

Evaluation of the Natural Narrative Contrast and Historical Evolution of Chinese and Western Tragic Theories

Guojian Wu

Social Sciences China Press, Beijing, China
wuguojian1025@163.com

Keywords: Chinese and Western Tragedies, Theoretical Forms, Natural Narrative Contrast, Historical Evolution

Abstract: Tragedy is an important genre of drama, which occupies an important position in both the history of Chinese literature and the history of world literature. The feeling of tragedy often generates infinite power. Although tragedy exists in Chinese and Western cultures, it is manifested in various historical forms, including geographical factors, living conditions, cultural customs, etc. Therefore, this paper analyzed the origin, causes, themes and character characteristics of Chinese and Western tragedies, analyzed the natural description and historical process of theoretical forms, analyzed the differences between Western Europe and China's traditional tragedies and their causes, and better understood the formal characteristics of Western Europe and China's tragedies. At the same time, people can have a deeper understanding of Chinese and Western cultural traditions. Through analysis, it can be concluded that the popularity of Western tragedies is the highest in the youth stage, and the popularity of Western tragedies is 53%; the popularity of Chinese tragedies is the highest in middle age and old age, and the popularity of Chinese tragedies is 62% in middle age and 60.5% in old age. The structural form of Chinese tragedies is mostly ordinary people's tragedies, while western tragedies are mostly heroic tragedies. In Chinese tragedies, heroic tragedies account for 20%, destiny tragedies account for 30%, and ordinary people tragedies account for 50%; in Western tragedies, heroic tragedies account for 56%, destiny tragedies account for 32%, and ordinary people tragedies account for 12%.

1. Introduction

Due to the differences in cultural tradition, mentality and artistic aesthetics, the Chinese view of tragedy has some similarities with the western view of tragedy, but there are also obvious differences. There are different ideas about the manifestations and values of tragedy. Chinese tragedies are mostly social tragedies or ethical tragedies, while western tragedies are human tragedies or destiny tragedies. The Chinese have no personal consciousness. Even the most intelligent philosophers and sociologists like class analysis. The differences between Chinese tragedies and Western tragedies are manifested in different themes, tragic conflicts between man

and nature, and different writing methods. China is used to "joy and worry", while the West is good at "from tragedy to death". Among various creative purposes, China emphasizes the purpose of ethical education, while the West tends to criticize reality.

Most Chinese tragedies end with perfect reunion, and most of them show national color. An D U believed that the concept of tragedy contains differences and contradictions in the modern Chinese cultural environment. The concept of tragedy presents contradictions between individuality, utilitarianism and anti-utilitarianism, enlightenment heteronomy and aesthetic autonomy [1]. Song D believed that when tragic factors emerge, it attempts to transcend tragedy and turn tragedy into human charm. This is mainly determined by the unique aesthetic psychology of the Chinese, social and contemporary factors [2]. Chen J thought that the self-doubt about whether China has tragedy can be traced back to a possible proud moment in the complex history of China's contact with the West, that is, the introduction of Chinese classical drama into Europe [3]. Lin Y Q profoundly narrated the tragic fate of the existence of Chinese female images, revealed the social status, inner world and personality characteristics of women in traditional Chinese culture, and explained the tragic roots of Chinese women's existence from the perspective of Chinese culture [4]. Yang J compared the differences between Du Shiniang and Medea in female self-consciousness, explored the cultural reasons behind their behaviors, and found the cultural differences between China and the West [5]. JU analyzed the tragic plot in *A Dream of Red Mansions* to explore whether there are similarities between Chinese and Western tragedies [6]. All the above studies have described the characteristics of Chinese tragedies, but there are still deficiencies in the study of comparison with western tragedies.

The cultural characteristics of tragedies in China and the West are not the same, especially in terms of the narrative and historical evolution of things. Liu H's analysis of the differences between Chinese and Western traditional tragic ideas and their causes would help people to better understand Chinese and Western cultural traditions, their tragedies and related theories [7]. Martin W believed that tragedy literature is intended to provide moral compensation for suffering, which is much greater than what is generally believed now, and that the tragic protagonists are usually degraded because of their own mistakes [8]. MD Silva believed that the preventable maternal mortality rate in Solomon Islands is very high and bears a disproportionate burden due to poor perinatal outcomes. There is no targeted research to investigate the causes of preventable stillbirth [9]. Wen C believed that compared with western tragic creation and theory, Chinese traditional tragedies are not rich and different in tragic significance [10]. Chen Y S believed that *The Death of the Number One Scholar* is a hybrid of traditional tragedy theory and modern tragedy theory. This is the survival dilemma of local opera creation and the condition to reflect the tragic consciousness of playwrights [11]. Feng J X analyzed the Chinese classical tragic masterpieces "Orphan" and "Snow in Midsummer" from the perspective of "tragic plot theory", with a view to finding the coincidence between the eastern and western tragedies and discussing the charm of tragedy [12]. The above studies have all described the narrative differences between Chinese and Western tragedy theories, but there are still many deficiencies in the historical advancement.

