

**A Comparison of *War and Peace* and *A Farewell to Arms*****Hongbin Dai<sup>1</sup>, Xiying Liu<sup>2</sup>**<sup>1</sup>Xiamen University, Xiamen, China<sup>2</sup>Central China Normal University, Wuhan, China**\*Corresponding Author:**

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**Abstract:** By making a general comparison between *A Farewell to Arms* by Hemingway and *War and Peace* by Tolstoy, this article provides us with insightful and innovative perspectives on better comprehension of war novels and critical realism. Through comparison we find Hemingway was not only highly influenced by Tolstoy's techniques but he also developed them. He applied the technique of interior monologue as Tolstoy did, but his monologue had unique characteristics. Through comparison, we also acquire profound knowledge about the different cultures of the East and the West.**Keywords:** Comparison; *A Farewell to Arms*; Hemingway; *War and Peace*; Tolstoy.

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**1. Introduction.**

*War and Peace* is the master piece by Tolstoy (1828-1920), who "is the greatest of all novelists—for what else can we call the author of *War and Peace*" [1]. *A Farewell to Arms* is authored by the prestigious writer Ernest Hemingway (1899-1961). Both novels deal with wars and have similar themes such as love in the war, peace, etc. A probe into the two novels may assist in the better understanding of them. A comparison will further promote the reader's awareness of how great novels come into being and acquire a general idea of the relationship between the novels' respective authors.

**2. What They Have in Common.**

2.1. Both authors had war experiences before they wrote the novels and they both strongly detested wars. For Tolstoy, when he was twenty-three, he accompanied his brother to the Caucasus and was persuaded to enter the army. Then as a cadet, he engaged in the raids Russian troops made now and then on the rebellious mountain tribes. In 1854, when Tolstoy was twenty-six, the Crimean War broke out and he was promoted to the rank of lieutenant for distinguished bravery and courage at the battle on the Chernaya River. During and after his military service, Tolstoy wrote a great number of sketches, storied and novels, which reflected his viewpoints towards wars. Among these *War and Peace* is the representative one. The novel deals with the events of 1812. At that time, Napoleon is waging an aggressive war, a war of self aggrandizement. The Russians display the utmost self-sacrifice in fighting to liberate their country from the aggressors. Here, surely, is a distinction between a

"just" and an "unjust" war. Yet, despite the very real admiration which Tolstoy shows for the altruism of the Russian people, their consideration for others, their readiness to sacrifice comfort, property and wealth in the interests of their country, we cannot agree with those critics who see *War and Peace* primarily as a hymn of praise to a great and glorious feat of arms. To Tolstoy, no war--- not even a "just" defensive war--- can be anything but a human tragedy. *War and Peace* is an encomium to the simple Russian people rather than a patriotic tribute to 1812. It is a testimony of the way in which people live and behave. In the novel, Tolstoy expresses his attitude: War is stupid and unpredictable, but people are brave and put on clean shirts to die.

Just like Tolstoy, Hemingway had a lot of war experiences. World War I broke out in 1914, when Hemingway served as a reporter on probation. In the year 1918, he went to the Italian front as a volunteer. Unfortunately, he was badly wounded at Fossalta di Piave when an Austrian trench mortar exploded while he was on canteen duty. In 1937, Hemingway went to Spain and played an active part in the civil war. In the Second World War, he fought in France as the head of an irregular fighting unit. These experiences provided Hemingway with a lot of materials for novels about war, such as *A Farewell to Arms* and *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, etc. In *A Farewell to Arms*, Hemingway expressed his attitude toward wars clearly. The novel's famous opening establishes a contrast between the natural landscape without the troops (the river is "clear and swiftly moving and blue") and the landscape with the troops ("the dust they raised powdered the leaves of

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the trees”), and it notes the disruption of nature’s circle by the troops (“and the leaves fell early that year”). Thus, despite the apparently objective description, the passage clearly conveys Hemingway’s negative judgment about the war. As the chapter continues, we can make further inferences about the negative incursions of the war into nature. (“There were big guns too that passed in the day drawn by tractors, the long barrels of the guns covered with green branches and green leafy branches and vines laid over the tractors.”) Throughout the novel, the author implied his opinion: The war is highly destructive.

