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Imagery Representation and Cultural Interpretation of Silk Fabrics in Modern Literature

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ABSTRACT

As an essential part of traditional Chinese culture, silk fabric not only carries a wealth of cultural symbolism but also, under the background of modern social change and the Industrial Revolution, its imagery and symbolism have undergone a remarkable transformation. This paper analyzes how silk fabric has gradually transformed from a traditional luxury item symbolizing aristocracy and affluence to a medium reflecting social reality, class change, and cultural identity. This transformation was further accelerated by technological shifts in dyeing: the transition from expensive natural dyes to inexpensive synthetic alternatives not only reduced production costs but fundamentally stripped silk of its aura of “pure” luxury, embedding it deeply within the logic of industrial reproduction. By closely examining representative works by authors such as Lu Xun, Mao Dun, Eileen Chang, and Mo Yan, this paper analyzes the diverse uses of silk fabric in literature, demonstrating its pivotal role in narrative structure, thematic deepening, emotional resonance, and cross-cultural communication, by serves as a tangible narrative anchor that weaves together disparate plot threads, materializes abstract social transformations, and provides a physical medium for the fragile psychological states of characters amidst turbulent times. In addition, the modern evolution of silk fabric imagery has profoundly impacted contemporary literary creation, providing new perspectives for the understanding of literary works and enriching the artistic expression and cultural connotation of works. This study analyzes how silk functions and transforms within modern literature, offering new theoretical perspectives on the utilization of cultural symbols in literary creation.

KEYWORDS

silk fabric, modern times, imagery, cultural interpretation

INTRODUCTION

Silk fabric, a symbol of material culture with a long history, has witnessed the development of Chinese society from ancient times to modern times through the evolution of its manufacturing process [1]. As one of the most essential products of ancient China, silk established China's image in international exchanges and occupied an irreplaceable position in Chinese culture. Its history can be traced back to the prosperous period of the ancient Silk Road, when silk was a commodity for trade and a messenger of cultural exchange, spreading oriental aesthetics and craftsmanship to the rest of the world [2]. Over time, the manufacture of silk has gradually transitioned from traditional handicraft to industrialized production, a shift that has not only improved the efficiency of silk production but has also made silk products more widely available and thus into the homes of ordinary people [3]. In literature, the imagery of silk fabric is also enriched and deepened. In classical literature, silk is often depicted in detail to show the noble and elegant character, symbolizing social status and wealth. This stands in stark contrast to modern narratives, where silk functions not merely as a static emblem of status but transforms into a dynamic instrument of critique. By juxtaposing the use of silk as a stable marker of dynastic power in classical works like *The Dream of the Red Chamber* against its role as a signifier of social turbulence and identity anxiety in the works of Lu Xun and Eileen Chang, we observe a fundamental shift from silk as a token of material glory to a complex literary device revealing industrial alienation and class mobility. In modern times, with the changes in social structure and cultural concepts, the symbolism of silk began to diversify, and it was no longer exclusive to the upper class. However, this transformation was not a linear process of substitution. Instead, a complex semiotic tension emerged: the traditional aristocratic aura of silk did not vanish but came to co-exist with the commodification and alienation brought by modern industrialization. This overlapping and conflict of old and new meanings enabled silk in modern texts to simultaneously reference nostalgia and critique of the new reality, thereby preventing a one-dimensional interpretation. It became an important symbol reflecting all social classes' state of life and psychological changes [4]. In modern literature, silk fabric, with its unique texture and rich symbolism, has become an important carrier to express class change and social reality. Its use in the works shows a deep insight into the changes of the times and reflects the living conditions and psychological states of people across social classes [5]. The imagery of silk fabric has become a bridge connecting the past and the present, the tradition and the modernity, and every appearance of it is

a profound reflection and artistic reproduction of the social reality of that era [6]. Through the material symbol of silk, readers can glimpse the vein of history, feel the pulse of culture, and understand the rich connotation and social value embedded in literary works. To systematically deconstruct these transformations, this study adopts a methodological framework that integrates material culture studies with literary semiotics. This dual perspective allows for the examination of silk both as a tangible commodity with economic implications and as a textual signifier capable of generating multiple metaphorical meanings, thereby precisely locating the imagery of silk at the intersection of historical materialist reality and literary aesthetic expression.