Traditional Chinese literature, whether "literature carries morality" or "poetry carries ambition", pursues lofty ideals and good moral feelings, proving the value of loftiness, justice and existence, as well as the concept of tragedy. In western tragedy theory, this view reflects the limitation of reason to tragedy, that is, the pursuit of human dignity, holiness and spiritual purity. This tragic situation is seen as a test of human dignity and strength. It is believed that there is eternal justice and people would surely embark on a better path. Therefore, both Chinese and Western traditional tragedies reflect the pursuit of loftiness, solemnity, truth, goodness and beauty. However, Chinese traditional tragedies are fundamentally different from western tragedies, so this paper studies the differences between Chinese and western traditions by illustrating the works with obvious tragic effects in

literature and novels.

2. Comparison of the Historical Evolution of Chinese and Western Tragedies

(1) Comparison of the origins of chinese and western tragedies

Due to the huge differences between Chinese and Western cultures, the background and process of drama culture development also show significant differences [13-14]. Chinese ancient opera originated in the pre Qin Dynasty. After the development of the Northern and Southern Song Dynasty, Chinese opera made a qualitative leap and gradually formed a complete form. On the other hand, the development of the old communication lines to promote cultural exchanges has affected the cultural exchanges of ethnic minorities bordering on foreign cultures. In the western world, the concept of tragedy is embodied in drama, and ancient Greek tragedy is widely mentioned in most western tragedies, which is also the root of the whole tragedy system. After social changes, the ancient Greek tragedy began to weaken in the ancient Greek era. The West believes that tragedy creation is the creation standard of the Renaissance. In the history of drama development for more than 2000 years, western tragic drama has gradually formed the overall structure system of western literature, as shown in Figure 1.

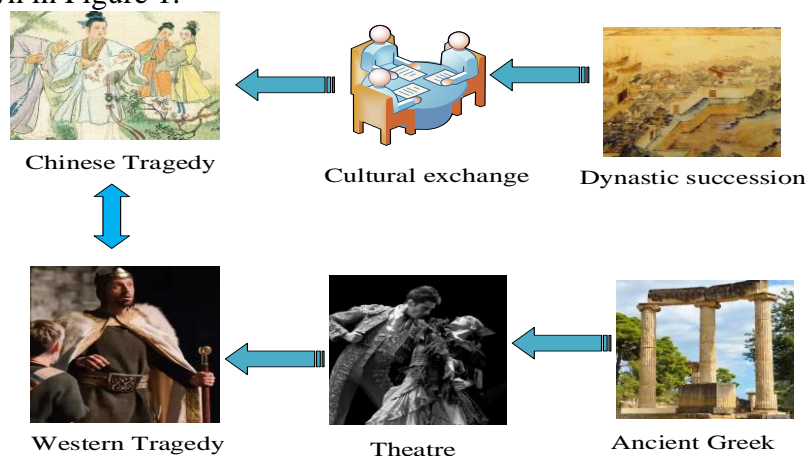


Figure 1: Comparison of the origin of Chinese and Western tragedies

(2) A comparison of the expressive techniques of chinese and western tragedies

From the beginning, Chinese operas have all emphasized the creation of tragedies in the form of setting off the characters by the environment. This creation not only reflects people's spiritual demands, but also describes the characters' character and spirit in the background of the characters' environment. Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai depicts the best images of men and women in the minds of the ancients. Compared with the miserable love in the article, the characters are more impressive [15]. However, the manifestations of western tragedies are quite different. As far as the content structure is concerned, the Western structure is an all-inclusive network. It is hoped that the whole background can accurately and completely describe the style and characteristics of the social period, as shown in Figure 2. This is why Western drama and dance are not only a description of tragic history, but also an answer to the real tragedy of this era. Therefore, the tragic psychology of the characters in Hamlet is based on the multidimensional approach of western tragedy, which truly reflects the dark side of human nature, cruel social status and social humanism [16].