2.2. In the two novels, the authors both applied the technique of contrast. Though it is a big novel written over a long period of time, *War and Peace* has a relatively new architecture which makes the novel seem harmonious[2]. The basic contrast in *War and Peace* is the one inherent in the title. This is not simply a contrast between the periods when the country is at a war and the periods when it is not. War means military actions; peace means non-military actions whether in peace time or in war. There is a balance held in the composition of the book between military and non-military scenes, even toward the end, when a state of war is permanent. In the early parts of the novel the principle of juxtaposing and contrasting peace and war scenes is very obvious. Volume I is divided into three parts. The first is exclusively peace; the second is war; the third begins with peace and ends with war. Volume II covers the biggest span of years (1806-1812), and except for some brief chapters in the second part it is all peace. Volume III and IV describe a continuous period of war. But the threads of “war” and “peace” are no longer separate and parallel. They are closely interwoven. There is a clearly discernible pattern running through all the volumes of the novel which invariably begin and end with a significant scene or event in peace or in war. The two basic states of existence--- peace and war provide Tolstoy with a useful outer framework for his novel.

Within this framework the two states are inwardly contrasted. One is tempted to think that Tolstoy, with his love of contrast, wanted to draw a dividing line between the “good” war and the “bad” war. Tolstoy never evinces that all right is on the side of the Russian, all wrong on the side of the French. For him, war is an unmitigated evil. Structurally speaking, the arrangement of the war materials in *War and Peace* follows the line not of a just and unjust cause, but of “good” men and “bad” men.”Good” in the military context means unpretentious, aware of one’s own limitations, spontaneous, non-conformist; “bad” in the same context means arrogant, self-opinionated, disingenuous, hidebound and lustful for power.

Similarly, at the basis of the construction of the peace scenes in the novel is the contrast between “good”

families and “bad” ones. Moreover, the constructional device of antithesis so favored by Tolstoy may be seen to operate not only in contrasting groups, but also in contrasting scenes that directly succeed one another.

The total structure of *A Farewell to Arms* is developed around the series of contrasting situations. The contrasts Hemingway makes usually manifest the balances of design. One example is in the contrast he makes between sacred love and profane love, worked out not only in the usual connotations of those terms but also in the contrasting bases of the relationship between Frederic and Catherine in Book one and in the rest of the novel. An examination of these contrasts will serve to illustrate the closely-knit texture of the novel and the complex structural organization that sustains its surface.

We first meet Henry in the ambulance unit mess, where the officers are baiting the chaplain, a young country priest. Rinaldi, the surgeon-captain, accuses the priest, in good-natured bantering, of sexual introversion. Frederic is about to go on leave, and they tell him to visit Amalfi, Capri, or Naples, where they will give him addresses at which to find girls. The priest suggests that he should go instead to the Abruzzi: “There is good hunting. You would like the people and thought it is cold, it is clear and dry, and you could stay with my family. My father is a famous hunter.” “Come on,” said the captain, “we go whore-house before it shuts”[3].

Frederic not only goes to the Villa Rossa with Rinaldi, but also spends his leave on the kind of hunting Rinaldi has suggested, in “the smoke of cafes... nights in bed, drunk... waking and not knowing who it was with you...” (14) It is Rinaldi who introduces Frederic to Catherine Barkley, and Rinaldi who first visits Frederic in the field hospital after he has been wounded, bringing a bottle of cognac, talks of the girls at the Villa Rossa, and promises to send Frederic his “lovely cool English goddess.”

The priest’s visit to the hospital is in direct contrast. They discuss the progresses of the war. The priest is wary and wishes to return to the Abruzzi, “Where it is understood that a man may love God?” “You do not love Him at all?” he asked. “I am afraid of Him in the night sometimes.” “You should love Him.” “I don’t love much.” “Yes,” he said, “You do. What you tell me about in the nights. That is no love. That is only passion and lust. When you love you wish to do things for, you wish to sacrifice for, you wish to serve”(66).

This scene is re-echoed in Book Four after Frederic has discovered true love with Catherine. He is playing billiards in the hotel at Stresa with fragile worldly---wise Count Greffi, who has expected to become more devout as he grows older but somehow feels it to be a pity.

