—a Trigger of Kitty's Growth

In Hong Kong, Kitty had a secret relationship with an English man, Charlie. In front of outsiders, he was a successful man with a harmonious family and a thriving career. While behind the veil, he turns out to be a hypocritical, superficial as well as irresponsible villain who shared the same bed with his lawful wife. In front of Kitty, he was gentle and affectionate, and as he seemed to be a funny man with a promising career, Kitty couldn't resist him. It wasn't until the uncovering incident of his sudden escape made Katie see his hypocrisy and selfishness. It was also the trigger that made Kitty follow her husband, Walton, to the village of China, in which it led to Kitty's wokeness of feminism.

The awakening of marriage and love was mainly due to Kitty's passion for true love and marriage. Kitty did not love Walton. Their marriage had failed. She believed that love and marriage require the basis for the relationship between the two, and that she and Walton did not have the basis for the relationship. She fell in love with Charles with an illusion that he could get divorced to marry her. But because of Charles' egotism, her love was passionate yet not available. She acknowledged that the women who fell in love with their own person, who fell in love with selfish people, ultimately did not have a good result. Charlie served as a mirror, which made Kitty see herself clearly and realize that how selfish, foolish and vainglorious she used to be. And then she began to change and to grow up gradually.

3.2.3 Nuns and the Children in the Village--the Guide of Kitty's Growth

Kitty's revival for life value was heavily influenced by the nuns. The nuns helped those who suffered in the monastery: "They have given up everything, their houses, their fatherland, their love, their children, their freedom. They are ready to pray and help the people who are suffering throughout their lives." Kitty absorbed a great mental power in her and realized that women must have their own

personality and ideals, rather than looking at men and money as the basis of life.

The children who were living in the village evoke Kitty's passion and love and her responsibility serving as a mother as well as a wife. After realizing that herself was a superficial, vainglorious and silly girl who was so ordinary and common in the world, Kitty tended to see herself useless, but in this village, Kitty found her responsibility and under the influence and love by the nuns there, Kitty snapped out of her past quickly, and then devoted herself into caring and teaching the children here. She finally realized the power and importance of herself, transforming into a new female who shirked one's duty firmly and shared sympathy and love to others, and purchasing her dream rather than relying sightlessly on a man or on someone else. She was relying on herself now.

IV. THE CALLING OF FEMINISM TO KITTY

4.1 The Calling on Kitty's Transformation

As a matter of fact, a large number of females were not willing to be resigned to their conventional female status. They always revolted against the unfair society in a long process of age. It was certain that Kitty bore resistance in her blood, she would not be resigned to others' status, instead, she fought for her freedom and value in the unjust world through active steps. In the *Painted Veil*, she developed her self-cognition during her process of getting away from others' consciousness. In Kitty's home, she fought against her mother, who served as the product of male-dominated society. In Kitty's marriage, she used to be bond with a marriage without love, as a result, she fought for her true love and liberty. In her course of opposing, Kitty gradually became a woman with a type of independence in the recognition of family relationship and her past.

4.1.1 Rebellion against Social Environment

In the patriarchal society, a large number of women played a role as lady and materfamilias, restraining from limited positions. Tired as they were, they devoted themselves into household duties yet could not be seen in any social activities, only to rely on economy and affect from men. Hence, feminism held that women ought to cast off their inherence influenced by nature and the past, so as to cast off the reliance on economy and men, and to become financially independent. In *the Painted Veil*, after going through death and love, Kitty began to resist women's inherence covered by society. In the process of challenging male dominance and traditional fetters, Kitty was on the path looking for self-cognition. Kitty's resistance, coming from home, male and social convention, made her develop to a compassionate and self-transformed one, and finally

she became an individual with independent mind.