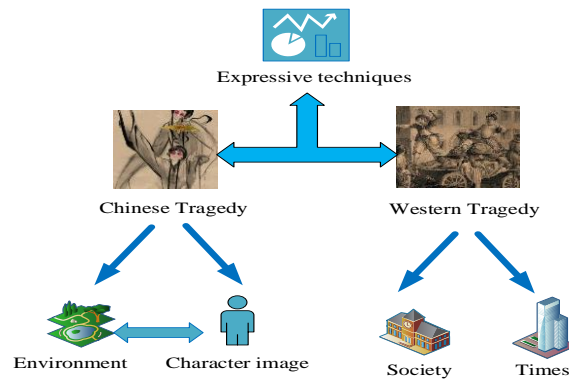


Figure 2: Comparison of expression methods of Chinese and Western tragedies

3. Evaluation of the Differences between the Theoretical Forms of Chinese and Western Tragedies

(1) Differences between Chinese and Western tragedy views

The differences between Chinese and Western tragedies are mainly shown in five aspects, as shown in Figure 3.

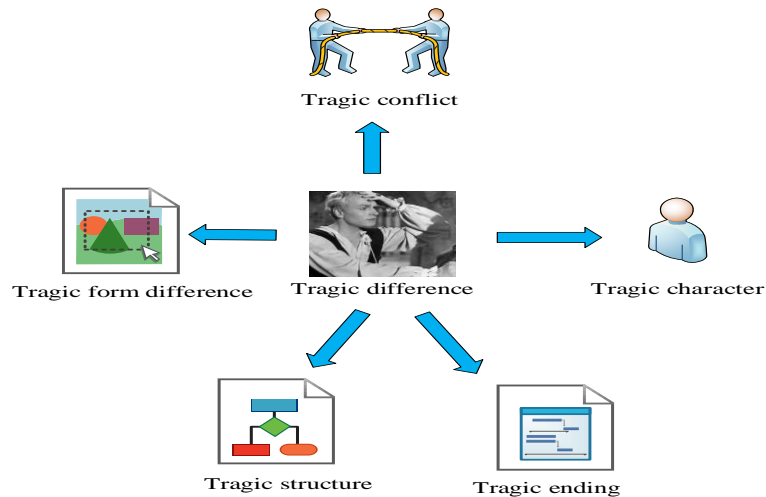


Figure 3: Differences between Chinese and Western tragedy views

1) Tragic conflict

Western classical tragedy is usually the main reason why tragic characters achieve tragedy. There are many tragedies of fate in ancient Greek tragedies. The fate is like an irretrievable net, and the tragic people are doomed to perish. In Poetics, western writers opposed the "mechanical decomposition" commonly seen in Greek tragedies at that time, and seldom mentioned the "destiny" often said by Greeks. They believed that the main cause of tragedy was not fate, but people's rejection of God's intervention in the tragic plot. In addition, it is also believed that tragedy would arouse people's sympathy and fear, as well as those who have made minor mistakes but have experienced misfortune. Fear comes from people who work as hard as people but are not happy. Chinese classical tragedies are usually manifested in the conflict between social forces and political forces [17]. Sometimes, the strength of both sides is the same, but in most cases, the evil force is stronger than the good force at the beginning of the conflict, and would increase or decrease during the conflict. Heroes in tragedy are usually morally perfect. They fall into tragedy mainly because the evil forces are too strong. On the other hand, they do not hesitate to pursue moral perfection and

stop on the way of pursuing morality.

2) Tragic character

Western writers believe that the hero of tragedy should be a celebrity with a prominent family background, so they feel a noble sense of tragedy. Therefore, the main characters of western classical tragedies are often nobles, legendary heroes or emperors. Only in modern classical works can this situation be changed. Chinese classical tragedy does not limit the personality, status and family of tragic characters. Many of them are small people at the bottom of the society. In the face of enormous social difficulties, they show the tragic situation of ordinary people. Tragic characters are often very vulnerable and must resist attacks that may lead to external evil forces, which can easily cause sympathy and pity. Chinese tragedies especially emphasize the virtues of heroes and show the amazing spiritual strength of the weak. Western tragedies mostly reflect the internal contradictions and conflicts between people. Heroes are often complex, and people's weaknesses are often the main factor in their tragedies [18]. Heroes in Chinese tragedies are generally relatively pure and perfect, with good character, kindness and perseverance. They may have character defects, but this is not the main reason for their tragedy. In essence, the images of tragic characters are errors and tragedies caused by the inability to distinguish ugly social phenomena.