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“Maybe it is too late. Perhaps I have outlived my religious feeling.”

“My own comes only at night.”

“Then you too are in love. Do not forget that is religious feeling” (203).

The above contrasts play a significant part in the wholeness of the novel and contribute to the great success of the novel.

### 2.3. Their languages are simple, lucid and repetitive.

Anyone who has read one book or two by Tolstoy will be impressed by his simple and lucid language. He will never confuse his language with that of Dostoevsky or Turgenev, Gogol or Leskov. In *War and Peace*, Tolstoy often used spoken language to describe the principal characters. Prince Andrew and Pierre, Niohola and Natasha are immediately recognizable by the sort of things they say and the opinions they express, but the actual words they use are simple and common. One may imagine that they are taken from the day-to-day language of Tolstoy and his family in the 1860's. The main characters in the novel are in fact given relatively little direct speech [2]. When they speak, they do so briefly; they do not declaim at length or figure in long conversation pieces. One has the impression that more is said about them than they say themselves, and still more is expressed through interior monologue or through the author describing their thoughts, feelings and reactions. The language the author applied in the interior monologue, the characters' thoughts, feelings are easy and clear. Usually, metaphor, metonymy and simile are Tolstoy's literary images, but here in *War and Peace*, there is comparatively little richness of imagery. The images are not prominent in the novel, which makes it seem very simple and lucid.

Another distinguishing feature of Tolstoy's style which is everywhere in the text of *War and Peace* is repetition. A novelist who writes at such length as Tolstoy cannot afford to delineate a thing only once. He is more or less obliged to repeat a piece of information at least once if it has any significance. However, Tolstoy is not content with merely saying a thing twice. How often are we told that Julie Karagina became a wealthy heiress on her brother's death? That Kutuzov occupied his leisure time writing to Madame de Stael and reading French novels? That there was straw beneath the windows of the dying Bezukhov's house? These facts are repeated two, three and four times even. Their repetition aids the memory. It facilitates reading. There is no doubt that in this respect, Tolstoy was very considerate. The other variety of repetition, which is characteristic Tolstoyan, is the constant reiteration of some external details designed to characterize an individual. No one can fail to notice how the essence of a Tolstoyan character is distilled into mannerism, a gesture, a physical feature, and outward and visible sign which recurs continually and is the permanent property of that character. They identify the person by something more meaningful than a name, and

something less ossified than a stock epithet. The repeated reference to Napoleon's small white hands and Helene's bare white shoulders is not a conscious epic device. It's a combination of the assertion of a permanent, individualizing feature with the expression of a moral judgment. On suggesting what is most signify about his heroes, Tolstoy tries to evoke in the reader at the same time a positive or negative response to them. Napoleon's small hands suggest effeminacy and the absence of work; Helene's inadequate clothing is a sign of her brazenness. This type of repetition of external details, involving the frequent recurrence of identical words, is an example of how closely related a novelist's language and characterization are. Words are repeated because aspects of character have to be repeated, and once the words chosen to convey those aspects are altered, the characterization itself is altered, however slightly. Another type of repetition for Tolstoy is to introduce a word and then repeat it in the next sentence: The pattern is clear, and there is often an easily discernible system of links between consecutive sentences, and even, on occasions, between consecutive paragraphs. Generally speaking, repetition of one type or another, lucidity and simplicity are the characteristic features of Tolstoy's style.

“The guiding principle in Hemingway's esthetics is a reduction of things to their simplest terms. In description, in narrative, in characterization, above all in dialogue, the effort is to say things in words that are most expressive at a minimum cost of philosophy or abstraction” [4]. Hemingway's double aim is truth and simplicity--- the unvarnished truth that is what the realist advocates. The realist dislikes varnish not merely because it disguises the truth, but also because he dislikes the shiny effect. It is too showy, and a symptom of the “bourgeois” penchant for “conspicuous waste”. Hemingway's plainness is an outcome of the movement in favor of handmade articles. He didn't care for “nice” people because they are overlaid with so much varnish; it is too much trouble scraping this off to get down to the true vein of the wood. He might satirize these types-- but on the whole he didn't aim at satire; that in itself is too showy a line. He didn't want his picture cluttered up with so much paint. Hemingway always took pains to keep free from abstractions and sentimental elaborations. “He tried to dispense with adjectives, and particularly the sort that serve to inflate the subject rather than render its substance. He tried to express his Ethical values in terms of concrete object, actions and effects. He tried to keep his sentences simple, by reducing a train of thought to its component elements and ranging them in sequence rather than in the complicated patterns of logical subordination”[4].

