

REPRESENTATIONS OF CHINESE CULTURE IN BRITISH LITERATURE:

THE PAINTED VEIL BY W. SOMERSET MAUGHAM

ÇİN KÜLTÜRÜNÜN İNGİLİZ EDEBİYATINDAKİ TEMSİLLERİ: W. SOMERSET MAUGHAM'IN THE PAINTED VEIL ADLI ESERİ

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Abstract: This article looks at W. Somerset Maugham's "The Painted Veil" (1925) as a complicated cross-cultural depiction where Chinese philosophical and social systems are shown via a Western literary and ideological synthesis. Instead of presenting a neutral or sympathetic picture, the novel filters Chinese thought through a colonial vision. This paper contends, using Edward Said's points of view, that the novel's interaction with Chinese culture is a kind of epistemic power. It creates knowledge about the East molded by the West's historical frameworks of control and desire. Set against the backdrop of cholera-ridden colonial Hong Kong and the heartland of China, the story mixes narrative omissions, stressing the ambivalence of imperial authorship with detailed descriptions of environment and custom. Kitty's rationalist Western attitude and the self-cultivating philosophy represented in the Buddhist monastery contrast to reveal a broader thematic conflict between Western modernity and Eastern spiritualism. But this conflict remains; rather, it exposes the ideological effects of portraying Eastern belief systems using Western literary techniques. This article places "The Painted Veil" in the context of larger conversations on Orientalism and cross-cultural storytelling, therefore investigating how its depictions not only interact with but also change views of Chinese culture and thought. It adds to current discussions on the literary consequences of portraying "the Other" and the boundaries of cultural translation in British literature utilizing an analysis of the philosophical undercurrents and cultural representations in the book.

Keywords: Chinese culture, British literature, cross-cultural representation, literary orientalism, Asian philosophy.

Öz: Bu makale, W. Somerset Maugham'ın "The Painted Veil" (1925) adlı eserini, Çin'in felsefi ve toplumsal sistemlerinin açıkça Batılı bir edebi ve ideolojik sentez aracılığıyla sunulduğu karmaşık bir kültürlerarası betimleme olarak ele almaktadır. Eser, tarafsız bir portre sunmak yerine, Çin düşüncesini sömürgeci bir bakış açısıyla süzgeçten geçirir. Mevcut çalışma, Edward Said'in bakış açılarını kullanarak, romanın Çin kültürüyle etkileşiminin bir tür epistemik güç olduğunu öne sürer. Doğu hakkında bilgi üretimi, Batı'nın tarihsel kontrol ve arzu çerçeveleri tarafından şekillendirilir. Kolera salgını altındaki sömürge Hong Kong'u ve Çin'in iç bölgelerinde geçen hikâye, çevre ve geleneklerin ayrıntılı betimlemeleriyle birlikte, emperyal yazarlığın ikircikli doğasını vurgulayan anlatı boşluklarını harmanlar. Kitty'nin rasyonalist Batılı tavrı ile Budist manastırda temsil edilen kendini geliştirme felsefesi arasındaki zıtlık, Batı modernitesi ile Doğu mistisizmi arasındaki daha geniş tematik çatışmayı ortaya koyar. Ancak bu çatışma çözüme ulaşmaz; bunun yerine, Doğu inanç sistemlerinin Batılı edebi tekniklerle sunulmasının ideolojik etkilerini gözler önüne serer. Bu bağlamda çalışma, eseri oryantalizm ve kültürlerarası hikâye anlatıcılığı üzerine süregelen daha geniş tartışmalar bağlamında konumlandırır. Böylece, romanın betimlemelerinin sadece Çin kültürü ve düşüncesiyle etkileşime girmekle kalmayıp, bu anlayışları nasıl dönüştürdüğünü de araştırır. Kitapta yer alan felsefi akıntılar ve kültürel temsillerin analize dayanarak, «öteki»nin edebi temsiliyetine dair sonuçlara ve Britanya edebiyatı'nda kültürel çevirinin sınırlarına dair güncel tartışmalara katkıda bulunur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Çin kültürü, İngiliz edebiyatı, kültürlerarası temsil, edebi oryantalizm, Asya felsefesi.

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Introduction

Set in 1920s China, W. Somerset Maugham's *The Painted Veil* (1925) is a story about love, betrayal, redemption, and self-discovery. The narrative centers on Kitty Fane, a selfish and self-centered British woman who weds Dr. Walter Fane, a quiet bacteriologist, mostly to avoid social pressure. After relocating to Hong Kong, she has a relationship with Charlie Townsend, a likable but shady colonial officer. Walter finds out about the romance and gives Kitty an ultimatum: join him in a cholera-infected rural Chinese village or suffer a messy divorce. Kitty, who is not happy, pursues him, hoping for suffering. Maugham changes the narrative of Pia de Tolomei from Dante's *Purgatorio*, where Pia is transported to her husband's castle in Maremma, reflecting Walter's path to Mei-Tan-Fu with Kitty. This comparison emphasizes ideas of imprisonment and personal awakening. The usage of the veil as a metaphor in Maugham's story and comparable themes in the writings of Goldsmith and Shelley provide another interesting link. Reflecting a curiosity about Asiatic religions and traditions, Shelley, as a Romantic poet, inherits a legacy shaped by his colleagues, Wordsworth and Coleridge, who were exposed to German Idealism. Kitty changes when she sees Walter's commitment to combat the epidemic and engages with local Chinese people, including a group of nuns. She starts to see the boundaries of her former egotistical perspective and acquires a fresh understanding of love, sacrifice, and goal. Walter, on the other hand, dies from cholera, which leaves Kitty grieving and regretful. Hoping to escape the errors of her past, she goes back to England resolved to raise her unborn child with a newly found independence and self-awareness. While also investigating deeper existential concerns inspired by Chinese philosophy—especially the Taoist and Confucian concepts of harmony, obligation, and self-improvement—Maugham criticizes British colonial views (Li, 2020, p.89).