3) Tragic form difference

Because of the differences in the theories of tragedy creation, Chinese drama has endowed romanticism and ideal aesthetic significance. The aesthetic feeling that the audience enjoyed in the Chinese tragedy was pleasant and increased their interest. Aesthetic atmosphere is more familiar than rational thinking. They are familiar with the form centered behavior. The main motive force of Chinese tragedy is public consciousness, and the aesthetic principle of form is aesthetics. However, the characters depicted in western tragedies are realistic, and rational thinking is more than formal appreciation. The tragedy of passion diminishes with the familiarity of the plot. Rational thinking is formal appreciation, or it may be that people have read it many times. The more familiar with the tragic characters, the more difficult it is to understand the protagonist's emotions. The main driving force of western tragedies is the rationality of the audience, while the form aesthetics is the truth.

4) Tragic structure

The common sadness, joy and alienation in western tragedies greatly reduce the aesthetic impact of tragedies, but at the same time, the opposite emotions prevent tragedies from becoming reality. On the other hand, good cannot be accepted, and evil cannot be accepted and ends in tragedy. However, Chinese tragedies emphasize the contrast of plot development, that is, the contrast of plot development. This is basically a happy ending. No matter how unhappy the heroes are, they also have a happy ending. As for the organization of tragic events, western drama experienced a strong concentration from joy to sadness, which led to the sudden end of tragedy. Its aesthetic quality lies in the variability and uniqueness of tragedy. Chinese tragedies use linear stretching techniques and are usually associated with sadness. The most obvious purpose of western drama is not to prolong the tragic ending, but to prolong the painful process. The contrast of emotions and sorrows gradually leads to tragic results, which is a progressive trend. At the same time, aesthetic attributes are also related to the process and contrast of tragedy.

5) Tragic ending and the realization of tragic value

Western tragedies are usually opposed to comedy endings because they weaken the high importance of tragedies, and tragedies have serious consequences for the most classic tragedies. Western writers believe that the purpose of tragedy is to awaken sympathy and fear, to liberate and purify the audience's feelings, and to enlighten people's minds. At the same time, it also believes that the destruction of beauty would cause people's pity, and the cruelty of fate and human weakness lead to the tragedy of human existence. Chinese classical tragedies often end with the victory of happiness and justice and the shameless punishment of evil forces. Because the Chinese believe in

retribution for good and evil, while the Greeks have no sense of destiny, there is no real tragedy [19]. In China, tragedy is almost synonymous with comedy. Chinese tragic writers always like the happy ending of good and evil retribution. The happy ending of tragedy cannot be completely denied, but it needs detailed analysis. The characteristics of the classical ending of Chinese tragedies are partly related to the value of Chinese tragedies. In ancient China, the importance attached by literary works to the role of social education enabled justice to overcome evil, praised virtue and power, and affected public education.

(2) The reasons for the differences between Chinese and Western tragedy views

There are two reasons for the differences between Chinese and Western traditional tragic views, as shown in Figure 4.