Most of Hemingway's sentences are short and simple, a single statement, with a subject, a predicate and an object. Most of the rest are strings of simple statement held together with “ands”. The rarest thing with him is

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the statement modified by subordinate clauses indicating reasons, causes, conditions, and concessions-- intrusive refinement of thought, which only serve to clutter things up and blur the simple behavioristic sequence. Repetition is also Hemingway's distinguishing feature of style. Let's examine the following paragraph: " I went out the door and down the hall to the room where Catherine was to be after the baby came. I sat in a chair there and looked at the room. I had the paper in my coat that I had bought when I went out for lunch and I read. It was beginning to be dark outside and I turned on the light to read. After a while I stopped reading and turned of the light and watched it get dark outside... There was a crowd of kids watching the car, and the square was hot, and the trees were green, and the flags hung on their staffs, and it was good to get out of the sun and under the shade of the arcade that runs all the way around the square... I drank a small bottle of chianti with the meal, had a coffee afterward with a glass of cognac, finished the paper, put my letter in my pocket, left the paper on the table with the tip and went out". (166) In this short paragraph, ten "ands" are used. All sentences appeared simple and clear. The technique of repetition is applied here and there in the novel *A Farewell to Arms*. Hemingway often employed the copulative "to be", and the expletive "there were" and "there was" occurs ten times in the twenty-one sentences of the fist chapter, six of the sentences being introduced by them. The repetitions give a sense of the first chapter, six of the sentences being introduced by them.

2.4 There are disputes over the genre of the two novels. It is hard to properly apply one or the other conventional literary designation to *War and Peace*. Tolstoy himself "was the most reluctant to call his work a novel" [2]. He sated in " The Russian Archives that *War and Peace* "is not a novel, even less is it a poem, and still less a historical chronicles. *War and Peace* is what the author wished and was able to express in the form in which it is expressed" [5].

Though Tolstoy was concerned about the lack of an obvious climax to his work and the number of what might be called culminating points in it, the reasons he gives are barely sufficient to disqualify it as a novel. It is impossible to define in the abstract what a novel should be like. There is no doubt that *War and Peace* has many of the characteristic features of earlier European novels. It has many standard, situations of entertainment and adventure--- a girl's first ball, an attempted abduction, a duel, a wager, a gambling scene, a hero believed dead but in fact alive, a heroine who attempts suicide in a moment of despair, etc. It has to do with basic human emotions and conflicts---passion, jealousy, deep religious feeling, ambition, courage, and thirst for adventure. It has its fair share of journeys, meetings and partings. Coincidence plays an important part, as when Prince Andrew turns up in the Rostov's year din Moscow, Nichola arrives at Bogucharovo in time to

rescue Princess Maria. Natasha sees Pierre in deserted Moscow. This is not to imply that *War and Peace* is like any novel in particular, but that it has enough recognizable thematic and other points of contact to establish it as belonging to that loose genre called the novel. *War and Peace* has recognizable plot affinities with other Russian and Western European novels. It also and brave deeds, a family background in which the main characters are realistically portrayed and psychology explored. But to call it a historical novel or an epic novel, or a psychology novel or any other sort of novel is to obscure rather than illuminate. Equally unsatisfactory is the argument that transferred its allegiance, as it grew up, from one genre to the other.

In so far as *War and Peace* is a landmark in the history of the novel, it is not because it belongs to, or is the culminating point of this or that genre or because it is hybrid of various genres. If there are any rules to which author must confirm, if his work is to be assigned to a recognizable genre, Tolstoy did not know them and did not care. We can only say that *War and Peace* marks a new stage in the history of the Western European novel because of its concern with historical, social, ethical and religious problems on a scale never attempted in previous novels. It has considerable psychological subtleties. In Tolstoy there was a unique combination of intelligence, imagination and seriousness of purpose, profundity of thought and emotion. His novels engages the mind and the heart, it brings into play the animal and rational sides of the reader. Its content is richer, fuller, and more varied than that of any other novel before it. It is in these attributes-- and not in the qualities which do or do not make it an epic novel or a historical novel or a family chronicle--- that we must look for the greatness and originality of Tolstoy's achievement.