Social change and the evolution of literary forms

Modern social changes

The Impact of the industrial revolution on fabrics on literature

As a significant social change in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the textile industrial revolution profoundly impacted the development of Chinese literature [7]. To a certain extent, this social change accelerated the changes in China's social structure and cultural concepts, which further shaped the direction of the evolution of modern Chinese literary forms and the path of the emergence of modern literature [8]. The study of literary works of this period can provide a deeper understanding of the complex effects of industrialization on the development of Chinese society and literature. The most important of these effects was the rapid decline in the price of fabrics due to their rapid industrialization [9]. Before the Industrial Revolution, the production of fabrics such as silk relied heavily on artisans and was limited and expensive, thus symbolizing power and wealth in Chinese culture [10]. After the Industrial Revolution, the introduction of mechanized production led to a significant increase in the production of silk fabrics, and the price was lowered so that this former luxury item gradually came into ordinary people's homes. Correspondingly, the patterns on silk fabrics have gradually shifted from their previous auspicious meanings and blessings to reflecting the lives of ordinary people, as shown in Figure 1.



Figure 1. Rural New Appearance Silk

In literature, the Impact of the Industrial Revolution is mainly reflected in the literary works, the central theme, and the subject of literature. The social upheaval and economic changes brought about by the Industrial Revolution became an essential theme of literary creation in this era [11]. Writers reflected the contradictions and conflicts in the process of industrialization by depicting the factory life, the struggle of the working class, and the inequality of the society, in which the silk fabric, as an essential symbolic product of the different statuses of different classes, has again become important imagery in modern literature.

Changes in social structure and cultural attitudes

The Impact of the fabric industrial revolution was not limited to the economic sphere but also included profound changes in the social structure and cultural concepts, and this mode of production greatly impacted the traditional mode of production in China [12]. This profound social change also led to the gradual breaking down of the traditional social hierarchy in China. Through the Industrial Revolution, several new social strata and class consciousness gradually began to form and emerge. This new group of people, as an essential force in society at that time, naturally became the main object of description in literary works. Therefore, as a reflection of social reality, the content and form of literature also changed.

The imagery of silk fabrics in literature evolved during this period, along with changes in social structures and cultural concepts. In traditional literature, silk often symbolizes nobility, elegance, and luxury, representing the feudal society's upper class and aristocratic life. However, with the changes in modern society, the symbolism of silk has gradually diversified [13]. As some people with lower status in traditional society were able to access and own silk, which used to be a symbol of noble status, in the new social context, the

ownership of silk fabrics by the new class also symbolized their efforts and the change of social concepts on another level [14]. It can be seen that during this period, silk was not only a symbol of nobility and luxury but also a proof of strength and hard work. Against this background, many literary works depicting the new class sprang up.

Evolution of literary forms

Transformation of Literary Forms from Classical to Modern Times

The evolution of literary forms is a long and complex process. Classical literary forms were dominated by poetry, drama, and prose, focusing on formal beauty and linguistic elegance [15]. During this period, silk fabrics often appeared as important imagery in poetry and drama, symbolizing beauty, purity, and nobility. The profile depicts the nobility of the holder's identity, while also symbolizing beautiful and pure qualities. During this period, silk fabric patterns were mainly composed of flowers and birds with beautiful meanings, as shown in Figure 2.



Figure 2. Precious Blue Forged Colorful Embroidered (Jade Hall Wealthy Women's Shirt)

However, with the changes of the times and the progress of society, the form and content of classical literature gradually appeared to require more work to adapt to the new social reality and cultural needs. From the end of the 19th century to the beginning of the 20th century, with the aggravation of the national crisis

and the rise of the New Culture Movement, the expression of Chinese literature began to change to modern literature [16]. Most of the literary works of this period can be seen to actively explore new literary forms and creative techniques, which further reflected the requirements of reflecting social reality and expressing personal thoughts and feelings in the new context of the new period [17]. In addition, the introduction of Western literary trends such as realism and modernism also had a particular impact on the form and content of Chinese literature. With the rise of modern literature, the form of literature changed significantly. Poetry, drama, prose, and novels underwent significant changes in both content and mode of expression [18]. The novel became the primary literary genre in this period, emphasizing storyline and characterization, and the language was more down-to-earth and colloquial, thus broadening the readership to a certain extent. Similarly, the meaning behind silk fabric, as essential imagery in novels, also became more diversified, no longer limited to symbolizing the beauty and nobility of such airy content but incorporating a more realistic background.

The rise of modern literature

Industrialization contributed to the development of modern education and intellectual enlightenment. With the development of factories and cities, educational institutions and cultural facilities gradually increased, and workers and citizens had more opportunities to come into contact with modern education and new ideas [19]. Depictions of modern education and new ideas also began to appear in literary works, further accelerating the emancipation of ideas [20]. Literary works of this period also paid more attention to social reality and individual experience, focusing on revealing social problems and the inner world of people. As a representative image of the critical transformation from nobility to commoners and from official to businessman, silk fabric was also widely used in modern literature.