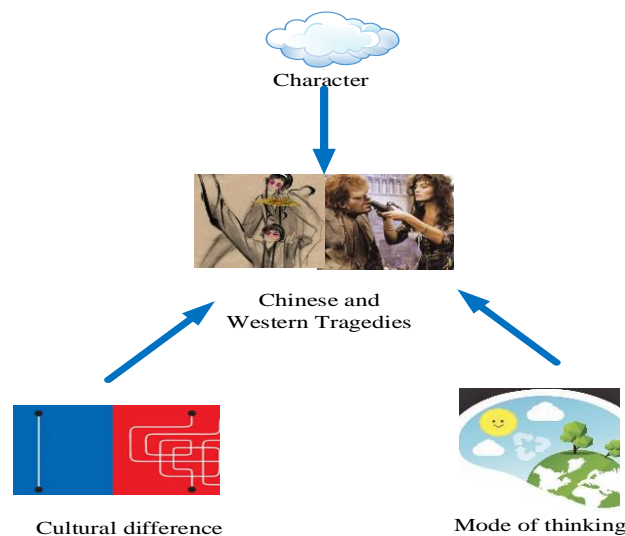


Figure 4: Reasons for the differences between Chinese and Western tragedy views

1) The tragic view developing between China and the West

The great difference between Chinese and Western traditions is closely related to the social and historical conditions of China and the West, as well as the resulting cultural and psychological characteristics. The feeling of tragedy is a feeling that people have after suffering. The painful challenges that people suffer often occur in different regions and at different times. It is precisely because of people's understanding and feelings of different things that China and Europe have different views on tragedy. In addition, the types of tragedies are also different due to the changes in their traditions and western tragedies. Tragedies in different periods in China and the West reflect different life experiences in different periods. The great differences between Chinese and Western history and culture naturally led to the differences in the nature and concepts of Chinese and Western classical tragedies. Therefore, people cannot determine which tragedy is the most accurate and which is the most noble from a certain standard.

2) The influence of different thinking modes of China and the West on the tragedy view

The ancient Greek spirit emphasized rationality and logical knowledge. In other words, people should study not only the secrets of nature, but also human nature. Compared with Chinese culture, western culture pays more attention to personal rather than social relations. Therefore, Western tragedies focus on exploring the character and significance of people as independent individuals, taking the most tragic characters as the root of the tragedy, and revealing the complex aspects. The purpose of traditional Chinese thought is to create a harmonious life order, a warm family and a reasonable social and national order through moral force. Therefore, the focus of Chinese classical literature is the power conflict between good and evil. This sense of tragedy occurs in the embodiment of good and justice and the pain and destruction of people's pursuit of ideals and moral

norms. Chinese tradition emphasizes the ethical and moral pursuit of social groups, which determines the differences between Chinese and Western tragic views.

4. Comparison of the Differences in the Evolution of Theoretical Forms of Tragedy between China and the West

In order to study the evolution of the natural narrative form of Chinese and Western tragedies, this paper analyzed the differences between the tragic characters in Chinese and Western tragedies through a comparative study of the origins and characters in Chinese and Western tragedies. First of all, 30 tragedies in both China and the West were investigated to study the differences between Chinese and Western tragic characters. The origins of the characters were divided into ordinary people, aristocratic sons and emperors; the characters were divided into weak, strong and kind; the characters had happy endings and tragic endings. The specific research results are shown in Table 1, Table 2 and Table 3 respectively.

Table 1: Comparison of the origin of Chinese and Western characters

	Chinese Tragedy	Western Tragedy
Common people	70%	20%
Aristocratic Family Young Master	16.7%	40%
Emperor	13.3%	40%

Table 2: Comparison of Chinese and Western character

	Chinese Tragedy	Western Tragedy
Weak	39%	34%
Firm	38	40%
Good	23%	26%

Table 3: Comparison of the character ends of Chinese and Western tragedies

	Chinese Tragedy	Western Tragedy
Happy reunion	72%	34%
A tragic end	28%	66%
Total	100%	100%

According to Table 1, Table 2 and Table 3, most of the characters in Chinese tragedies are ordinary people. Aristocratic princes and emperors and generals are very rare. Because ordinary people have a kind and strong character, they still rise to the difficulties in the face of difficulties, and the ultimate is basically a happy ending for the sake of national justice. Tragic characters would basically have a good ending in the end, but there are also some tragic characters who still leave despite the support of justice. In contrast, Western tragic characters are mostly aristocratic princes and emperors, usually with strong qualities. However, most of the characters end in a sad ending, because Western culture pays attention to the characterization of characters and their personal destiny, but little attention is paid to national justice. Although they fight against difficulties, they fail to overcome the obstacles of fate in the end, and this kind of character's loss is a common form of tragedy in the West.

In order to study people's views on tragedy under the influence of Chinese and western cultures, 500 people from both China and the West were investigated to study their liking for China's Dou'e Yuan and Zhao's Orphan, as well as the West's Hamlet and King Lear. Each tragedy can only be selected once. The specific research results are shown in Figure 5.