As to *A Farewell to Arms*, a lot of critics believe that it is hardly a novel. W. M. Frohock said: "Strictly speaking, this book is hardly a novel at all, at least if the word "novel" is used in the traditional sense of a story which develops through the interactions a group of characters one upon the other"[6]. He offered the following reasons: Hemingway's story ahs really but one major character, Frederic Henry, and is in the last analysis nothing more than the account of how falling in love feels to young man who is sick of a war. Few books are made of less material. Hemingway depends almost entirely on the trained and disciplined eye, and the carefully accurate report on the emotions. So, W. Mfrohock concluded that the book is closer to a good movie script than to a conventional novel, but it is still one fo the few books of our time that stands entirely by itself. The other critic Ray G. Wet, Jr argued, "the physical form of *A Farewell to Arms* more nearly resembles the drama than it does the majority of American works of fiction"[7]. It is composed of five separate books, each composed of a series of scenes,



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and each scene broken into sections that might be likened to stage direction and dialogue. Thus, in Section One, we have the introduction of all major characters, the general war setting, and a statement of the problems involved; in Section Two the development of the romance between Frederic and Catherine; in Section Three, the retreat at Caporetto and the decision of Frederic to escape the chaos of war; in Section Four, the supposed escape, the rowing of Frederic and Catherine across the lake to Switzerland; and in Section Five, the hope of the sanctuary which, through a reversal reminiscent again of the drama, comes to a climax in the ironic sense of Catherine's death while giving birth to their child.

In spite of many opinions about the novel's genre, I think that *A Farewell to Arms* is one pure lyric novel. In a well known essay, a scholar has drawn a distinction between two kinds of poetry, "a "pure" poetry, which seeks more or less systematically to exclude so called "unpoetic" elements from its hushed and hypnotic atmosphere, and an "impure" poetry of inclusion or synthesis which welcomes into itself such supposedly inhospitable stuff as wit, jagged rhymes and intellectual debates"[8]. The distinction between the two types, so helpful in the analysis of lyrics, may obviously be used here to call attention to an aspect of Hemingway's art. There are works, such as *War and Peace*, *Ulysses*, *Moby Dick*, whose power and beauty are best explained by their very "impurity" --- novels that batten on the diversity of life and are most loose and baggy--- while the strength of Hemingway's novel is in spirit and in method closer to pure lyric than to epic, and his novels systematically exclude whatever threatens to interfere with the illusion of life beheld under the aspect of a single, dominant, all-pervasive mood or state of mind. They attempt to sustain perfectly a single emotion: they begin with it and end with it, and any scenes, characters, thoughts, or stylistic elements that might tend to weaken the dominant emotions are ruthlessly rejected. Consequently, Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* has both the virtues and the limitations of lyricism: maximum intensity on one hand, extremely limited range on the other. Therefore, it is a pure lyric novel.

In addition to the major similarities stated above, there are also other similarities. For instance, the authors both applied the symbolic technique; they dealt with the novels at different angles; they revised their works time and again, which rendered the works more wonderful; they dealt with love and war, which are the essential subjects.

### 3. The Differences between the two novels

3.1 Tolstoy and Hemingway applied the device of interior monologue, but they had very different way of presenting it. Tolstoy is technically versatile in the presentation. He uses many language techniques to describe the inner thoughts and conditions

of the officer born of an aristocratic family. The words are exact and they make readers think of many unspoken words. The description is vivid and detailed. Every action and simple word in it indicates something. Secondly, Tolstoy dealt with the monologue from different angles, sometimes from the angle of Andrew, sometimes of Natasha and sometimes even of the author himself. Here lies the biggest difference between Tolstoy's interior monologue and Hemingway's that is usually dealt with from a single angle. By the variation of angles, Tolstoy made his monologue seem jerky, irregular and incomplete, which is his distinguishing feature.