In modern literature, silk fabric is a symbol of material life and a carrier of cultural identity and personal emotion. Through silk fabrics and other imagery, the literature reflects the contradictory unity between traditional and modern culture is expressed [19]. Amid the fabric industrial revolution and the profound changes that followed, the form and content of Chinese literature became increasingly diversified and enriched [21]. Literary works of this period have become essential texts for understanding social change and cultural development in modern China. The imagery of silk fabrics in modern literature not only reflects social changes and cultural concepts but also demonstrates the evolution of literary forms and the writers'

deep understanding and keen observation of the natural world, which, as a unique cultural symbol, is constantly given new meanings in literature and has become an important bridge connecting the traditional and the modern.

Silk fabric traditional imagery performance

Silk fabric imagery in ancient literature

Silk fabric occupies an essential position in traditional Chinese culture, appearing widely in literature as a luxury and status symbol, thus forming a unique imagery system. As silk fabrics are often used to symbolize wealth, splendor, and noble life, they have also become important imagery referring to the aristocracy. At the same time, through the depiction of silk fabrics, reflections on the differences in social classes have also appeared in ancient literature. In the Book of Songs, the descriptive words “onyx clothes and scarf” initially embodied the reference of silk fabrics and other clothing to the overall image of the depicted characters, implying the background of the depicted characters. After that, “Southeast Flight of the Peacock” also shows the background and family situation of the character through Liu Lanzhi’s textile attainments and the clothes she wears, which makes it easy for readers to understand the deeper meaning behind it. At this time, the styles of silk fabrics were mostly traditional flower and bird elements, with strong ethnic colors, see Figure 3.



Figure 3. Plum Orchid Bamboo Chrysanthemum Silk

Silk in Classical Literature

As an essential part of traditional Chinese classical culture, silk carries a wealth of cultural symbolism. Silk is a symbol of economic affluence and social status, and a representative of oriental arts and crafts. Silk production and trade have an important position in Chinese history; the “Silk Road” is an important bridge connecting the East and the West in cultural exchanges. These factors have further established silk’s special status and symbolism in classical literature. In many classical literary works, silk symbolizes character identity and status and reflects the social hierarchy and cultural traditions [22]. For example, in the Book of Songs, the contrast between the ruler’s silk clothes and the people’s coarse linen clothes is used many times to depict the harshness of the people’s life and the ruler’s extravagance, which also further establishes silk as a symbol of the upper class, symbolizing the classic imagery of classical literature of wealth and power.

Imagery of Silk in Classical Literature: The Dream of the Red Chamber as an Example

Silk is particularly prominent in its imagery as the pinnacle of Chinese classical literature, the Dream of Red Mansions. Cao Xueqin demonstrates the luxury and delicacy of aristocratic life through the delicate depiction of silk fabrics and reveals the characters’ fate and emotions through silk. In A Dream of Red Mansions, silk fabrics’ first and most important image is the glory, wealth, and good life of the Jia family. In the life scene of the Jia family, silk fabrics are everywhere: gorgeous dresses, exquisite draperies, and decorative embroidery, all reflecting the luxury and opulence of the life of the Jia family and Yuanfei’s relatives. At this stage, the Jia family’s grandeur primarily conveyed through meticulous preparations of silk fabrics and jewelry, vividly captured in the description: “the garden tents dance with coiled dragons, the curtains fly with embroidered phoenixes; gold and silver shimmer with color, and jewels shine with brilliance within the Jia Mansion”.

However, silk fabrics in Dream of the Red Chamber bear proof of the prosperity of the Jia House and are the same witness to the decay of the Jia House. With the decline of the Jia family, silk fabrics changed from a symbol of glory and wealth into a symbol of decline and disillusionment. After the decay of Jia’s family, the once gorgeous silk clothes gradually became worn out, and silk fabrics became the shackles that bound such a big family as Jia. This imagery echoes the fading of former prosperity and the cruelty of reality, revealing the impermanence of the world and the inscrutability of life’s destiny. It can be seen that silk fabric in ancient literature is used to depict the material existence of aristocratic life and another kind of satirical symbol. Through the depiction of silk fabrics, literature reflected the cultural traditions, economic condi-

tions, and the emotional world of the society at that time. The imagery of silk fabric not only adds to the beauty and mood of the work but also further deepens the theme and connotation of the work.