According to the *Painted Veil*, Kitty was born in England in 1900s when the society was male-dominated and restrained women out of houses. The women's status in that age, however, was judged by the status of their husbands or fathers. Kitty's parents made an exquisite blueprint for her in the purpose of a glorious marriage instead of a complete character as an individual. Holding such a stereotype that she would gain lots of interests from marriage when she was still young, Kitty saw her own position as a kind of model in society. During this time, she played a role with a submissive type, staying away from the rebellious thoughts that there was inequality between male and female. Unhappily, obediently did she try in the appointment of her mother, the ideal husband did not come in time. What was worse, her young sister, Doris, had made an engagement with the only son of an honorary attorney, and it would not be long before Doris got married, leaving Kitty alone as an old single. Under this situation, there was a rebellious seed growing up in Kitty's consciousness. She wanted to break the rules that bond up upon females, which stated that a lady should get married when reached a proper age. She did want to marry an ideal husband who she loved despite of her mother's sarcasm and dislike. Thirsty she was to escape from her mother's supervision, while she doubted her ability to be independent, hence she accepted Walton's proposal casually in the purpose of getting away from the fetter of her family. Kitty followed her husband to another country after getting married, believing that she would somehow change her feeling to him. Nonetheless, it was her husband's character with a type of over politeness and taciturnity as well as the monotonous marriage that made Kitty, a beauty full of energy and passion, feel desperately despondent and dull. Her husband's reaction always confused her, growing her discontent about him. Despite she behaved herself as a conscientious wife, Kitty longed for liberty and true love, therefore she strongly felt the fetter of marriage bond to her. Different from the traditional woman who tended to lead a peaceful life as a pious wife, Kitty longed for a true love, and had a love affair with Charlie Townsend, an adulterous way to challenge convention. She even did not feel guilty about her conduct, instead she held the belief that each individual had the right to pursue his or her love. The feminism called Kitty to hold a strong opposition against her marriage. And in the society which preferred male, adultery was always despised by public moral, which was even more rigid to females than to males. For a man, it would be forgotten soon after his betrayal of a marriage. Charlie was exactly the example. Serving as a vice secretary in a colony, his glorious career mainly relied on his shrew wife, and he saw his career and money as the measure of his bright future. Despite her

husband's love affair, Dorothy also took advantage of her husband to achieve her business, which was in line with Kitty's mother, Mrs. Justin. Therefore, to Charlie, he would not get divorced in order to marry Kitty, and of course he also would not be attacked by anyone else as his future was only bond with his career. On the contrary, to Kitty, a female under the judgement in this society, she would be strongly condemned and isolated. While the feminism led Kitty to chase her own judgement that she was a woman with liberty away from male-dominated society. She believed that despite of any limitation bond to women, they all had the equity and right to show and chase their love. Kitty's frenzy passion for Charlie illustrated her inherent courage, at the same time she showed the resistance against social convention and depressive life.

4.1.2 Kitty's Shift in Spiritual Aspects

The Painted Veil was often looked as a story about the spiritual growth of female. Spirit played a critical role in one's consciousness. The feminism held that one's behavior and position hinged on one's spiritual status, which was the most important part in a complete individual. In the process of appealing to feminism, people tried to find out a way to liberate women. Only when a female who recognized her passive situation and find that she was being pressed and retrained, would she take positive activities. Women ought to get rid of their disadvantaged position, to win the fight for liberty, which meant that they ought to get rid of a society that the moral and convention were judged by men.

The relationship between Mrs. Justin and Kitty was more like a paradox rather than the traditional relationship between mother and daughter. In the beginning, Kitty usually held a feeling to her mother with a tense and indifferent atmosphere. In *the Painted Veil*, she did not tend to wish her mother could be around her as a company when facing the strait of life. Exposed by her love affair, Kitty was desperately helpless; finding herself pregnant, she even felt more isolated than ever before. Frail and desperate she was, Kitty ought to need the help of her mother. Nonetheless, she chose to care of herself alone instead of seeking for help as she knew the cold personality of Mrs. Justin. She used to dislike her mother partly as Mrs. Justin brewed the unfortunate marriage indirectly, she even used to doubt that Mrs. Justin would not shed tears if she kicked the bucket. However, it was Kitty's spiritual growth that made her forgive all the burden put by her mother. She even showed a sympathy to Mrs. Justin in her heart, seeing her mother was also a victim of the society, as her mother was busy with calculating and the judgment of others through her whole life, rather than something that was truly valuable. Mrs. Justin had a cancer very early, yet she refused to take a remedy and died after a few months, unconscious of her

mistakes through her entire life which had already brewed a huge gap between Kitty and her. The demise of Mrs. Justin symbolized the demise of egoism. Kitty realized that as a mother, she would not let her kids be remorseful about their lives.

