

Comparing the Clan Hall and Scaffold in *White Deer Plains* and *The Scarlet Letter*

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This article takes the theory of power space as an starting point for an in-depth comparison of the clan hall in *White Deer Plains* and the scaffold in *The Scarlet Letter*. In *White Deer Plains*, The clan hall, as the core place of family activities, has a spatial layout that implies a hierarchy of power, and the taboos it represents relate to various aspects such as marriage and bloodline, and maintains the order of the clan through a variety of disciplinary mechanisms. The scaffold in *The Scarlet Letter* is located in the town's central square and is a symbol of Puritan social power and moral discipline, behind which Puritan taboos influence people's behaviors and public punishments are used to achieve the discipline of the people. The research reveals the similarities and differences between the two in terms of sources of power, modes of operation and influence, and opens up new horizons for cross-cultural literary studies.

Keywords: *The White Deer Plains*, *The Scarlet Letter*, Clan Hall, Scaffold

Introduction

The *White Deer Plains*

The *White Deer Plains*, a classic of contemporary Chinese literature that won the fourth Mao Dun Literature Prize, took Chen Zhongshi four years to complete. This novel is set in the *White Deer Plains* in Shaanxi Province from the late Qing Dynasty to the early stage of the beginning of People's Republic of China, presenting a complex portrait of traditional Chinese clan society in a magnificent span of history. The beginning of the novel unfolds the geography and humanitarian settings on the White Deer Plains, where the villages are surrounded by natural surroundings and deeply imbued with a strong clan culture. On the White Deer Plains, a stable family order is constructed around the Bai and Lu clans, and the clan hall, as the core space of this order, carries the functioning of power and the transmission of culture. The clan hall is not only a sacred place to worship ancestors and remember them, but also a key place for family affairs and the enforcement of clan rules and laws, and its existence symbolizes the majesty and inviolability of clan power. Against this background, the social structure on the White Deer Plains presents a distinctive clan character. The patriarch, Bai Jiaxuan, as the representative of clan authority, maintains the order of the clan by traditional moral ethics and clan rules. All affairs of the clan, no matter how big or small, from weddings and funerals to land disputes, are adjudicated under the authority of the clan hall. The spatial layout of the clan hall is also of great significance. The tall and majestic gatehouse

highlights the status of the family and is only opened for important ceremonies, symbolizing the solemnity of the clan's power. The large courtyard is where the clan gathers, and when sacrifices or conferences are held, the clan members are arranged according to seniority and status, reinforcing the concept of hierarchy. The main hall is dedicated to the ancestral tablets, which are arranged according to seniority and affinity, and the seating arrangement is similarly arranged, clearly presenting the stratification of the clan's authority structure. At the same time, the cultural background on the White Deer Plains is deeply impressed by traditional Confucianism and patriarchal culture. In this context, *White Deer Plains* provides a wealthy and dynamic textual basis for analyzing the symbolic meaning of the clan hall from the perspective of power space.

The Scarlet Letter

The Scarlet Letter, written by Nathaniel Hawthorne, stands as a classic of American literature, set in the Puritan colonies of 17th-century North America and reflecting profoundly on Puritan social power structures and moral codes. The Puritan colonies of North America are at a critical stage of pioneering and development at the time, and Puritan doctrine is the core value and behavioral discipline of society. The Puritans, with their devotion and fear of God, integrate their religious beliefs into every aspect of their lives and build a social order centred on the church. In such a social atmosphere, the scaffold, as an essential space for the demonstration of power and moral discipline, highlights its unique significance. In the town layout of Puritan colonies, the scaffold is usually prominently located in the central square, which is the core area of the town's public activities, where people gather, trade, and so on, and whose presence makes it a focal point of moral warning. As a symbol of Puritan social power, the scaffold is a place of public punishment for violations of doctrines and social norms. Its high-ceilinged structure and open peripheral space allow criminals to be fully exposed to the public view while being punished, reinforcing the deterrent effect of punishment and demonstrating the authority and irresistibility of Puritan power. Puritan doctrines emphasize moral purity and absolute loyalty to God, and there is no tolerance for behaviour that goes against them. Adultery is a grave offence in Puritan morality, contrary to the sanctity of marriage and fidelity to God, and Hester Prynne is sentenced to wear a scarlet letter 'A' on the scaffold for adultery. This punishment is not only a disciplinary measure for her personal behaviour, but also a warning to society as a whole, reinforcing the strict norms of sexual morality in Puritan society by means of public humiliation. Within this context, the disciplinary mechanism implemented by the Puritan society through the scaffold has had a far-reaching impact on the thinking and behaviour of the people.