The Modern Transformation of Silk Fabric Imagery

Silk fabrics and economic change

The rise of the silk industry and social structure

In the modern period, with the advancement of the Industrial Revolution and the development of global trade, the silk industry witnessed an unprecedented rise and expansion. Machine production and technological innovation led to a dramatic increase in the productivity of silk fabrics, a surge in production, and a drop in prices, making silk no longer the exclusive consumer product of the aristocracy and the rich but gradually popularized into the lives of the middle class and even the general public, a change that also had a profound impact on the social structure. This change also had a profound impact on the social structure. The first direct impact was that the rise of the silk industry promoted economic prosperity and social mobility, with the establishment of a large number of factories and production bases, creating a large number of employment opportunities and attracting a large number of people from rural areas to the cities to engage in silk production and its related work. This population mobility and urbanization process broke down the traditional social hierarchy and gave rise to new social classes and occupational groups. The new social classes and groups further accelerated the disintegration of the existing social structure. The rise of the silk industry also affected people's consumption concepts and lifestyles. As the price of silk decreased, more and more people could buy and use silk fabrics, and silk was no longer just a symbol of luxury and status but became a part of everyday life. This change in consumer attitudes has also led to a gradual change in the meaning of silk. Silk has become one of the everyday consumer goods within reach, and silk fabric advertisements have also appeared in the public eye, see Figure 1.



Figure 1. Shanghai Huanqiu Handkerchief Factory Advertisement

Literary works also vividly reflect the rise of the silk industry and the change in social structure. Modern literature, out of the need to reflect the reality of life, often depicts the factory life, the struggle of the working class, and social inequality, in which the imagery of silk fabrics has been newly interpreted and used many times, and these changes through the imagery before and after also further reveal the contradictions and conflicts in the process of industrialization. For example, Lu Xun often describes the life of female workers in silk factories in his works, and most of the female workers have lost their own lives due to the oppression of industrialization, which reveals the hardship and helplessness of the lower class of society, and criticizes the exploitation and injustice of the capitalist society.

Impact of the silk trade on social development

Silk, an important foreign trade commodity of China at that time, had a far-reaching impact on the development of modern Chinese society through its massive exports and, thus, economic gains. The silk trade's prosperity promoted economic growth and brought about cultural exchanges and collisions, which had a multifaceted impact on social development.

On the one hand, the silk trade promotes international economic interaction and cooperation. With the circulation of silk products in the global market, silk has become a link between the economies of different countries and regions. The wealth and economic benefits of the silk trade promoted the industrialization process and economic development of various regions in China. Chinese silk during this period was export-

ed to Europe and the Americas via the Silk Road, which promoted economic exchanges between China and the West at this critical node and provided technological and economic support for the subsequent sustained development of China. The economic form of China has also changed, with silk fabric factories rapidly expanding in scale. Influential textile companies have issued stocks in the market, promoting further changes in China's economic form. As shown in Figure 5.



Figure 5. Shares of R.O.C. Hengfeng Textile Co.

On the other hand, the silk trade also promoted the spread and integration of cultures. Silk, as a symbol of ancient Chinese culture, has spread worldwide through trade, becoming an essential carrier for exchanging and integrating different cultures. The patterns and crafts on silk products show the essence of traditional Chinese culture and gradually absorb different cultures and elements in selling silk fabrics and other products, forming a diversified artistic style. Through the silk trade, people of different countries and nationalities have gained a deeper understanding and recognition of each other's cultures, promoting cultural integration and development. The traditional Chinese silk fabric elements, such as flowers, birds, and auspicious beasts, were integrated with Western culture. During this period, geometric elements were widely used in silk fabric patterns, as shown in Figure 6, and the use and integration of these elements also attracted more attention to Chinese silk fabrics, thereby promoting cultural dissemination in China.



Figure 6. Western Silk Pattern, Product Name: Double Crepe

Through the depiction of the silk trade and cultural exchanges between China and the West, Chinese and foreign literary works of this period show the collision and fusion between different cultures and the resulting social changes and changes in individual destinies. Therefore, the imagery of silk fabrics in modern times reflects the economic changes and social structure of this period and demonstrates the far-reaching impact of the silk industry and trade on social development. As a unique Chinese cultural symbol, silk has continuously been given new meanings in literature, becoming an important bridge connecting tradition and modernity, East and West.

New Imagery of Silk Fabrics in Modern Literature

Integration of Silk and Modern Life

In modern society, silk fabric is no longer a symbol of aristocratic life in feudal society but is gradually integrated into the daily lives of ordinary people. This change has been vividly expressed in literary works. Silk is not just a symbol of luxury and status but has become a universal element of life, representing people's pursuit of a better life and their inheritance of traditional culture.

