

A Spatial Analysis of Isabel Archer in *The Portrait of a Lady*

Chenyang Bai

Zhejiang Agriculture and Forestry University, China

Abstract—This paper attempts to develop a comprehensive analysis of Isabel Archer in *The Portrait of a Lady* from the perspective of spatial theory. It analyses the houses Archer settles down to expound that the physical surrounding constitutes not only the background setting but also the influential part of narration and character-shaping, explains how Archer deals with the conflicts between American and European culture through her marriage choice, revealing James' aspiration for cultural integration, excavates Archer's mental space to indicate her cognitive development of self-identification and growth from an innocent girl to a mature lady, so as to develop a profound understanding of the novel.

Index Terms—Henry James, *The Portrait of a Lady*, the Physical Space, the Social Space, the Mental Space

I. INTRODUCTION

Henry James (1843-1916) is a famous American novelist and literary critic. *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881) is one of his most popular novels, and it is regarded as one of his finest novel. Brownell once claimed that *The Portrait of a Lady* is “the best piece of realistic fiction published up to date”. (Bamberg, 1995, p.661) *The Portrait of a Lady* narrates the story of a young American woman, Isabel Archer. With the dream of expanding her knowledge and experience, the young, innocent and imaginative Archer comes to Europe with her aunt. Except for winning the favour of several suitors, she also inherits a large sum of money. Unfortunately, she falls into the conspiracy of two American expatriates afterwards and marries the false man. Though the suitors are still waiting for her, Archer chooses to face the challenging marriage, through which she finally establishes her self-identification.

Henry James and his *The Portrait of a Lady* have attracted long-last attention from large-scale readers and critics. Related studies probe into its international theme, narrative strategy, feminine consciousness, and so on. As for the reviews on the protagonist Archer, critics mainly focus on her marriage, growth and quest for freedom. The manifestation of Archer's personality, the tragic effect of her marriage, her view on freedom have been expounded fully, the characters and events in this novel have been discussed a lot, but the physical world especially the houses Archer settles down and the relationship between the physical world and the characters have not got enough attention. Therefore, the author of this paper tries to analyse Archer's physical surroundings and spatial movements from the spatial perspective.

Literary space criticism is a literary criticism method rising from the spatial turn in social science. The Chicago school of sociologists and geographers made an effort to inject space into studies on class, gender, power and the world system in 1920s. Then the roaring urban unrest in 1960s brought forth a revolutionary way to deal with space and the powerful effects of urban spatiality on human behavior and social development. Henri Lefebvre, the pioneer of space researches, suggests that space must be considered not simply as concrete, material object, but also an ideological, lived, and subjective one. He divides space into three aspects, respectively physical space, mental space and social space in his masterpiece *The Production of Space* (1974). The physical space indicates nature, the cosmos; the mental space includes logical and formal abstractions; the social space is the space of social practice, being occupied by sensory phenomena, including products of the imagination such as projects and projections, symbols and Utopias. (Lefebvre, 1991, p.11-2) In other words, physical space is the space in physical state, and is able to be perceived by human senses. Social space is the inter-personal space, and the construction of relationship of various social factors, placing emphasis mainly on politics, economy, power, race, class and culture. Mental space is the interior space constructed through the edition of and the projection onto the exterior world by human emotions and consciousness. Literary space criticism takes space in literature as the object of criticism. Literary space is the transformation, transfer and transcendence of people's living space. Living space undergoes author's selection, redefinition and creation, transformed into literary space, embodying authors' aesthetics, outlook and humanistic concept. Thus literary spatial studies are based on the transformation stage between living space and literary space, and intends to explore external regulation of authors' inner world and values.

Henry James is closely related with the issue of “space”. He has shuttled back and forth between America and Europe all his life. Through which, he manifests keen and unique insights into the European and American society and appreciates the human scene through the innumerable windows of the house of fiction. In his space, there is a conspicuous geographical route starting from America and terminating at Europe. It constructs an abstract map indicating the objective social phenomena of cultural difference and conflicts between America and Europe, and the subjective self consciousness including the relation between self and ego, self and other, self and society. The above

concrete and abstract spaces serve as the base where humanity and society are explored, where cultural geography and spatial criticism merge. Therefore, James' space is worthy of exploration.