Power Space Theory

The development of power space theory has been an evolving and multidisciplinary intertwining process, from the early initial perception of space to the gradual deepening of its intrinsic connection with power, providing key theoretical underpinnings for many fields including this thesis research.

Early understanding of space was mostly confined to the physical level, treating it as an objectively existing, neutral container that carries only human activities and has no deep connection with social relations and power structures. With the deepening of academic research, especially the development of sociology and philosophy, scholars began to re-examine the nature of space. In the 20th century, Foucault's theories revolutionized the theory of power space. In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault (2003) analyzed prison space in detail, revealing how power used spatial layout, architectural design, and day-to-day management to discipline and control individuals

on all fronts. He emphasized that space was not an isolated and neutral physical category, but was closely intertwined with power and was a concrete manifestation of social relations at the material level, breaking the traditional static and isolated perception of space and emphasizing the social and historical nature of space. Foucault's theory laid a solid foundation for the theory of power space, allowing the academic community to begin to pay attention to the positive role of space in the operation of power, and how power shaped individuals and social order through space. Lefebvre (2021) further expanded the theory of power space on the basis of Foucault's research. In *The Production of Space*, he proposed that space was a product of social relations and that social space contained a triple dialectical unity of concepts, namely, spatial practice, the representation of space and the space of representation. This theory has deepened the understanding of the relationship between space and power, revealing how power permeates and operates at different levels of space, the differences in power faced by different social classes in the production and use of space, and how power maintains social order and structures of domination through the representation of space.

Since then, power space theory has been developing in different disciplines. In the field of literature, the power space theory provides new perspectives for interpreting literary works, such as the spatial imagery of clan halls and scaffolds in *White Deer Plains* and *The Scarlet Letter*, which are studied in this dissertation, with the help of the power space theory, we are able to excavate the power relations, values and moral norms behind them. By analysing the layout, function and interaction of these spatial images with the characters in the works, we reveal the similarities and differences in the operation of power in the context of Chinese and Western cultures, which further expands the application of the power space theory in the study of literature, and enriches the understanding of the deeper connotation of literary works.

The Clan Hall in The *White Deer Plains*

Spatial Status and Function of Clan Hall

The clan hall is a traditional Chinese folk building, and initially the form and function of the clan hall and the hall were not the same. The hall is the most important part of the clan, also at the centre of the clan, it is the place where the gods of ancestors are enshrined, and in the Han Dynasty, the name of the clan and the hall were merged into one. According to Dai Sheng's *Book of Rites* in the Western Han Dynasty, emperors and feudal lords built ancestral temples to honour their ancestors in the pre-Qin period. In the middle of the Northern Song dynasty, important ministers were allowed to build family temples, and a trend of family temple building emerged among the general public, which in turn led to the gradual formation of clan halls' (Wei & Gu, 2013, p. 159). During the Southern Song Dynasty, Zhu Xi incorporated the clan hall into the interpretation of the science system, and the clan hall was thus recognised by the rulers. During the Ming and Qing dynasties, the construction of clan halls became popular. It can be seen that the clan hall is the result of the secularization and civilization of the royal sacrificial right in the ancient Chinese patriarchal society. In *White Deer Plains*, the imagery of the clan hall appears as many as 175 times in the text (Li, 2010), which shows the vital role of the clan hall in structuring the whole text. The clan hall is of great significance in the hearts of the villagers of *White Deer Plains*. It is not only a place for worshipping the gods of ancestors, but also a carrier of traditional patriarchal ethics, and the native government office on the *White Deer Plains*, where Bai Jiaxuan uses the clan hall as a position to practice his own ideals of patriarchal morality. Functionally, the clan hall is a place to deliberate on important matters: “这是本族