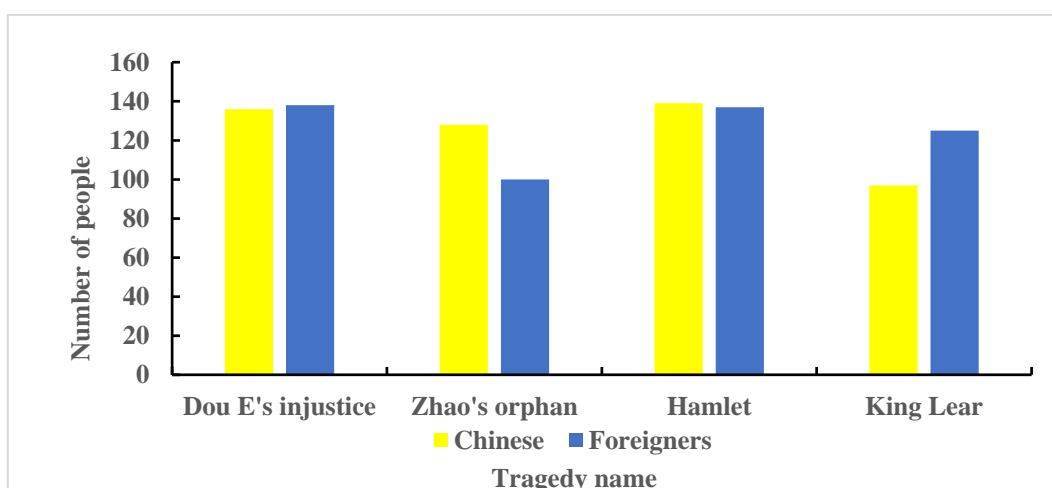


Figure 5: People's love of Chinese and Western tragedies

According to the data in the figure, the Chinese have the highest liking for Hamlet, accounting for 27.8% of the total number of Chinese. The popularity of King Lear among Chinese people is the lowest, accounting for 19.4% of the total number. Dou'E's Tragedy ranks second, accounting for 25.8% of the total. Westerners are the most fond of Dou'E's Tragedy, accounting for 27.6% of the total number of people in the West. The lowest love for Zhao's Orphan accounts for 20% of the total number, and Hamlet ranks second, accounting for 27.4% of the total number. To sum up, people in both China and the West like Hamlet the most, because Hamlet portrays a positive character who always adheres to personal principles and does not use violence even though full of hatred. Eventually, people would revenge, but also die for justice, which can arouse people's resonance and inspire people's pity. People have the lowest liking for King Lear, because Chinese readers have less access to foreign works. Relatively speaking, the tragic character of King Lear cannot arouse people's resonance.

In order to study the narrative situation and expression methods of Chinese and Western tragedies, this paper investigates the popularity of Chinese and Western tragedies at different age stages, with 200 people at each age stage. The age stage is divided into three stages: youth, middle age and old age. The narrative differences between Chinese and Western tragedies are studied according to the popularity of the three age stages. The specific research results are shown in Figure 6.

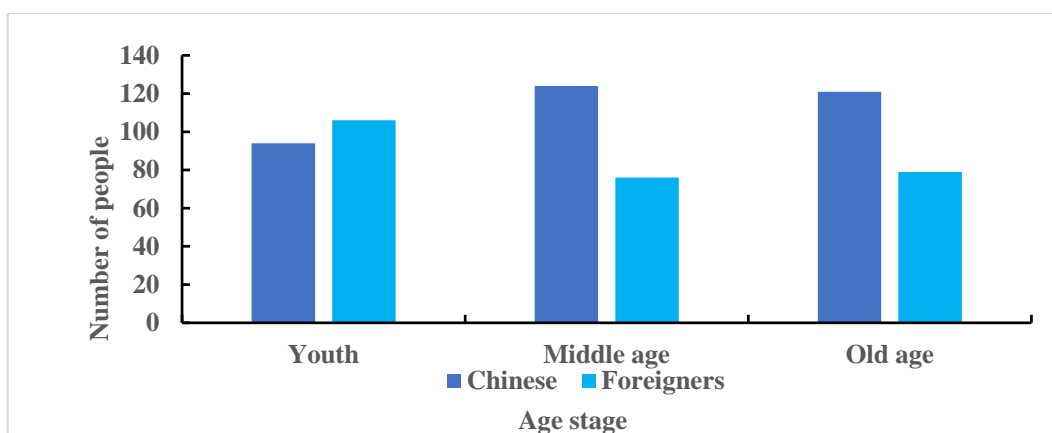


Figure 6: The popularity of Chinese and Western tragedies at different ages

According to the data in the figure, western tragedies are the most popular in youth, and the popularity of western tragedies is 53%; the popularity of Chinese tragedies is the highest in middle

age and old age, and the popularity of Chinese tragedies is 62% in middle age and 60.5% in old age. Because young people are easy to accept foreign novelty, can fully understand the feelings and images of the characters in western tragedies, and also like the origins and personality characteristics of western tragic characters, western tragedies are more popular among young people. In the middle age and old age, the kind-hearted and strong characters in Chinese tragedies can better reflect the national justice, and the ending of the characters is basically happy, which can arouse people's sympathy and compassion.