Because of the popularity of silk fabrics in everyday clothing and home decoration, the literature of this period also reflects the changes in people's lifestyles that followed the popularization of silk fabrics. In

many modern literary works, silk is depicted as a part of people's daily lives; for example, silk clothing has become a commodity that ordinary people can choose. Usually, this kind of depiction is still mixed with some of the noble silk. Often, this description is still mixed with a portion of the description of the noble feeling of silk, and the ambivalence of this description further reflects the significant transformation of the critical imagery of silk fabric in the process of changing times. People have accepted the new form of silk fabrics in their lives. However, psychologically, they still have traditional knowledge of the value of silk fabrics, and this cognitive dislocation has given rise to many works of silk fabrics as important imagery to describe. For example, in Lao's novel *Four Generations Under One Roof*,¹ the different family members used silk fabrics and views to further show the people at that time, for silk and other products, such as cognitive ambivalence of psychology.

Secondly, silk fabrics carry people's emotions and memories as gifts and souvenirs. In modern literature, silk is often used as gifts or souvenirs between family and friends, symbolizing friendship, love, and affection. For example, in many novels depicting war and turbulent times, silk handkerchiefs or silk clothing are often used as tokens between soldiers, their families, and lovers, carrying their emotions and thoughts. Such depictions not only enhance the story's emotional depth but also give silk fabrics more cultural and emotional significance.

Imagery of Silk Fabric in Modern Literature

Modern, lithe inheritance has given it new connotations and symbolism based on inheriting traditional silk imagery. Through the delicate depiction of silk fabrics, the literary works of this period reflect the social reality and individual destiny, express people's understanding of modern society, and reflect on traditional culture in this period.

Modern literature expresses social changes and the transformation of people's psychological state through changes in silk fabrics. With the acceleration of industrialization and urbanization, the traditional way of life and values have undergone significant changes. Silk fabrics are a symbol of material life in literature and a metaphor for social change and personal destiny. For example, in *Camel Xiangzi*, the description of Xiangzi and Tigress's clothes shows the ambivalence of the emerging class towards silk fabrics and so on. It also reflects the great contradiction between the old and the new that people in this period are in. At the same time, it expresses criticism of the traditional feudal system and the way modern society is thought. Silk in

the work is not only a symbol of feudalism but also reflects modern people's pursuit of freedom and liberation.

Secondly, modern literature explores individual identity and cultural belonging through the silk fabric. With the exchange and fusion of Chinese and Western cultures, the status and role of traditional culture in modern society have become the focus of writers' attention. As an essential symbol of traditional Chinese culture, silk fabric often appears in works that explore cultural and individual identities. For example, in her novel *Love in a Fallen City*, Eileen Chang further depicts the identity of silk for people at that time through the meticulous depiction of silk clothing, which leads to the confusion of modern people about modern life. Silk symbolizes the elegance and beauty of traditional culture in the work and reflects the cultural confusion and identity crisis of individuals in modern society.

In addition, the literature of this period also expresses women's destinies and emotions through silk fabrics. Silk, a symbol of softness and delicacy, often appeared in works depicting women's lives and emotions. Through the imagery of silk fabrics, writers expressed women's position in society and their inner world. For example, in Eileen Chang's *The Red Rose and the White Rose*, the portrayal of the female characters' choice of silk clothing shows the fragility of the female characters' beauty and the complexity of their inner feelings simultaneously. Silk is an external decoration in such works and symbolizes women's destiny and emotional world, see Figure 7.



Figure 7. Women's silk cheongsams in literature (example)

Therefore, the imagery of silk fabrics in modern literature not only inherits the essence of traditional culture but also incorporates the reality of modern society and people's psychological state. Through the delicate depiction of silk fabrics, writers have revealed the contradictions and conflicts in social changes and expressed their profound thoughts on individual destiny and cultural identity. As a unique cultural symbol, silk fabric has been continuously given new meaning in modern literature, becoming an important bridge connecting tradition and modernity.

THE USE AND CULTURAL INTERPRETATION OF SILK FABRIC IMAGERY IN MODERN LITERARY CREATION

Literary Presentation and Diverse Exploration of Silk Fabric Imagery

Depiction of Silk Fabrics in the Perspective of Material Culture

In modern literature, silk fabric is not only a material existence, but also an important symbol of cultural and social change. From the perspective of material culture, the changes in the depiction of silk fabrics can reflect the development of the social economy and the transformation of cultural concepts. At the beginning, silk fabric, as a symbol of luxury goods, showcased social class differences and consumer culture in literary works. For example, in many works depicting the life of the upper class, silk fabrics are often used to depict the luxurious lifestyle of the aristocracy and the wealthy. The gorgeous silk clothing, decorative

silk furniture, and home decorations in the works are all symbols of social status and wealth. At the same time, the patterns on silk fabrics are mostly reflective of the life of the upper-class aristocrats. In addition, in order to further highlight the luxury and nobility of silk while also considering aesthetics, silk fabrics of various colors and embroidery techniques are usually chosen as symbols of noble identity, as shown in Figure 8.