本村的大事，该当搁到祠堂去议” (Chen, 2016, p. 21). Secondly, the clan hall is also the place where the Township Covenant is implemented, and the Covenant is also posted and seal-engraved on the gate of the clan hall. Thirdly, the clan hall is the place where rituals are held, and every Qing Ming Festival: “家家户户提前吃的晌午饭便去上坟烧纸祭，然后集中到祠堂里聚族莫老辈子祖宗” (Chen, 2016, p. 23). Finally, the clan hall is also a place of education and punishment, where Tian Xiao’e is whipped for eloping with Heiwa. It can be said that the clan hall is the witness of the family’s reproduction and development, carrying the historical memory of the family for hundreds or even thousands of years. Therefore, in the village community constructed by *White Deer Plains*, the clan hall occupies an irreplaceable central position, and it is the absolute centre of the activities of the whole clan.

Spatial Layout of the Clan Hall and the Presentation of the Hierarchy of Power

In the *White Deer Plains*, the clan hall consists of a five-room hall and a six-room mansion, with a square in front of it, and in the courtyard there is a stone tablet of ‘Benevolence and Righteousness of the *White Deer Plains*’ approved by the county magistrate. “五间正厅供奉着白鹿两姓列宗列宗显考显妣的神位，每个死掉的男人和女人都占了指头宽的一格，整个神位占满了五间大厅的正面墙壁” (Chen, 2016, p. 65). The two sides of the main gate of the clan hall are inscribed with the ‘Township Covenant’, which is mirrored by the ‘Benevolence and Righteousness of White Deer Village’ monument in the courtyard. The spatial layout of the clan hall adheres strictly to the hierarchical order of the clan, and every detail carries a deep symbolism of power. The towering and majestic gatehouse, as the entrance to the clan hall, is the outward manifestation of the dignity and status of the clan. Adopting exquisite carvings and unique architectural styles, the gatehouse is only opened during important ceremonies, such as sacrificial ceremonies, major family celebrations, or visits by distinguished guests, symbolizing the solemnity and inviolability of clan power. Ordinary clansmen can only enter and exit through the side gate on weekdays, and this gate system reinforces the sanctity of the clan hall and the hierarchical difference in power. When entering the clan hall, the spacious courtyard is the main place where the clan gathers. During ceremonies or family meetings, the clansmen are arranged in the courtyard in order of seniority and status. The open space of the courtyard not only facilitates the gathering of people, but also creates a solemn atmosphere so that clansmen can feel the majesty of clan power the moment they enter the clan hall. The main hall, on the other hand, is the core area of the clan hall, where the ancestral tablets are enshrined. The tablets are arranged in strict order of seniority and affinity, with those of higher seniority and closer to the ancestors located in the centre of the front row, and those of lower seniority and farther away from the ancestors. This arrangement of the tablets reflects the hierarchy of bloodlines within the family and strengthens family members’ awareness of their own position in the family lineage. When deliberations or ceremonies are held at the clan hall, there are also strict rules for seating arrangements. Clansmen of high rank and status, such as the clan chief and elders of the clan, sit in the front row near the tablets, and they have the decision-making power and the right to speak in clan affairs; while clansmen of low rank and status are arranged in order at the back, and they are mainly responsible for following the arrangements of the elders and executing the relevant affairs. This spatial layout and seating arrangement intuitively and clearly presents the hierarchical structure of clan power, so that each clan member can clearly define his or her position and role in the clan the moment he or she enters the clan hall, and thus consciously abide by the order and norms of the clan.