As for Kitty's attitude towards her father, she wished him could have his own value. After the failure of love and the test of death, Kitty chased not only her own liberty but also the liberty of others. It could be said that her mental independence let her respect her father's feeling and understand his weakness as an ordinary man. Her father's will and career were planned by Mrs. Justin who liked to weaken other's will and control them. Kitty, on the contrary, was not willing to become a woman like Mrs. Justin, she would have a daughter and raise her up to an independent woman. The growth of the attitude towards Kitty's family demonstrated a significant fight against society and self-cognition. Kitty regained love and duty in the calling of feminism.

4.2 The Calling on Kitty's New Prospect in the Future

After all the difficulties she met during her travel, Kitty changed her thoughts towards others around her and her own status. After her growth, she often felt sad and shamed for her past, and did not judge people in the eye of egoism. For instance, she would not take her mother's devotion for granted, and she felt ashamed for she married Walton without loving him. In the end of *the Painted Veil*, Kitty envisioned a new life for her future, wishing her daughter could be independent and would not follow a society dominated by men. Feminism led a conclusion that women had the right to get rid of the role as parents shaped by society, instead, they should shape their identity on their own. Therefore, Kitty held the thought that her daughter and herself could get rid of the past, and could grow up as a woman with her own consciousness which would never be judged by men.

In the future, Kitty would take the burden of family through hard labor. Only in this way could she feel her life true and valuable. She even was willing to take her father's responsibility. In conventional society, men tended to be seen as a figure with the type of activity and domination. However, as a woman, what made Kitty significantly different was that she chose to company and look after her father. She realized that a father could rely on his daughter both mentally and materially, rather than a daughter's dependence on her father. This kind of spiritual growth broke women's weak character in conventional society.

V. CONCLUSION

The Painted Veil, known as the most popular novel to the public in Maugham's writings, sets the background in a foreign land in the early 1900s. In the writing, the writer portrays people's peacockery, relative's indifference, and the degeneration of public sympathy in the description of the strange relationship between Kitty and her husband.

Under the respective of feminism, this thesis takes a general analyzation of the heroine, Kitty, taking the conclusion that each woman should have her right to strive for her internal power, so as to become an independent individual who will not submit to anyone else. *The Painted Veil* takes a detailed description of Kitty through an ironic way. Kitty grows up in a hypocritical and indifferent society of England. Under the oppression of this male-dominated society, Kitty is fettered to express her own thoughts and feelings. At the same time, serving as a representative produced by the conventional society, Mrs. Justin, Kitty's mother, also chokes Kitty's character. In the male-dominated word, Kitty succumbs to the femininity which is imposed on women by men and express a high sense of reliance, bond to the financial and professional reliance as a housewife, which leads to the position of Kitty's passive status and also causes the misconception of her cognition about love and values. With the gradual germination of Kitty's female subject consciousness, she finds out the fetters of striving for true love and value in the conservative world. Hence, Kitty decides to take opposition to the identity of self and strives for casting off female passive status as well as looking for equality in society and family. Firstly, she fights for her marriage arrangements of the conservative world, and secondly, she fights for her female rights which the unjust society takes away from women. In the process of fighting, with the help of Waddington and the nuns, Kitty has an understanding of devotion and sympathy. Touched by the love between Waddington and his Chinese wife, Kitty starts to reflect on her marriage, status, her experience, as a result she holds a different feeling to Walton.

The feminism emphasizes that a woman has the rights to choose her own way of living and chooses a new existence way to change her life. In the process of getting rid of otherness and remodeling self, Kitty faces various options. In the face of her inner desire, Kitty's inner world transforms from indulgence to restraint, from perceptual to rational. At the same time, the work in Mei-tan-fu shows Kitty as the stronger, she decides to shoulder the responsibility of taking care of orphans and finds the value of self-existence. Both in gaining economic independence and getting rid of the love attachment, Kitty wins the real freedom of woman and becomes an independent individual.

This thesis is designed to evoke public concern about female's liberty which has become the most significant and pressing object in the current world. As the expansion of women's rights, women can own more chances and lifestyles to their spouses and professions. Nonetheless, there are still numerous phenomena of gender inequality. Feminism holds that a woman should lead a life as a complete individual, instead of an appendage of a man. They should be aware that they have the equal right and also the duty of being a master and constructor. Together, women and men can build a more prosperous world.

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