This paper attempts to focus on James' *The Portrait of a Lady* and its protagonist Isabel Archer from the perspective of spatial theory. It first analyses the houses Archer settles down to expound that the physical surrounding constitutes not only the background setting but also the influential part of narration and character-shaping. Then, it explains how Archer deals with the conflicts between American and European culture through her marriage choice, revealing James' aspiration for cultural integration. Finally, it excavates Archer's mental space to indicate her cognitive development of self-identification and growth from an innocent girl to a mature lady.

II. PHYSICAL SPACE: HOUSES THAT WITNESS ARCHER'S LIFE JOURNEY

Gabriel Zoran (1984) claims that physical space is self-existent and independent of the temporal structure of the world. The text expresses physical structure by means of direct descriptions. This physical structure can be conceived as a kind of map based on the text. The series of places in *The Portrait of a Lady* serves as the map of Archer's actions. The houses she settles down witness Archer's cognitive process. "The place in which an event occurred was in his point of view of equal moment with the event itself; it was part of the action it had a part to play... it needed to be made as definite as anything else." (Miller&James, 1972, p.14) Accordingly, James puts equal emphasis on the description of places especially the houses there and plot development, exhibiting the interaction between them. This part mainly discusses the houses like the old house in Albany, Gardencourt, the Palazzo Crescentini and the Palazzo Roccanera, which play very important role in promoting the development of the plot and shaping the personality of Archer.

The old house in Albany is the place in which Archer has spent most of her time in America. Firstly, it is old. It belongs to Archer's grandmother. And there is even a notice of sale in the windows of one of the lower apartments. Secondly, it is large and square. Its rooms are extremely numerous. Thirdly, it is a double house. There are two entrances which are exactly alike: large white doors with an arched frame. On the third floor, there is an arched passage, connecting the two parts of the house.(James,1999) This house relates closely to Archer's early life, it constitutes the token of her personality. Its being large and square helps to form Archer's broad mind and strong desire to see the world and to enrich her experience. Its symmetrical structure indicates Archer's double-sided personality. She aspires to freedom, but she is not able to abandon conventions completely. This is shown by her early education experience. Opposite to her grandmother's double house, there is a primary school for children of both sexes. Archer has been offered an opportunity of laying the foundation of knowledge there, but she protests against its laws and quits schooling after a single day. Later, when she hears the hum of childish voices repeating the multiplication-tale, she feels indistinguishably the pain of exclusion as well as the elation of freedom. She enjoys the freedom but feels depressed being out of school. Furthermore, when she gets married and finds out the truth of her husband's conspiracy, she chooses to return to family rather than escape from it. This choice also explains her consideration on convention to some extent though it is partially due to her mental maturing which will be fully analyzed in the last chapter. One of the exactly-alike entrances has long been out of use but never has been removed. Obviously, the out-of-use entrance indicates convention, and the frequently used entrance symbolizes freedom. She indulges in free reading in her so-called office. In her opinion, freedom is the consolidation of self-identity regardless of the surrounding society. She tends to ignore the truth for the truth will interfere with her own theory just like that she refuses to open the window though the window of her office is facing the street. She forms a vague conception of Europe and European culture through reading and decides to verify it. This old house enriches her mind, and endows her with strong desire to go out for knowledge and experience.

Archer's first station in Europe is Gardencourt. Gardencourt is the Touchetts' country house in England, which stands upon a low hill, viewing Thames. Its red bricks, brown ceilings, and deep green garden make it quite charming to the foreign guest Archer. Moreover, its long history satisfies her expectation of European culture. It has been built during the time of Edward VI, has provided a night's hospitality for the great Elizabeth, has been bruised and defaced in Cromwell's wars, then has got restored and enlarged under the Restoration, and has been remodeled and disfigured in 18th century. The historical elements are much of the taste of Archer, which helps her to show her real self in this "Garden of Eden". Archer soon becomes the focus of attention there. Her uncle Mr. Touchett likes her very much, and he answers her various kinds of questions patiently and humorously. Her cousin Ralph Touchett fancies her and protects her secretly. Ralph even persuades his father to offer Archer half of the Touchett inheritance, so as to support her searching for freedom and independence. It seems to be a bright beginning of the European journey.