The Mechanisms for Clan Hall Discipline

The disciplinary mechanism of the clan hall is mainly realized through the punishment of clan rules and township covenant, which complement each other to maintain the order and norms of the clan. Both the clan rules and the township covenant have clear and detailed punishments for all kinds of infractions. For lesser offences, such as being late for a ritual or speaking disrespectfully to elders, punishments such as kneeling or fines are usually imposed. Kneeling penalties generally require the offender to kneel in the courtyard of the clan hall in front of the ancestral tablets for a specified period of time, as a means of disciplining his or her behaviour, and at the same time allowing him or her to reflect on his or her own faults during the process of kneeling and strengthening his or her reverence for the rules of the clan. Fines are imposed as financial penalties to make the offenders realise the inappropriateness of their behaviour, and the proceeds of the fines are usually used for the maintenance of the clan hall or for public welfare of the family.

For more serious offenses, such as theft and adultery, the punishment is more severe, and flogging and expulsion from the clan may be imposed. Flogging is a physical punishment, carried out in public in the clan hall, where the offender is tied to a special instrument and beaten with a whip by law enforcement officers in the clan. Its purpose is not only to discipline the offender as an individual, but also to send a strong signal of discipline to the entire clansmen through public ceremonies, so that the clansmen can psychologically form a fear of the offending behaviour and reverence for the clan rules. Expulsion from the clan is the most severe punishment, as the offender will be permanently deprived of his or her status as a member of the clan and will lose the protection and support of the clan, which, in the social environment of that time, means that the offender will lose his or her dependence on life and social status, which is almost the same as being abandoned by the society. For example, when gambling and opium-smoking clansmen appear in the village, the punishment ceremony is held in the clan hall, with the participation of the whole clan. When Bai Jiaxuan punishes his eldest son Xiaowen, who has violated the clan rules, the ceremony is very tedious, with the recitation of the relevant articles of the township covenant and the clan rules prior to the execution and the execution by the patriarch, which is an exhibition of rituals in which the whole clan observes the process of the disposition of those who have violated the rules of the clan, a process that is a kind of spiritual and physical discipline.

The Scaffold in *The Scarlet Letter*

Spatial Status and Function of The Scaffold

Like '*The Scarlet Letter*', which is the title of the novel, 'Scaffold' is used throughout the story. The difference is that '*The Scarlet Letter*' is everywhere, while the 'scaffold' mainly appears in the four chapters of the novel, namely, 'The Market-Place', 'Recognition', 'The Minister's Vigil' and 'The Revelation of *The Scarlet Letter*', and has a symbolic meaning that matches the development pattern of the whole story. In the unique setting of the seventeenth-century Puritan colonial town in North America created in *The Scarlet Letter*, the scaffold occupies a prominent and crucial spatial position in the town's central square, a spatial positioning that gives the scaffold an extremely important role in the novel. As the central public area of the town, the centre square is the meeting place for residents' daily activities, social gatherings, and commercial transactions, and the scaffold naturally becomes the focus of attention. "The scaffold is located at the west end of the marketplace,

erected almost under the eaves of Boston's earliest churches, like an annex to a church" (Chen, 2016, p. 97). This clarifies the striking nature of its spatial positioning.

In terms of functional significance, the main function of the scaffold is to serve as a specialized place for the imposition of punishment and trial of criminals (Chen, 2016, p. 97), and to become a centralized platform for the embodied display of puritanical social power. The Puritans, with their strict religious doctrine and moral code, turn to the scaffold as a key tool in maintaining the moral order of society: "In fact, this scaffold constituted a portion of a penal machine, which now, for two or three generations past, has been merely historical and traditionary among us, but was held, in the old time, to be as effectual an agent, in the promotion of good citizenship, as ever was the guillotine among the terrorists of France" (Hawthorne, 1850, p. 31). Public punishment ceremonies convey to the entire population the judgement of sinful behaviour and adherence to moral norms, thus reinforcing the Puritan society's relentless pursuit of moral purity. Each execution on the scaffold becomes a major public event in towns and attracts crowds of spectators. "the crowd was sombre and grave" (Hawthorne, 1850, p. 32). This publicity allows the punishment to have an impact far beyond the individual punished. It is not only a punishment for the individual criminal, but also a profound moral education for the entire population. It demonstrates to the public in a visual way the serious consequences of violating the moral norms of Puritanism, so that the public develops a psychological fear of criminal behaviour and a reverence for the moral norms, and builds up the public's awareness of the need to maintain the social order, thereby achieving the goal of maintaining the social order.

