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東方與西方冒險故事中的社會諷刺之比較：

以格列佛遊記與西遊記作品為例

Comparing the western and eastern social satire via adventure stories：

the analysis of Gulliver's Travels and Journey to the West

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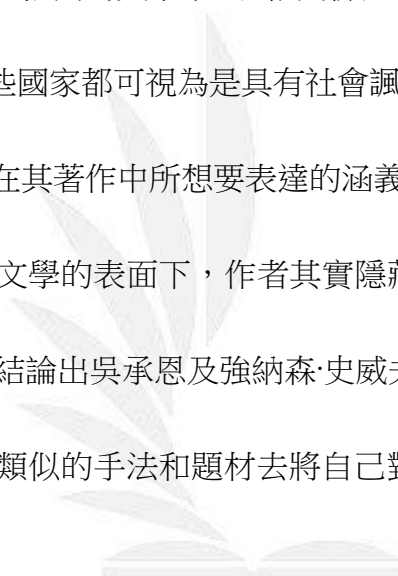**Course:** English Writing 6

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The Comparison between Gulliver's Travels and Journey to the West
: Adventure Stories with Social Satire

中文摘要

　　這份研究報告主要在探討格列佛遊記與西遊記中社會諷刺的情節及文學象徵，並且加以比較兩部東西方文學小說之間架構的相似性。文中一開始先提到了兩位作者－吳承恩及強納森·史威夫特的背景以及作品的時代背景。他們都是身在政治動盪的年代並對當時的執政者抱有不滿。接著，這份報告分析並比較了在兩部小說中對於社會及政治批判的文學手法。格列佛遊記和西遊記中的主角都遊歷各個虛構的國家，而這些國家都可視為是具有社會諷刺意義的象徵。再者，報告內容也提到了兩位作者在其著作中所想要表達的涵義。他們的小說都就各種層面被賞析閱讀，但在科幻文學的表面下，作者其實隱藏了更深的意義於文字之中。從這些比較中，可以結論出吳承恩及強納森·史威夫特因為時代背景及際遇的相似性而使得他們採用類似的手法和題材去將自己對社會和政治的不滿寄託在所寫的小說裡。

關鍵字：格列佛遊記、西遊記、吳承恩、強納森•史威夫特、社會諷刺、冒險故事

Abstract

This paper aims to compare *Gulliver's Travels* and *Journey to the West* by discussing the symbols and the plot of social satire of the two literary works. The paper first mentions the background of the two authors: Wu Cheng'en and Jonathan Swift and the historical background of the two novels. Wu and Swift both live in turbulent eras and are dissatisfied with the rulers. In addition, the paper analyzes and compares the literary techniques use in the two works. In *Gulliver's Travels* and *Journey to the West*, the characters travel to the fictional countries which can be viewed as symbols of social satire. What's more, the paper also shows the ideas of the authors presented in their works. The novels can be read and explained in different aspects. However, under the veil of science fiction, the authors actually hide deeper meanings in the stories. From the comparison, we can conclude that Wu and Swift use the same way to express their dissatisfaction with the societies and politics because of their similar background.

Keywords: Gulliver's Travels, Journey to the West, Wu Cheng'en, Jonathan Swift, social satire, adventure stories

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Chapter 1 Introduction

Brief Background

Gulliver's Travels, as one of the greatest works of satire, is popularly discussed

in the aspects of politics, religion, colonization and human society. In addition, since

it is basically an adventure story, many people have attempted to make a comparison

of it and other adventure literary works such as Homer's *The Odyssey* and Daniel

Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe.* However, the papers associated with *Gulliver's Travels*

scarcely mention its similarity with Chinese literary works. Through my observation,

Gulliver's Travels and *Journey to the West*, one of the Four Great Classical Novels of

Chinese literature share common features. They are both adventure stories in which

the characters travel to fictional countries. What's more, all these countries can be

seen as symbols of social satire.

Statement of Facts

The definition of satire in Cambridge Dictionary is a way of criticizing people or

ideas in a humorous way, or a piece of writing or play that uses this style. The word

satire derives from the Latin word satur and the phrase lanx satura. Quintilian (95 CE),

a Roman rhetorician, in his book *Institutio Oratoria* claims that Gaius Lucilius, an

earliest Roman satirist, is the inventor of satire. In the 17th and 18th century, an

intellectual movement called the Age of Enlightenment produces a flourish of satire 在

Britain. This is fuelled by the complex political situation of the age. Among all writers,

Jonathan Swift is one of the greatest satirists, and one of the first to practice modern

satire. He writes about the disadvantages of human society and particularly of English

society in his novel *Gulliver's Travels*. In contrast to the clear definition of *Gulliver's*

Travels as a satire work, there are many interpretations of *Journey to the West*. Some

argues that this work reflects the confluence of ideology of Chinese Confucianism,

Buddhism and Taoism. Others think that the author Wu Cheng'en aims to express the

anger of his frustration in the political environment of Ming Dynasty through this

novel.

The Importance of this Issue

   Raab (2009) in his paper *Gulliver's Travels as a Political Satire* claims that the

early 18th century is the golden age of satire and that politics is a common target of it.