Figure 8. Partial production of Qipao (made of plain satin material, hand-embroidered work)

By depicting these details, writers reveal the differences in social classes and changes in consumer culture. With the development of the times, the depiction of silk fabrics gradually began to reflect the changes in production and trade during the industrialization process. With the mechanization of silk production and the globalization of trade, silk fabrics are no longer just handmade products in literary works, but symbols of industrial products and commercial trade. During this period, most of the works depicting factories and trade reflect the profound impact of industrialization and globalization on the social economy through detailed depictions of the silk production process and market transactions.

Symbols and Metaphors of Silk Fabrics in Modern Literary Scenes

The imagery of silk fabrics in modern literature is not only limited to the material and cultural level but is also often endowed with symbolic and metaphorical meanings. Writers convey complex emotions and pro-

found social thinking through the depiction of silk fabric. As an essential imagery in Chinese culture since ancient times, silk fabric has become a symbol of time and memory. In modern literature, silk fabric also often appears in scenes of reminiscence and nostalgia. In many works depicting family and kinship, silk fabrics are used as heirlooms or souvenirs, symbolizing family history and memory.

At the same time, silk fabric plays a vital role in characterization as a metaphor for identity and fate. In some works depicting women's destinies, silk fabrics often symbolize women's beauty and vulnerability. Through the depiction of silk clothing, writers reveal women's status in society and their inner world. The softness and delicacy of silk symbolize women's softness and gentleness, but also imply that silk fabrics and other fabrics have been a shackle that binds women's existence as well as their development from ancient times to modern times, which leads to the fact that even in modern life, women may still become the victims of the development of the times.

Silk fabrics and the depth of characterization

Silk fabrics not only serve as decorations for environments and scenes in modern literature, but also play an important role in shaping character images. Due to the upgrade of silk fabrics from the previous expression of flat patterns to the emotional expression of the fusion of humans and patterns during this period, it is usually possible to construct a connection between humans and installations, which can resonate with the emotions of the audience, see Figure 9. Therefore, literary works during this period also often give characters more depth and complexity through the depiction of silk fabrics.

Firstly, silk fabric, as a symbol of character identity and personality, can help readers better understand the character image. In many works depicting aristocrats and wealthy people, the clothing and silk items used by the characters often symbolize their social status and personal taste. By depicting these details, writers showcase the identity, background, and personality traits of the characters, enhancing the three-dimensional sense of their image. Secondly, silk fabrics serve as the externalization of characters' emotions and psychology, revealing their inner world and emotional changes. In some works depicting love and family, silk fabrics serve as carriers of emotions, and their changes in state often metaphorically represent the emotional bonds and psychological changes between characters.

It can be seen that the use of the image of silk fabric in modern literary creation, through detailed depiction and profound interpretation of silk fabric, not only showcases the changes in society and cultural evolution,

endowing works with more artistic charm and cultural connotations, but also reflects the diversified exploration of material culture, symbolic metaphors, and character shaping in modern cultural works. At the same time, silk fabrics, as a unique cultural symbol, are constantly given new meanings in literature, once again becoming an important bridge connecting tradition and modernity, material and spiritual.



Figure 9. Rendering of the "Flower Mirror" Human Platform Device

Functional Analysis of Silk Fabric Imagery in Modern Literature

Silk fabric imagery in narrative structures: construction and facilitation

In modern literature, silk fabric imagery plays a role in building and advancing the plot in the narrative structure. In this function, silk fabric is a critical element of narrative clues and plot development, assisting in constructing rich narrative layers and complex plot advancement through its unique texture and symbolism. In many modern novels, the appearance of silk fabrics often marks the turning point of essential plots. For example, in Eileen Chang's *The Fate of Half a Life*, the silk cheongsam symbolizes the character's identity and promotes the development of the storyline. The appearance and disappearance of the silk cheongsam symbolize the ups and downs of the protagonist's fate and emotional changes, thus promoting the

deepening of the novel's narrative tension and emotional depth. As a narrative tool, Silk fabric can also effectively connect different characters and events, making the storyline more compact and coherent. For example, in Mao Dun's *Ziyou*, the silk factory serves as the backdrop of the story, and through the production, trade, and use of this factory, the lives and destinies of the main characters are linked together, promoting the development of the plot and the escalation of conflict. Specifically, silk functions not merely as a backdrop but as the central mechanism driving the plot. In the novel's climax, it is the volatile fluctuation of silk market prices—a direct product of speculative capitalism—that precipitates the protagonist Wu Sunfu's bankruptcy and collapse. Here, the materiality of silk directly dictates the character's destiny, constituting the pivotal turning point of the narrative. In this narrative structure, the silk fabric serves as an actual material existence and plays an important connecting and promoting role in the narrative structure as an important clue.