The spatial positioning of the scaffold in the novel is closely linked to its role; while its position in the central square magnifies the impact of punishment, its role as a platform for the display of power and as a symbol of moral warning reinforces its special position in the town space. It is not only a material carrier for the power operation of the Puritan society, but also a key medium for the dissemination and reinforcement of social moral norms, playing an irreplaceable and important role in the construction and maintenance of the Puritan social order depicted in the novel, and profoundly influencing the people's behavioral patterns and values, just as reflected in the text, the Puritan society through the scaffold to provide moral discipline to the people in order to maintain the social order.

Spatial Features of the Scaffold and Representations of Power

In the spatial layout of the Puritan colonial town created by *The Scarlet Letter*, the scaffold has a distinct and unique spatial feature, which is closely linked to the display of power in Puritan society, and profoundly embodies the discipline of power over individuals and society. The scaffold towers above the square and is surrounded by open space, a spatial arrangement that exposes the criminal to the public view while he or she is being tortured without any concealment. When the criminal stands on the high scaffold and is in the centre of attention, the humiliation and pain he or she suffers are magnified infinitely, becoming a visual manifestation of the deterrent power of the Puritan society and greatly enhancing the deterrent power of punishment. The ritualized nature of public punishment is extremely significant. Before the execution, the priests will conduct solemn prayers and admonishments in accordance with Puritan traditions, and the priests and other judges stand on the high balcony and, by quoting biblical doctrines, harshly condemn the criminals for their crimes, while at

the same time repeatedly stressing to the public the importance of abiding by the moral norms of the Puritan religion.

The execution process has strict and meticulous procedures and norms, from the established route that the criminal is escorted to the scaffold, to the specific position he or she stands on the scaffold, and to the specific manner and duration of the punishment, all of which are clearly and irrevocably stipulated. This ritualized punishment is not just a punishment for the individual criminal, but also a public proclamation of Puritan social values, which strongly demonstrates the authority and irresistibility of Puritan power. In the process of watching the punishment rituals, the people have received a deep inculcation of Puritan moral values and further strengthened their identification with the power structure of the Puritan society. Through this process, the Puritan society successfully embeds its will to power and moral code into the people's consciousness and consolidates the social order centred on religious teachings, while the scaffold, with its unique spatial characteristics and ritualized punishment process, becomes the key material carrier for the effective display and dissemination of Puritan power.

The Mechanisms for Scaffold Discipline

The scaffold has had a profound disciplinary effect on the morals and behavioral norms of the populace. Through public punishments, Puritan society imposes its own strict moral code and values on the people. In the course of watching the punishment rituals, the people can witness the pain and humiliation suffered by the criminals, thus psychologically forming a fear of forbidden behaviour and an identity with the moral norms. This fear and identification gradually become internalized into the people's self-restraint mechanism, which makes them consciously abide by the moral norms of Puritanism in their daily lives and not dare to step out of their bounds easily.

To a certain extent, this disciplinary role helps to maintain the order of Puritan society and ensure that the behaviour of its members conforms to the requirements of the church. However, this overly strict discipline also suppresses human nature to a certain extent and triggers conflicts and contradictions within the society. For example, Hester Prynne, after being punished by being displayed on the scaffold, although she accepts the society's punishment outwardly, she inwardly questions and revolts against the moral strictness of the Puritan society. Although her revolt does not fundamentally change the status quo of Puritan society, it triggers some of the people to reflect on the moral norms of Puritanism, and becomes a potential driving force for change in Puritan society.