Gulliver's Travels is a perfect example of satire work. This adventure story can be

seen as a satire on human nature, the society and the politics in the era. Zhou (1925), a

leading figure of modern Chinese literature, states that *Journey to the West* depicts

ironically the social and political circumstances of the Ming dynasty. Politics certainly

have great impact in the development of literature. Many writers concern about the

social and political structure and try to depict its image through words. Theirs works

help us have further understanding of the history and have the opportunity to

introspect human nature and society.

The Purpose of the Paper

I am going to study in the historical background of *Gulliver's Travels* and

Journey to the West and the background of Jonathan Swift and Wu Cheng'en, review

the implied political elements of the two works and make a discussion on the

similarity between the two.

The Significance of the Paper

This paper helps understand irony about society and politics presented in

Gulliver's Travels and *Journey to the West*. It also shows how social elements affect

literature in both Western and Eastern cultures. In addition, since the interpretation of

Journey to the West includes many different opinions, this paper will focus on the

implied irony.

The Arrangement of the Paper

In this research paper I am going to firstly analyze the history background of

both *Gulliver's Travels* and *Journey to the West* and then compare the relation of these

two works and the social situations. Next, I will examine the political and social

symbols appeared in the two stories. In addition, I want to discuss the authors' ideas

presented through irony in the novels. The last part of this paper will be my

conclusion.

Chapter 2 Historical Background of the Stories

Gulliver's Travels is a novel of the 18th century written by Irish writer Jonathan

Swift. Rawson (2010) in his book *Politics and Literature in the Age of Swift* mentions

that there are many political and religious conflicts in the 18th century: Tories and the

Whigs, Catholics and Protestants, and England's ruling over Ireland. Swift has spent

many years in England and has joined in various political activities. As Swift writes

Gulliver's Travels in such a complicated circumstance, he presents many of his

thoughts toward his time in the literary work.

Journey to the West is a Chinese novel published during Ming Dynasty

(1368–1644) and generally believed to be written by Wu Cheng'en. Wu has taken the

imperial examinations several times for becoming an imperial official. Nevertheless,

all his attempts were failed. In the later years, with the support of Li Chun-fang, Wu

finally reached his goal. However, he eventually resigned. Wu is dissatisfied with the

political situation of his time and the corruption of the whole environment. He spent

the rest of his life writing stories and poems and living as a hermit. Chen (2002) in his

paper indicates that many researchers disagree with Hu Shih's view of seeing *Journey*

to the West as an entertaining novel without actual meaning. They tend to believe that

Journey to the West is a work associated with Wu Cheng'en's political experiences and

demonstrates Wu's discontent and worries for the politics and the society of his time.

Jonathan Swift and Wu Cheng'en live in two turbulent societies and encounter

frustrations in their political professions. Both of the two works can be seen as

reflection of the authors' life and experiences.

Chapter 3 The Comparison of the Political and Social Symbols in the Stories

In *Gulliver's Travels*, the protagonist Lemuel Gulliver travels to four imaginary

regions: Lilliput, Brobdingnag, Laputa, and the land of the Houyhnhnms. In his first

voyage, Gulliver encounters a shipwreck and finds himself a prisoner as he wakes up

in the country of Lilliput. The inhabitants of Lilliput are tiny people less than 6 inches

tall. They are at first afraid of Gulliver but gradually accept him because of his good

behaviors. However, when Gulliver displeases the court, they sentence him to be

blinded, which forces Gulliver to escape from the country. Gulliver's second journey

is to Brobdingnag, a land occupied by giants. Gulliver's ship is blown off by storms

and therefore he sails to the land for fresh water. A giant farmer saves him but later

exhibits him as a rare creature for making money. The constant shows make Gulliver

ill, so the farmer sells him to the queen. In the court, Gulliver depicts the condition of

Europe to the king, who is discontented with Gulliver's accounts of Europe, especially

when he learns of the use of guns and cannons. Gulliver leaves the country during a

trip to the seaside; his traveling box is seized by a giant eagle which drops it into the

sea. Some sailors save him and return him to England. Gulliver travels to various

islands in his third journey. After Gulliver's ship is attacked by pirates, he is rescued

by the flying island of Laputa, a place focuses on the arts of music and mathematics

but fails to make practical use of the knowledge. In Laputa, the people are so

distracted with their thoughts that they need to be reminded of what they are doing. As

a result, the Laputian nobility needs a servant, the Flapper to flap their eyes or ears

when their attention is required. Dissatisfied with merely staying at Laputa, Gulliver

is lowered down to Balnibarbi, where the land has been ruined. Afterwards, he goes to

Glubbdubdrib, an island of sorcerers and magicians and Luggnagg, where most of the

inhabitants of are the immortal but unfortunate struldbrugs. After reaching Japan,

Gulliver ends this long trip and returns home. The last journey of Gulliver is to the

Country of the Houyhnhnms. He is abandoned by his crew in a landing boat and

meets a race of intelligent horses called Houyhnhnms and primitive creatures called

Yahoos. Gulliver joins in the group of Houyhnhnms and starts to admire their lifestyle.