However, long history also means tradition and conventions. As for appreciating the aesthetic value of Gardencourt, people there have to obey its conventions. One night, Archer stays very late with Ralph and Lord Warburton. Then, Mr. Touchett, her aunt, reminds her not to defy the convention. In Great Britain of Archer's time, the unmarried young women are not supposed to stay with men at late night, and they are under control of their fathers or brothers, deprived of freedom. Archer does not go back to her room soon as her aunt's instruction. She says she is glad to know the conventional rituals from her aunt. But the purpose of knowing is for making choice. That is to say, to obey it or defy it, she would like to make her own decision. Just having tasted the flavour of freedom, Archer certainly pays little attention to conventions. So the traditional Gardencourt inevitably witnesses Archer's departure and strengthens her further exploration of freedom.

Archer's next station is the Palazzo Crescentini which is Mrs. Touchett's residence in Florence. It is an old palace full of stories, even deaths. Mrs. Touchett says there are at least three people who have been murdered there and there may be more besides. The mysterious palace arouses Archer's curiosity when she is in Albany. Entering the Palazzo Crescentini as she wishes, Archer gets so excited for she is so close to the historical and cultural heritage. She senses no tragic or horror, on the contrary, she smells charming fragrance. Similarly, she does not sense the danger in her future life, for she is attracted by Osmond's elegant manner whom she meets in that charming palace. The grandness of the Palazzo Crescentini has made Archer forget its tragic history, and the pretended elegance of Osmond has made her ignore his dark inside. The Palazzo Crescentini unveils Archer's misfortune in love and marriage, and its tragic history predicts Archer's tragic future.

Archer's residence after marriage is the Palazzo Roccanera—a palace by Roman measure. Her husband and she choose this habitation for their love of local colour. It has local colour enough for the stern old Roman name and smelling of historic deeds. Its proportions of the windows and the details of the cornice have quite the grand air. The Palazzo Roccanera is mentioned in Murray's guidebook and visited by tourists. However, according to a vague survey, the tourists are disappointed at it. Mr. Rosier, the suitor of Archer's step-daughter Pansy, also thinks its rooms are cold and ugly. Pansy explains that it is her father's taste. Actually, Osmond has made a large collection of art pieces in this house. He holds the view that one should make one's life a piece of art. To the author of this paper, the most important collected art pieces in this palace are Pansy and Archer. Pansy is kept away from her true lover Rosier and has been forced into the snobbish marriage with Lord Warburton. It's a dungeon not only to Pansy, but also to Archer. In this palace, Archer changed a lot. She used to be curious, independent, and willing to express herself, but now, she becomes depressive and obedient. In order for pleasing her husband, she tries to make Lord Warburton accept Pansy as his wife. Nevertheless, Osmond still blames Archer for having too many ideas and asks her to get rid of those ideas. Then, when she is asked about her own taste by Lord Warburton, she expresses her willingness to accept what others propose. Archer mistakenly believes that her marriage is out of free choice and she is independent, self-governing individual, in fact, her independence is illusory. She is the hostess of the Palazzo Roccanera, but she has never had the spatial dominance in this house. The house is the manifestation of Osmond's taste, not at all of hers. The free, keen Archer remains the beautiful art piece collected by Osmond. Consequently, the Palazzo Roccanera proves to be the cage that Osmond sets for Archer, preventing her from pursuing individual development. It reveals the evil essence of Osmond, symbolizes the male authority. Enlightened Archer is destined to break through the restriction and get out of the siege.