Comparison of Clan Hall and Scaffold

The Source of Space Power

"The extension of state power during the twentieth century dramatically changed the role of the clan in cultural networks. Although the sense of family has penetrated into all levels of Chinese culture and has in a sense become an integral part of Confucianism, in rural societies the blood group, represented by the clan, still plays an important role" (Du, 2008, p. 77). Whether or not a person can enter the clan hall and participate in its major activities represents the clan's belonging and identity, and having a clan identity means having a basic guarantee of survival and spiritual support. It is this ancestor worship and consanguinity that becomes the source of power of the clan hall, which is derived from the assumption of responsibility for the family and the guardianship of the

cultural values of benevolence and righteousness. This makes the clan hall a place for ancestor to worship, deliberation, education and punishment, and gradually evolves into the center of power in the *White Deer Plains*, becoming a symbol of clan power. Meanwhile, in *White Deer Plains*, the operation of clan rules and the Township Covenant also unfolds in the space of the clan hall, where it is written that the Township Covenant was posted on the outer wall of the clan hall's gatehouse, and then later engraved on top of a stone tablet and set on both sides of the main entrance of the clan hall, further growing the power of the clan hall.

Unlike the *White Deer Plains*, *The Scarlet Letter* is set in a time when Puritanism pursues the unity of church and state, and Puritan doctrine controls law and religion, and in so doing, controls the spirituality and lives of the people. For Puritan societies, the scaffold is "an integral part of the whole machinery of punishment" and is the place where Puritan societies punish criminals. On the other hand, it is also a place where the offender confesses his sins, repents publicly, accepts punishment, and makes atonement, and is therefore a tool of social power to punish and humiliate the individual. Hester Prynne is put on the dais for the crime of adultery to be judged not only by the law but also by religion. Therefore, Puritanism with its controlled legal prestige is the support of the power of the scaffold in *The Scarlet Letter*, which derives its power from the legal and religious discourse system of Puritan society, and is not only an instrument of punishment for individuals, but also a symbol of social discipline and control.

From the perspective of moral restraint, the clan hall in *White Deer Plains* and the scaffold in *The Scarlet Letter* share a common source of power; both are places where the guilty are publicly displayed to be tortured. Hester is put on public display on the execution platform for adultery and is judged by the eyes of the people because the traditional ethics of the society cannot tolerate those who are unfaithful to their marriages. Similarly, in *White Deer Plains*, Tian Xiao'e is brought to the clan hall to be "beaten" because she elopes with Heiwa. Both of them are criticized by the world for breaking the traditional ethics and morals. From this level, the moral constraints of the society are also part of the source of power of the scaffold and the clan hall, which is reflected in these two works.

The Operation of Space Power

Clan halls focus more on internal discipline, subconsciously restraining the behavior of family members through ancestor worship ceremonies, family meetings and enforcement of clan rules. Rather than public punishment, the clan hall emphasizes the formation of pressure on individuals through tradition and public opinion within the family.

In *White Deer Plains*, whenever an important incident occurs, all members of the clan are present, arranged according to the order and the status of the them. The ceremony is presided over by the clan chief. In the power space of the clan hall, the head of the clan has the authority to express his views, and he disciplines the clansmen in accordance with the regulations of the clan and the township covenants. Through the ceremony, the clan power is strengthened, and hierarchical relations and clan identity are further enhanced. In *White Deer Plains*, whenever an important incident occurs, all members of the clan are present, arranged according to the order and the status of the them. The ceremony is presided over by the clan chief. In the power space of the clan hall, the head of the clan has the authority to express his views, and he teaches and disciplines the clansmen in accordance with the regulations of the clan and the township covenants. Through the ceremony, the clan power is strengthened, and

hierarchical relations and clan identity are further enhanced. In the *White Deer Plains*, the clan is the main social organization, and the clan chief is the embodiment of the clan function, so his power operation in the clan hall has a certain degree of autonomy, and the autonomy in the village is recognized and supported by the official authorities. So that internal disputes within the clan are resolved internally first, and as far as possible, without resorting to the official authorities.