Silk fabric imagery in thematic expression: deepening and broadening

Through the delicate depiction and multi-layered symbolism of silk fabrics, modern works have explored and presented the thematic ideas of the works in greater depth. This is the role of silk fabric imagery in deepening and expanding thematic expression. The delicate depiction of silk fabric not only enhances the strength of the theme of the work but also expands the connotation and depth of the theme. As a symbol of culture and identity, the appearance of silk fabrics in the works helps to deepen the thematic expression of the works. In many works that explore the conflict between traditional culture and modern life, silk fabric often symbolizes traditional culture and identity. Through the depiction of silk fabrics, literary works reveal the status and role of traditional culture in modern society and awaken readers' thinking about culture and identity. In Lu Xun's *Blessing*, the silk clothes that Sister Xianglin wears in the sacrificial ceremony symbolize her identification with traditional culture and confirmation of her own identity while revealing her predicament and helplessness in modern society. Secondly, silk fabrics, as an externalization of emotions and psychology, expand the thematic connotation of the work. For example, in some works depicting love and family, silk fabrics often symbolize the emotional and psychological changes of the characters. Through the depiction of silk fabrics, writers convey the characters' emotional fluctuations and psychological conflicts, expanding the works' emotional connotation and thematic depth. In Eileen Chang's *The Red Rose and the White Rose*, the silk clothes worn by Wang Jiaorui not only symbolize her beauty and ele-

gance but also reflect her profound emotional fluctuations and psychological conflicts about Tong, and the transformation of the clothes assists readers in understanding the character of Wang Jiaorui further.

Silk fabric imagery in readers' emotions: sentiment and empathy

The critical function of silk fabric imagery in modern literature is also reflected in the influence and resonance of the reader's emotions. Through the delicate description and symbolism of silk fabrics, writers can trigger readers' emotional resonance and psychological identity and enhance the infectious force and resonance effect of works. First of all, as a carrier of emotions, silk fabrics can trigger the emotional resonance of readers. In modern literary works depicting love and family, silk fabrics are often used as emotional tokens or souvenirs, carrying emotional ties and memories between characters. Through the depiction of these silk items, the reader's emotional resonance can be attached to an exact item waiting to be mobilized, thus enabling the reader to feel the deep emotions between the characters and the infectious power of the story. Secondly, silk fabric is a symbol of beauty that enhances the artistic impact of the work. Silk's softness, smoothness, and delicacy have visual beauty and symbolize beauty, purity, and nobility. Through the delicate depiction of silk fabrics, writers can create a beautiful atmosphere and enhance the artistic impact of their works and readers' aesthetic experience. When Eileen Chang describes female characters in her works, she usually chooses to describe how the same silk clothes fit the woman, showing the beauty and elegance of the characters through the portrayal of silk fabrics and also creating an entire art world of fantasy and dreams for the readers to immerse themselves in. As a carrier of emotion and a symbol of beauty, the use of silk fabrics in modern literature can trigger readers' emotional resonance and aesthetic experience and enhance the artistic impact and influence of the work. Through the skillful use of silk fabric imagery, the artistic expression of the work has been enriched at the same time, and its cultural connotation and emotional depth have been further deepened. The patterns of silk fabrics have also made breakthroughs from the initial simple geometric patterns, and more patterns with geometric texture effects have emerged, as shown in Figure 10, which is also a further upgrade of silk fabrics in the concretization of human emotional expression.



Figure 10. Chinese silk design pattern, product name: twill silk

Exploration of the Cultural Connotation and Value of Silk Fabric Imagery

Modern Cultural Elements in Silk Fabric Imagery

Silk fabric imagery in modern literature not only reflects the socio-economic development of the time but also incorporates rich cultural elements, reflecting the characteristics of the times and changes in the cultural background. Silk fabrics continue to symbolize traditional handicrafts and luxury goods, and their continuation and evolution of traditional culture are expressed in modern literature. In some works depicting family and social life, silk fabrics are often used as symbols of traditional culture, reflecting the deep Chinese cultural flavor, which also reflects people's respect for and inheritance of traditional values; the portrayal of silk fabrics also reflects the changes in the socio-economic development of the times and the integration of cultural elements. With the acceleration of industrialization and the expansion of international trade, silk fabrics are not only handicrafts but also symbols of industrial products and international trade in modern literature. Therefore, in some works depicting commerce and city life, silk fabrics are often taken as part of modern urban culture, reflecting the prosperity of city life and commercial trade.