The above physical surroundings serve not only the background setting of the plot, but also the important part of narration. They are intermingled with the development of the story. With the aspiration for knowledge and experience which are endowed by the old house in Albany, Archer commits her exploration in Europe. She moves from one place to another, and gets renewed knowledge here and there. Driven by these new recognition, she achieves cognitive progress.

III. SOCIAL SPACE: CULTURAL INTEGRATION IN ARCHER'S MARRIAGE CHOICE

Henri Lefebvre states that social space is the materialization of social beings. It incorporates social actions, and it provides a platform for social beings to continuously communicate. All subjects either recognize themselves or lose themselves in that situated space. (Lefebvre, 1991) Thereupon social space reflects social life and interpersonal relationships by exposing people's social action. In Henry James' works, Europe and America are usually set up as two kinds of society and cultural forces, and they interact with each other. Archer's suitors stand for different culture, and her view on these suitors indicates her attitude towards the corresponding culture, her choice of the American expatriate Osmond demonstrates her inner wish of cultural integration.

The young, innocent and imaginative freedom-searcher Archer has been the focus of attention since she got Europe. Casper Goodwood, Lord Warburton and Osmond fall in love with her and propose to her respectively. Casper Goodwood, head of a large cotton-factory in Massachusetts, is tall, masculine, strong, industrious, and energetic. He falls deeply in love with Archer and follows her to Europe. However, Archer cares nothing of his successful career. She is unsatisfied with his out appearance. She thinks his jaw is too square. His figure is too straight and stiff. His dressing is always in the same manner, and his garments have a way of looking rather too new. His appetites and designs are too simply and artlessly. When he stays with someone he talks too much about the same subject, but when other people are present, he talks too little about anything. The most terrible thing is that Goodwood has never corresponded to Archer's idea properly. So she is reluctant to correspond with him, not to mention reacting to his love. Apparently, Casper Goodwood is the symbol of American culture. Americans advocate materialism and pragmatism. As a well-known young country of immigrants, the US is dwelt by people of different nations, classes, religions and languages. But the American share the same character—pursuing liberty and equality and seeking adventures. In order to realize their American dream, they have to work hard; in order to survive, they adhere to pragmatism and self-reliance. America, accordingly, develops into a society running after material wealth. The money-oriented value results the lack of spiritual pursuits. Thus Americans fail to develop as good artistic sensibility as the Europeans do and are relatively ignorant of the complex social forms. That may explain Goodwood's lack of elegant manners. Having tasted the apple of knowledge, experienced the charm of European culture, Archer definitely rejects Goodwood's proposal. In doing so, she rejects the stiffness and aggressiveness of American culture.

Lord Warburton, being different from Casper Goodwood, is an English gentleman of charming taste and rich experience. He occupies a position that appeals to imagination, enjoys great opportunities, great wealth, great power, and a natural share in the public affairs of a great country. He seems to have everything, to know everything, and to be everything. Archer likes this specimen English gentleman. Moreover, she is quite interested in Warburton's house, family and English aristocracy. But when she gets the proposal from Warburton, she is not ready to accept it. "I am not, I am really and truly not able to regard you in the light of a companion in life... I shall never be able to see mine in the manner you proposed." (James, 1999, p.110) Archer is still intimidated by Warburton's social status. Warburton's title and parliament membership make him associated with and also dependent on the social system. Being his wife would be inevitably labeled with those title and social position. Although she admires European culture, she is afraid of being drawn by the territorial, political and social magnate into a conventional system where she would go farther away from her free will. She is unwilling to lose her own orbit in freedom seeking. Therefore, American ideas of independence, liberty and equality impel Archer to give up the proposal from the pure European origin gentleman.