In order to study the evolution process of the theoretical form of Chinese and Western tragedies, this paper studies the evolution of the theoretical form by investigating the types of Chinese and Western tragedies. From the form of the structure of Chinese and Western tragedies, a total of 100 tragedies were investigated, including 50 tragedies in both China and the West. The types of tragedies are divided into heroic tragedies, destiny tragedies, and ordinary character tragedies. The specific investigation is shown in Figure 7.

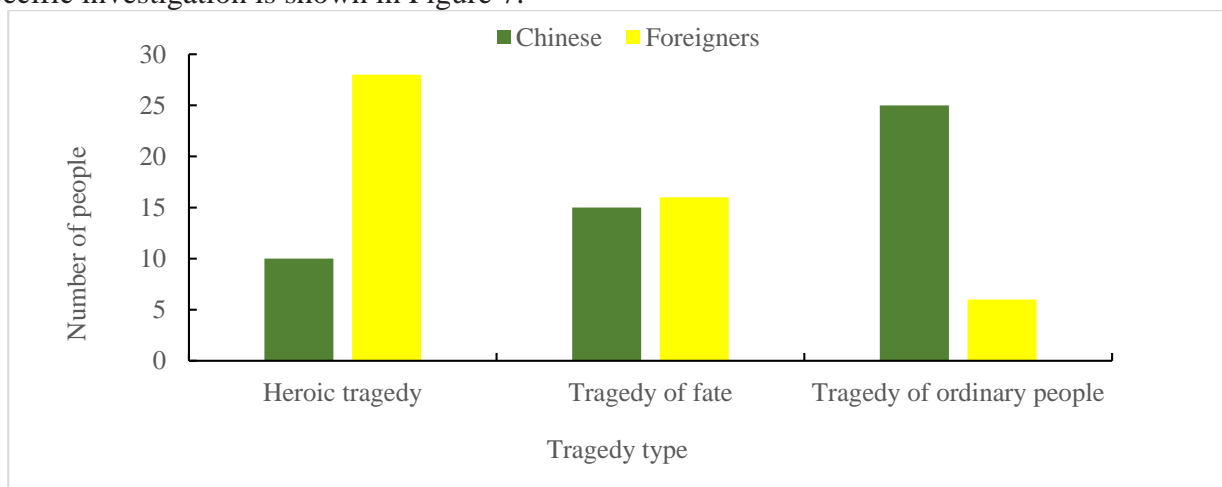


Figure 7: Types of Chinese and Western tragedies

According to the figure, most Chinese tragedies are ordinary people's tragedies, while most Western tragedies are heroic tragedies. In Chinese tragedies, heroic tragedies account for 20%, destiny tragedies account for 30%, and ordinary people's tragedies account for 50%; in Western tragedies, heroic tragedies account for 56%, destiny tragedies account for 32%, and ordinary people's tragedies account for 12%. Chinese tragedies are mostly ordinary task tragedies, mainly because of the influence of Confucian culture. The image of tragic characters needs to be highlighted by the origin of the characters. It is believed that ordinary characters can arouse people's pity, so that people can feel more real characters. In the final outcome, there is often a happy happy ending, ending in the form of comedy. The tragedy of the West is deeply influenced by the culture of ancient Greece, which believes that people are independent individuals, and the characters need a high background, but they are unwilling to accept the fate of the arrangement, focusing on the spirit of perseverance and strength shown by the characters in their struggle with the fate.

5. Conclusions

There are many wonderful tragedies in the history of Chinese and Western literature, which can arouse people's emotional resonance and set off a bigger and more lasting wave in people's minds. Tragedy is a precious treasure in the history of world literature. It can purify people's hearts, deepen people's thoughts, and endow people with infinite power. Neither the tragedy of the West nor the tragedy of China can be achieved by any other force. However, according to the cultural, psychological and artistic standards of Chinese and Western societies, tragic works have different

forms, but all have irreplaceable artistic charm. By analyzing the differences between Chinese and Western traditional tragedies and their causes, people can better understand the theoretical basis of Chinese and Western tragedies, and understand the narrative contrast between Chinese and Western tragedies.