Meaning Construction of Silk Fabric Imagery in Cross-cultural Communication

Silk fabric imagery plays a vital role in cross-cultural exchanges. The Silk Road, as a link between the East and the West, makes silk not only an essential item for commodity trade but also an important medium for cultural exchanges, so the understanding of silk fabric can not only promote the exchange and understanding between different cultures but also enrich the internationalization vision and cultural diversity of literary works. In Pearl Comfort Sydenstricker's *The Earth*, silk fabric symbolizes the exchange between Chinese and Western cultures, which shows the collision and fusion of Chinese and Western cultures. Silk in the novel is not only a symbol of traditional Chinese culture but also a witness to the exchange between Chinese and Western cultures. Through the depiction of silk fabrics, Sai Zhenzhu expresses her understanding of Chinese culture and her thoughts on cross-cultural exchanges.

The construction of the meaning of silk fabric in cross-cultural communication is also reflected in its multiple interpretations as a cultural symbol. Silk has been given different meanings in different cultural contexts as a symbol of elegance and luxury. In modern Western literature, silk fabric often symbolizes the mystery and luxury of the East. In Han Suyin's *Love for Each Other in This Life*, silk fabric symbolizes the Orient's mysterious charm and unique cultural atmosphere, which expresses the West's yearning and imagination for Oriental culture. Through the cross-cultural imagery of silk fabrics, literary works can usually express the understanding and misunderstanding in cultural exchanges, thus showing the complexity of cultural exchanges and understanding.

The Influence of Silk Fabric Imagery on Contemporary Literary Writing

Silk fabric imagery has its inheritance and evolution through the transformation from classical to modern literature. To this day, the imagery of silk fabric, with its strong vitality, continues to have a far-reaching impact on contemporary literary creation and an important role in profoundly influencing the narrative structure, thematic expression, and c, cultural connotation of contemporary literary works.

In Yu Hua's *Alive*, silk fabric, as a symbol of the changing times, shows the twists and turns of individual destiny and the cruelty of social change through the process of going from having it to not having it. In the novel, silk is the exclusive product of the rich and noble families. Through the loss of all silk fabrics and the change of family assets, this work also reveals the significant changes in Chinese society, reflecting the impermanence and resilience of individual destiny in the grand historical process.

In Mo Yan's *The Red Sorghum Family*, silk fabrics symbolize the beauty and destiny of women. Through the depiction of silk fabrics, Mo Yan delves into the different destinies of women in war and peace. As a symbol of women's identity, silk fabrics not only show women's external beauty in the novel but also reveal their inner resilience and complexity. Through the imagery of silk fabrics, this work shows a deep concern for the fate of women and a reflection on history and reality.

Silk fabric's delicate depiction and symbolism can enrich the cultural level of literary works and deepen reflection on social change, human complexity, and cultural exchange. The continuous influence of silk fabric imagery in contemporary literary creation demonstrates its profound connotation and extensive value as a cultural symbol. It provides new perspectives and ideas for understanding and studying modern literature.

CONCLUSION

By comprehensively analyzing the imagery performance and cultural interpretation of silk fabric in modern literature, this paper reveals the multiple functions and profound connotations of silk fabric imagery in literature. Against the background of social change and the Industrial Revolution, silk fabric reflects the changes in social structure and cultural concepts. It becomes an essential carrier for the evolution of literary forms. In addition, the imagery of silk fabrics in modern literature plays various vital roles. It is a critical element in the narrative structure to build and promote plot development. It can deepen the cultural connotation and emotional expression of the works in the theme expression. At the same time, the imagery of silk fabric promotes dialogue and understanding between different cultures through cross-cultural communication and stimulates the exploration of deeper thinking about history, culture, and human nature in contemporary literature. Summarizing its evolution and application, silk fabric imagery has enriched the artistic expression of literary works while deepening the understanding and experience of the cultural and emotional level behind the literary works.

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Conceptualization – Peng Qiang; methodology – Peng Qiang; formal analysis – Peng Qiang; investigation – Peng Qiang; resources – Peng Qiang; writing-original draft preparation – Peng Qiang; writing-review and

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Conflicts of Interest

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