The above two objections reveal that Isabel is not satisfied with European or American culture respectively. She admires the elegance and nobility of European culture and also advocates the independence and liberty of American culture. Americans adhere to democracy, liberty and independence, while Europeans are proud of their long-last history, and they attach great importance to etiquette and convention. Therefore, Americans tend to be more sincere while Europeans usually wear hypocritical garments in communication. Archer gradually realizes this diversity between honesty and craftiness. She is in searching for the combination of this two national traits. Unfortunately, she is too inexperienced to judge the true successful integration among the American expatriates, she mistakenly takes Gilbert Osmond as the perfect representative and accept his proposal disregarding the disapproval from all her relatives. Besides, Osmond is a poor artist. He has no career, no name, no position, no fortune... except for a daughter Pansy. Osmond will threaten Isabel neither in social status nor in financial condition. Archer even feels fortunate to be able to support him with her dowry. She is deeply in love, not in love with Osmond the man, but in love with her own illusion she invents about Osmond.

The social space is "created by the relations of people to one another, the structure of those relations, and the laws and mores that regulate them" (Kort, 2004, p.20). Laws and mores that regulate the relations between Archer and her suitors are manifestation of culture. Culture is displayed in her social space. She deals with the cultural conflicts in making the choice of a life companion. Her selection in marriage implies her view on culture and her aspiration for cultural integration. Which echoes with the author Henry James. James was born into a rich American family of transcendentalist. He grew up in the world of Emerson, Fuller, and Thoreau who are insistently American in their commitments. But James travelled a lot with his family. He took residence in many European cities during his youth and adolescence. In 1875, he became permanent resident of Europe. During James' long life from 1843 to 1916, the world pattern had changed dramatically. In the first half of 19th century, Europe boasted richest culture and well-reserved traditions. The newly established America still remained a land of poverty and wildness. And Americans were considered inferior to their European counterparts. So the European got absolute upper hand over the American. Then in the middle of 19th century, the situation changed due to the American Civil War which brought commerce and industry flourishing in America. The Gilded Age came accordingly, and the unparalleled industrialization had changed America from an old agricultural country into an industrial one. As the new leading power in the world, Americans began to reconsider its relationship with Europe. They poured into Europe, touring Europe with great pride, even arrogance. They were so indulged in their own self-conceit that they merely regarded Europe as a holiday toy, ignoring its rich and colorful cultures. Inevitably, they turned into the laughing stock of many polished Europeans for their cultural ignorance and social roughness. The sharp conflicts between them were keenly perceived by Henry James, and were unfolded thoroughly in his literary output. At the end of 19th century, the major countries of Europe fulfilled industrialization. The process of modernization transformed European society greatly. The Europeans gradually abandoned some obsolete notions and tend to be open-minded and tolerant to new things and new comers. Meanwhile, the frustrated Americans kept reflecting and realized their own vulgarness. They learned from the Europeans to make up for their own deficiency. Both of the Europeans and Americans stretched out tentative hands for closer contact. This trend of cultural fusion made its appearance in 1880s which witnessed the rapid development of mass culture, and it developed increasingly strikingly as their frequent contacts. James expressed this anticipation of a global village in a letter to his elder brother William James saying "This big Anglo-Saxon total is destined to such an amount of melting together" (Bellringer, 1988, p.16-7). James' perspective on European and American culture was indebted to Matthew Arnold (1822-1888), the British critic of literature, culture and society in the Victorian period, who proposed two famous symbolic terms—"Hebraism" and "Hellenism" to indicate the Hebraic and Greek culture source, which respectively call for duty and beauty. Inspired by Arnold, James realized that the American was Hebraic and the European was Hellenic. He claimed that the ideal civilization lied in "the dichotomy of American-Hebraic and European-Hellenic" (Berland, 1981, p.35). He tried every effort to combine them together as two indispensable parts of an entirety. Then his literary works are characterized by indications of cultural integration in the new phase of global modernization. Archer's choosing Osmond in *The Portrait of a Lady* constitutes such an exemplification. However, James didn't carry on with culture just for the sake of study, but emphasized its significance in reshaping and reforming human nature, and in enhancing and perfecting human life. That also explained why he placed the center of the subject

in the protagonist Archer in the novel.