The attributes of Hemingway's monologues are distinctive. His monologues are mainly comprised of simple and unadorned words; there are few adjectives: long and short sentences are used alternatively; The most important feature may be that Hemingway as a director of the monologue, made the stage nearly empty and provided the readers with little background knowledge. In the whole passage, only one character--- Henry is present and all we know is what he talks to himself. That means the author dealt with the monologue only from Henry's angle, and the author did not interfere in it, which made the monologue more convincing.

Though outstanding in their different means, Hemingway and Tolstoy's interior monologues contribute much to the world literature. Nowadays a lot of writers imitate Tolstoy's technique but few can do as well as he, while the technique of Hemingway is widely used and becomes a common technique of modern fiction.

3.2 *A Farewell to Arms* is a tragedy while *War and Peace* is not. *A Farewell to Arms* is widely regarded as a sheer tragedy. At the end of the novel, Catherine dies. Henry goes back in his hotel in rain. It is a highly sentimental ending. It manifests Hemingway's viewpoint that romance is transitory and doomed while death is permanent.

The last part of *War and Peace* demonstrates that it is not a tragedy. It shows the two new families in amazing harmony. When the story began, the families that had existed for a long-time were presented to us---the Bolkonskys who had a grown-up son and a daughter, and the Rostovs, when Nivhola was still only in school and Natasha was twelve years old. Fifteen years later, there appear before us the two young families with the little children. With the strategy of a genius, the author began the story of the families with people of such maturity that we could become interested in them, and concluded with scenes in which even the babies are extremely endearing to us, since they belong to families with whom in the course of the story, we have come to identify ourselves. Thereupon, the picture of human life

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is complete and the picture of the Russians of those days is complete. Consequently, at least, we do not regard *War and Peace* as a tragedy.

3.3 Tolstoy argued a lot in *War and Peace* to make it didactic. However, Hemingway seldom made any argument in *A Farewell to Arms* and laid emphases on the narrative aspect of the novel. In *War and Peace*, Tolstoy's intervention by his argument is marked. There are many passages that are often called digressions. However, from an artistic point of view, there is little to be said against them. They are all relevant to the main idea of the novel, though they are so often repeated and hammered out with a force and insistence that is offensive to many readers. The major weakness of the digressions may be that they are so concerned with the big groups—whether nations, armies or historians, which as groups make far less impression on the readers than the individual heroes; and in the digressions, individuals are given so scanty treatment. In spite of the weakness, the digressions help us better understand Tolstoy's idea of the novel.

In *A Farewell to Arms*, Hemingway mainly depended on the narrative aspect. He made the characters speak for themselves and make readers feel by themselves. He would not evidently intervene in the novel, which render the novel implicit and conformed to his iceberg theory.

#### 4. Conclusion

Tolstoy does not merely occupy a signify place in the Russian literature. He makes great contribution to the world literature. With Pushkin Hardy, Dickens, Balzac and other literary masters, Tolstoy produced a lot of works of critical realism, which is the highest stage of classical literature. Their masterpieces serve as the models of the writers of later generation. They exerted the unprecedented influence on the descendants. As one representative of critical realism, Tolstoy's way of writing is widely imitated and studies. Numerous critics have studied Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, which is one of his early works. There are a lot of controversies over the themes and other issues. In general, the novel leaves much space for further research. Hemingway is also the

master of realistic literature. His influence on younger writers is immeasurable. He belongs to the lost generation who was born at the turn of the century, and became mature during World War I. His experience enabled him to produce excellent war books, among which *A Farewell to Arms* is the representative one.

The comparison of *A Farewell to Arms* and *War and Peace* provide us new and innovative perspectives on better comprehension of war novels and critical realism. Through comparison we find Hemingway was not only highly influenced by Tolstoy's techniques but also developed them. He applied the technique of interior monologue as Tolstoy did, but his monologue had unique characteristics. Through comparison, we also know about some common laws of the world literature, namely, the realistic writers mainly depend their writings on the real life; they tend to probe into the characters' psychological activities. Through comparison, we also acquire profound knowledge about the different cultures of the East and the West.

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