The scaffold, on the other hand, focuses more on reinforcing society's common perception of morality through public ritualized humiliation, while operating more like a courtroom due to the imposition of laws under Puritanical control. In *The Scarlet Letter*, the scaffold is mentioned four times, and the basic elements of these scenes, i.e., space, characters, and events, are relatively fixed in the advancement of the plot. In terms of spatial layout, each demonstration is centred on the scaffold, and no matter how much effort the work spends on depicting the scaffold above, below and around it, it is always the focal point of sight in the whole square. In fact, the writer provides an open courtroom scene: the defendant, the judge and the spectator are all there, only it is not as regular as a modern courtroom, but its function is not very different. Characters: there are Hester, the Reverend Dimmesdale, Pearl, Chillingworth, officials, clergy, and a large number of New England. Governor Bellingham and Reverend John Wilson preside over the ceremony, with Hester as the defendant, Dimmesdale as the judge, who represents the church and the authorities, and the officials, senior clergy, and numerous New England populace, who represent the ruling class, as spectators. Together, these characters form a community of those judging and being judged, and are in a state of some tension. Event: This is a public trial of a woman who has committed adultery, and it is conducted in a question-and-answer format, in which Dimmesdale asks the questions required by the Crown and the Church, and Hester responds in order. The final result of the trial: Hester fails to give answers to the satisfaction of the judges and is sentenced to wear the letter 'A' for life as a symbol of shame, and to serve as a living example of discipline and warning.

In general, clan halls regulate and control individual behavior through clan norms and cultural activities, and the internal affairs of clan halls are generally dominated by family authorities and economic elites, among others, with the participation of the clan members. scaffold, on the other hand, realizes the moral judgment and regulation of society through public humiliation and punishment, and its operation mechanism relies more on the coercive power of law and religion.

The Impact of Space Power

Clan organizations exercise control over their clansmen through the clan halls, including the power of indoctrination, economic adjudication, and public security investigation, etc., and these powers make the clan halls authoritative in rural society. The clan system, when implemented, regulates the speech, behavior and thoughts of the clansmen, influences other clansmen to abide by the rules and regulations of the clan and the township, strengthens the clansmen's identification with the sense of the clan group, and consolidates the status and authority of the clan power.

Puritan society emphasized adherence to moral and religious norms, and punishment at the scaffold was not only a legal judgment but also a religious one. This dual pressure made individuals subject to strict moral and legal constraints in society. The punitive mechanism of the scaffold puts the individual under pressure for moral

judgment and redemption. The Puritan ethic required the individual to take responsibility for his or her actions and to achieve spiritual liberation through repentance and redemption.

Both are symbols and instruments of enforcement of power in their respective social structures. The scaffold emphasizes external publicity and directly manifests the oppression of power through humiliation; the clan hall, on the other hand, implements discipline through hidden family rituals, and its operation of power is more hidden but more deeply rooted in people's hearts.

Conclusion

Through an in-depth comparative study of the imagery of the clan hall and the scaffold in *White Deer Plains* and *The Scarlet Letter* based on the perspective of power space, we clearly see the similarities and differences in the way power operates in the context of Chinese and Western cultures. The clan hall is the centre of clan power, and its spatial layout demonstrates hierarchical order, representing taboos around marriage and bloodlines, which are enforced through clan rules and township ordinances. The scaffold is located in the square in the centre of the Puritan colony town, a space for power display and moral discipline, containing Puritan taboos and disciplining the people through public punishment. But both the scaffold and the clan hall, as the places of punishment and discipline at that time, carry the important function of moral trial and punishment, and are the materialized carriers of the extreme ethical and moral oppression of human nature at that time, symbolizing the central power in their respective political cultures. This parallel comparison shows us the differences between Chinese and Western societies in terms of power, ethics and culture, it also reflects the common role of cultural traditions in shaping the social structure and influencing the changes of the eras. Although the paths and directions of this common role are different, the trends are always similar. This comparative study not only deepens our understanding of the cultural connotation and literary value of the two works, but also provides new perspectives and methods for cross-cultural literary research. It makes us realize that spatial imagery in literary works is not only a setting of background, but also an important carrier of culture, power and social relations.

Of course, this thesis still has some limitations in terms of the depth and breadth of textual analyses. In future research, the scope of the study can be further expanded to include more representative literary works for comparative analyses, in order to more comprehensively reveal the diversity and commonality of the symbolic meanings of power space in different cultures.

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