IV. MENTAL SPACE: REALIZATION OF ARCHER'S SELF-IDENTIFICATION

In *The Portrait of a Lady*, Henry James places the center of the subject in the protagonist Archer's own consciousness, emphasizes her relation to herself. (James, 1999) Therefore, the novel can be viewed as the portrait of Archer's mental space which is considered as the result of intellectual activity, and conveys itself in language, both spoken and written. The focus on Archer's consciousness makes this representative innocent abroad story nationalized. It can be better understood as a dazed and confused American searching for a purchase on her own identity in a foreign clime. It constitutes one of the remaking of cultural power at the moment when capital, communications, and culture began to circulate more freely across geographical borders and boundaries. It is only when Archer gets Europe that she is able to define her own national identity. Meanwhile, it is only by the same process that the Europeans are forced to recognize their own transformation into objects of exotic touristical interest, and into stereotypes. Thus the fate of being American abroad is the major concern of James, and the American identification is the core of Archer's consciousness.

Archer has experienced great cultural shock in aristocratic Europe. First, she is from the country without long history of brilliant civilization and sophisticated social conventions, so she appears simple, innocent, and inexperienced. Although she reads a lot and boasts rich imagination, she has little real world experience. She has never seen the outside world before she comes to Europe with her aunt. She asks her cousin Ralph whether there is a ghost in Gardencourt when she gets there. Ralph says that the ghost can never be seen by such a young, happy, innocent girl like her. Ralph claims that she must have suffered first and then the miserable knowledge of suffering would make her minds open to Europe. Which implies her hardship in achieving spiritual maturity. Her idea is dogmatic, and her confidence is inflated. She is determined to see, to try and to know; she is thirsty for knowledge and experience; she is eager to live her own lives in her own way. However, her Puritan tradition which is characterized by moral earnestness and suspicion of pleasure endows her with sense of obligation and integrity and then prevents her from enjoying the life.

Secondly, influenced by Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882) who advocates to maintain the valuable American trait of being innocent and divine, she has no sense of evil. She keeps an optimistic attitude towards life. The world seems to her the best of everything. Its evil appears to be absent from her knowledge. Besides, Archer believes that her pure and noble nature would keep the undesirable things away from her. She thinks her life should always be in harmony with the most pleasing impression she should produce. However, the world is not what she expected to be. She fails to recognize and falls into the trap of Osmond and Madame Merle ultimately.

After marriage, Archer gradually realizes the malicious nature of Osmond, discovers the intimacy between Osmond and Madame Merle, and clarifies their motivation of this conspiracy. She gets shocked, just like a struck by a sudden flicker of light. Her dreams, her freedom, her independence, all come to be disillusioned. But after deep reflection, she decides to face the challenging marriage rather than get rid of it. The opening end of this novel— Archer's starting for Rome, going back to her marriage, attracts large scale of attention. Many are confused about her return. The author of this paper intends to explain it from two aspects of American tradition, so as to reveal its significance in Archer's construction of self-identity.

The first aspect of American tradition should be the idea of self-reliance from Ralph Waldo Emerson. Emerson is the leading figure of the New England Transcendentalists. He held a distinct view that the human instinct was good and should be followed rather than restrained. He appealed the American people to trust in their own thoughts, respect their own mind and cherish their own ideas rather than rely on others, claiming: "To believe your own thought, to believe that what is true for you in your private heart is true for all men,—that is genius ...A man should learn to detect and watch that gleam of light which flashes across his mind from within, more than the luster of firmament of bards and sages."(Emerson, 2012, p. 257-8) Emerson encouraged the Americans to rely on themselves, to see and think independently instead of following the conventions. Thus, self-reliance of an individual is superior to the conformity of the society and institutions. Emerson was among the lists of writers who influenced James greatly. His thought on self-reliance was deeply rooted in the minds of James' American characters and became a key element of the development of the plot. Archer is characterized by the Emersonian self-reliance. She is of independent thinking and always follows her own heart and instinct rather than submitting to the authority. She has her own ideas, and keeps her act in accordance with those ideas. She thinks highly of her own opinion. When Ralph mentions unwittingly that his mother adopts her, Archer got unpleasant and shows her disapproval of being adopted. She wants to be independent individual rather than the helpless, obedient adopted daughter. She depends on no one but herself in doing things and making choices. Archer values the right of choice very much. To her, choice means liberty, and liberty is based on independent judgment. "I try to judge things for myself; to judge wrong, I think, is more honorable than not to judge at all... I wish to choose my fate and know something of human affairs beyond what other people think it compatible with propriety to tell me."(James, 1999, p.146) She makes her own decision to marry Osmond. Though that choice turns to be a tragic, she insists on keeping it and facing the life she chooses. After all, to judge wrong, is more honorable than not to judge at all. With the reflection of her early life, Archer gradually comprehends that only love in life will remain forever while pain will be gone in the end. She is confident that she can live a life that she wants by going back to Rome. Therefore, to return to Rome is the reflection of her optimism towards life as Americans always hold. And it is the best way to show her acceptance of her own will, to manifest her free choice, independent judgment and self-reliance.