However, one of the Houyhnhnms thinks that Gulliver, a Yahoo with reason, is

dangerous and therefore expels him. Gulliver returns to England, but he views his

family as Yahoos and spends time speaking with the horses in his stables. The

messages hidden behind his voyage of these strange lands are popularly discussed.

According to Professor Sung (2004), Swift uses Lilliput to criticize the arrogant,

snobbish, selfish and hypocritical parts of humanity. He also depicts the human image

of being aggressive and fraudulent thorough creating the countries Brobdingnag and

the land of Houyhnhnms. What's more, the kingdom of Laputa is a tool for Swift to

attack the impracticality of science, abstract thinking and social reform program

during his time.

In *Journey to the West*, the monk Tang San Zang begins a journey to the west

with his disciples the monkey king Sun Wu Kong, the pig demon Zhu Ba Jie and the

river demon Sha Wu Jing. They travel to various countries and face difficulties and

dangers in between. The novel can be divided into four sections. The first section

narrates Sun Wu Kong's background. He is born from a rock on the Flower Fruit

Mountain and then becomes the king of the monkeys. 300 years later, he learns the

way of immortality and various kinds of magic. When he returns, he creates many

troubles, which result in a war against Heaven. At the end, Sun Wu Kong is captured

and punished. The Emperor of Heaven asks the Buddha for help and crushes Wu

Kong underneath the Mountain of Five Elements. He has been trapped there for 500

years.

The second section describes Tan San Zang's background. When he is a child, he is

abandoned down a river and is found by the head monk of a monastery. When he

grows up, he is chosen to go to the Western Heaven for fetching the Holy Scriptures.

The third section is the main part of the book. Tang San Zang saves Sun Wu Kong

from the mountain and meets Zhu Ba Jie and Sha Wu Jing later. The three all become

San Zang's disciples. Throughout the journey, Tan San Zang is constantly attacked

and kidnapped by demons because they want to become immortal by eating his flesh.

In the fourth section, the characters finally arrive at the Western Heavens and bring

back the scriptures to China. As rewards, Tang San Zang and his disciples attain

Buddhahood at the end of the story. Chen (2013) in his paper points out the rulers of

countries and reigns in *Journey to the West* mirrors the corruption of feudal societies

such as Ming Dynasty. It seems that Wu tend to impute all the faults to the rulers. For

instance, the king of Zhuzi Kingdom only cares about his kidnapped wife and does

not contribute in ruling the state. His character symbolizes an incompetent and feeble

superior. The ruler of Biqiu Kingdom is another example. The king is entranced by a

charming vixen and a white deer who disguises as a middle-aged man. The king

gradually falls ill because of the demons' influence, and the white deer lies that the

hearts of 1,111 children are required to make a cure. The king then orders to capture

1,111 children and imprison them in cages. The king represents a shallow and fatuous

leader.

The two works both show the authors' disappointment and helplessness to face

their unwholesome societies and rulers through creating fictional countries and

characters. As the readers follow the adventures of those characters, they can make

critical judgment for what the character see and meet.

Chapter 4 The Comparison of the Authors' Ideas Presented Through Irony

Smith (1990) in *The Genres of Gulliver's Travels* says that *Gulliver's Travels* is

explored from the standpoint of picaresque, history, novel, children's literature,

illustrated book, scientific prose, science fiction, philosophical treatise, and satire.

Like *Gulliver's Travels*, *Journey to the West* can be examined in different aspects.

However, one most important question can be the target or purpose of the authors.

Due to the historical background and writing techniques of Swift and Wu, many

people would like to view their true intention as social criticizing. Ernest (2006) in

Analysis of the nature of Swift's satire in Gulliver's Travels - Targets, techniques and

effectiveness defines *Gulliver's Travels* as a book which on the surface appeared to be

a travel log to chronicle the adventures of Lemuel Gulliver on his voyages to four

separate countries but primarily serves as a satire on different aspects of human

society and humankind itself. Lee (2008) argues that if we focus merely on the

entertaining effect of *Journey to the West*, then we will lose the chance to realize its

critique of the contemporary politics and society.

To avoid troubles brought by criticizing publicly, Swift and Wu convey their idea

obscurely through their novels in the disguise of adventure stories. It might be the

only way to express their anger.

Chapter 5 Conclusion

The two authors both live in the turbulent ages. In addition, their life experiences

contain frustrations in politics. These elements lead to their disappointment with

society and human nature. As a result, they have very similar ideas in the novels and

use the same way to express their dissatisfaction with the secular. Thus, we can

consider *Gulliver's Travels* and *Journey to the West* as equivalent literary works

existed respectively in the East and West for criticizing social corruption.

In my research paper, I have made a comparison of the two works in the aspects

of the time background, the authors' lives and the symbols in both stories. However,

my deficiency is that I did not look at the question that whether and how Swift and

Wu attempt to present the images of Sir Robert Walpole and the emperors of Ming

Dynasty in their works. I left this part because I have not collected sufficient

information and materials for it. I think it is an issue worth discussing and can be

developed in the future because it is very likely that these actual politicians are the

main targets of their satire.

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