References

- [1] An D U, Media S O, University G N. *National Consciousness, Ontological Consciousness and Stylistic Consciousness: The Ambivalent Modernity of Chinese Tragedy Poetics*[J]. *Journal of Guizhou Normal University (Social Sciences)*, 2018, 144(9):264-269.
- [2] Song D, Wang S, Humanities S O. *Change the Tragedy into Human Charming—On the Distillation of the Tragedy by Chinese Ancient Opera and Its Causes*[J]. *Journal of Hechi University*, 2017, 24(4):78-88.
- [3] Chen J, Qi S. *Tragedy, No Tragedy, and Tragedy with Chinese Characteristics? One Hundred Years of Debate with a 'Happy Ending'*[J]. *The Cambridge Quarterly*, 2020, 49(1):55-71.
- [4] Lin Y Q, Jia H W, Dechsubha T. *Interpretation of Female Tragedy Semiotics in the White Deer Plain--Take Tian Xiao'e as a Case* [J]. *Literature and Art Studies*, 2021, 9(10):620-625.
- [5] Yang J. *A Cross-cultural and Comparative Study on Female Self-consciousness Between Chinese and Western Tragic Women in Madam Du Sinks Her Treasure Chest in Anger and Medea*[J]. *Arts Studies and Criticism*, 2022, 3(1):56-60.
- [6] Ju W. *Aristotle's Tragedy Theory and Its Application in the Analysis of A Dream of Red Mansions*[J]. *Overseas English*, 2017, 2017(4):154-155.
- [7] Liu H. *Differences of Chinese and Western Traditional Concepts of Tragedy and the Reasons*[J]. *Ludong University Journal (Philosophy and Social Sciences Edition)*, 2017, 124(11):11-21.
- [8] Martin W. *Tragedy and Redress in Western Literature: A Philosophical Perspective*, by Richard Gaskin[J]. *Mind*, 2018, 128(7):993-1002.
- [9] MD Silva, Panisi L, Manubuasa L. *Preventable stillbirths in the Solomon Islands – A hidden tragedy*[J]. *The Lancet Regional Health - Western Pacific*, 2020, 19(2):54-59.
- [10] Wen C. *Probe into the Tragedy Sense of Puxian Opera the Number One Scholar's Death*[J]. *Journal of Zhejiang Vocational Academy of Art*, 2017, 54(3):24-29.
- [11] Chen Y S. *The Hegelian Tragedy, Negative Dialectic and Ethical Substance in Sophocles*'[J]. *Literature and Art Studies*, 2018, 8(4):11-16.
- [12] Feng J X. *On Chinese Classical Tragedies from Aristotle's Theory of Tragedy Plot—Taking Orphan and Snow in Midsummer as Examples* [J]. *Journal of Luohe Vocational Technology College*, 2017, 20(9):78-89.
- [13] Randolph R. *Arizona's Deadliest Gunfight: Draft Resistance and Tragedy at the Power Cabin, 1918*. By Heidi J. Osselaer [J]. *The Western Historical Quarterly*, 2020, 87(2):2-9.
- [14] Zkan H. *Book Review. Driven Toward Madness: The Fugitive Slave Margaret Garner and Tragedy on the Ohio*. Nikki M. Taylor [J]. *The Western Journal of Black Studies*, 2018, 42(2):83-84.
- [15] Chen J. *Britain's Forgotten War-time Tragedy to be Retold in a Chinese Documentary* [J]. *Cultural exchange*, 2018, 10(10):63-66.
- [16] Liu L. *Character Analysis of Oates' Wonderland—The Source of Tragedy: Willard Harte*[J]. *Overseas English*, 2018, 41(8):664-669.
- [17] Seaford R, Bostock R. *Tragedy, Ritual and Money in Ancient Greece (Selected Essays)* [J]. *Monetisation and the Genesis of the Western Subject*, 2018, 17(7):345-369.
- [18] Yun-Ting L U. *Spiritual Transformation of Western Civilization—Football as the Original Tragedy of the Modern Era* [J]. *Journal of Hebei Sport University*, 2018, 880(1):52-55.
- [19] Xiang L I, *Induction and Deduction: Discussion about Tragedy Character of 'The Story of Pipa'*[J]. *Journal of Mudanjiang University*, 2018, 51(9):1452-1459.