The second aspect is the Puritan tradition. Compared with the sophisticated Europeans, the American people had stronger moral conscience. For which American Puritanism put great emphasis on man's obligation and responsibility. Believing in predestination, original sin and limited atonement, the American Puritan ancestors were very cautious about their own behaviors. In devoting themselves to the construction of a new community in the harsh physical environment, they regarded life as a serious and difficult business, and thus worked very hard and lived in an extremely self-disciplined life style. They also despised trivial, playful or merely entertaining art forms. Although being criticized for its moral restrictiveness and killjoy way of life, American Puritanism played significant role in forming the moral outlook of America. Thus, the strong sense of morality became one of the representative American traits. Archer's moral conscience makes its appearance in her selection of husband. She chooses the impoverished Osmond rather than the wealthy men like Caspar Goodwood and Lord Warburton. She even claims that she loves Mr. Osmond for his poverty, because she regards Osmond as a distressed Prince and wants to help him out with her large sum of money, which is offered by her uncle. Her moral conscience also falls on Osmond's innocent daughter Pansy. She regards Pansy as "part of the responsibility she could face" (James, 1999, p.382). She thinks that life without duty would be meaningless and she would like to shoulder her share of responsibility with poor Osmond. Actually, she surrenders to Osmond with a kind of humility, and she marries him with a kind of pride as she is not taking, but giving. Though she is driven heartbroken by the marriage trap, she sticks to her promise to Pansy and takes her own responsibility bravely. By which, her moral coherence is achieved, and her identification with American culture is realized. As a confident American, Archer has been tried hard to adjusting herself to European culture, to seek for a new, ideal cultural self. She has the great confidence that she should be one of the best, should move in a realm of light, of natural wisdom, of high impulse, of inspiration gracefully chronic. And she has made it. It is through her misfortune in marriage that she learns the dark side of human nature and the sophistication of European society. It is by drawing nourishment from European culture, by preserving her national traits—strong moral conscience and self-reliance throughout the European journey that she has established her own cultural identity regardless of the cultural conflicts.

V. CONCLUSION

The family background and life experience allowed sensitive Henry James to cast a skeptical eye on culture conflicts, and made him a shrewd observer of human relation. He focused his attention on the protagonist Archer in *The Portrait of a Lady* and made Archer's consciousness the key point of the novel. James even intentionally weakens the sense of time through ambiguous time markers and time span, offering no exact age or date, for highlighting Archer's thoughts and feelings. From the consciousness flow, we comprehend her growth in knowledge and experience, her maturity in dealing with the conflicts between European and American culture, between the outside world and her inner aspiration, and her success in self-identification. It also reflects James deep thinking on those issues. Reconsidering James' responding to social and political transformations, his struggling with his time, his way of dealing with cultural conflicts from the perspective of our new century, we can develop a better understanding on our own confusing circumstances at the beginning of the 21st century, especially with regard to the global power—US, for James has offered us great inspiration through his literary endeavors.

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Chenyang Bai is an associate professor of English language and literature at Zhejiang Agriculture and Forestry University, Hangzhou, China. She teaches the courses such as Appreciation of Classic English Works. Her research interests are English language and culture.