The shaping of national identity, social values, and environmental policy is significantly influenced by Chinese landscape politicization. In China, the way landscapes are shown and used to foster national unity and identity shows a clear link between geography and politics. A guiding concept meant to balance environmental development with conservation activities, the notion of a "ecological civilization" has surfaced (Goron, 2018). This idea not only shows China's desire to balance economic development with environmental protection but also helps to create a national collective identity that speaks to the people. Furthermore, the idea of an ecological civilization changes how people engage with their surroundings and see their part in it beyond only policy. The government wants to create a sense of duty for environmental stewardship among its people by promoting a strong emotional and cultural connection to the terrain,

hence supporting the story of a cohesive national identity based in ecological consciousness.

In a parallel way, W. Somerset Maugham's *The Painted Veil* explores the intricacies of cultural identity and personal evolution set against China's magnificent scenery. Especially the conflicts between Western individualism and Eastern collectivism ideas make Maugham's book especially remarkable in its investigation of cultural opposites. Though her trip into the heart of China—both geographically and spiritually—Kitty, the protagonist, first reflects the arrogance and ignorance of the British colonial elite, gradually moving her toward self-awareness and change. Encounters with traditional Chinese values, such as the self-discipline of the Buddhist monastery and the Confucian concepts of responsibility and sacrifice symbolized by her husband, Walter, mediate this personal development. Although *The Painted Veil* presents a fascinating picture of Chinese practices and ideas, it also reveals the shortcomings of Western points of view in completely understanding the complexity of an alien culture.

Furthermore, Edward Said's concept of Orientalism offers a critical perspective from which to examine Maugham's portrayal of Chinese culture and identity. Said contends that Western depictions of the East frequently misrepresent and oversimplify rich civilizations, therefore framing them to further colonial goals (Said, 1978). Though trying to portray China with delicacy, Maugham's story is not free of these Orientalist stereotypes, which represent a Western perspective that struggles to appreciate the complexity of an unknown society. Maugham shows both the shortcomings of Western knowledge and the possibility for deeper cultural appreciation as Kitty faces the realities of life in rural China, therefore highlighting the conflicts that result from challenging deep-seated ideas about identity and civilization (Zhang, 2019, p. 45). Although *The Painted Veil* offers an interesting view into Chinese behaviors and ideas, it also exposes the flaws of Western points of view in fully grasping the complexities of an alien culture.

Methodology

Focusing on W. Somerset Maugham's *The Painted Veil* (1925), this paper uses a qualitative research approach to examine its portrayal of foreign cultures, literary Orientalism, and the interaction between British literature and Chinese intellectual legacy. Maugham's interaction with and reflection on Chinese culture, as well as his commentary on colonial views of his day, are investigated using literary analysis, cultural criticism, and comparative text study. A major focus of this work is a close reading of the novel to investigate its representation of Chinese culture, especially its relationship with Confucian and Taoist ideas. Examined, for example, are allusions to Lao Tzu and the Tao Te Ching to determine how they enhance the thematic depth of

the narrative and shape character development, particularly in the change of Kitty Fane. The research will also look at Taoist temple allusions and the influence of Catholic missionaries working in Hong Kong in the early 20th century. By providing information on the larger cultural scene that Maugham's characters travel in, these institutions help to highlight the cultural conflicts between Eastern spiritual practices and Western religious ideas.

Moreover, the cultural heritage of the Tang Dynasty will be evaluated in light of the 1920s Chinese societal representations. Understanding how past intellectual traditions still influence modern perspectives and literary representations of China requires this historical background. Although Taoism and Confucianism were not outlawed in the 1920s, their expressions were limited and questioned by the changing political ideas of the day, which the study will address in Maugham's story, reflecting or challenging these aspects.

This approach will also contrast *The Painted Veil* with other British literary works that explore Chinese culture, such as Pearl S. Buck's *The Good Earth* and Eileen Chang's *Love in a Fallen City*, using a framework of comparative literary analysis. These contrasts will underline common motifs and story patterns, helping to clarify how China is portrayed in Western literature. Examined via the perspectives of postcolonial studies, cultural studies, and comparative literature, Maugham's novel forms the main data for this research. Scholarly papers, critical essays, and historical records, among other secondary materials, will offer more viewpoints on Maugham's representation of Chinese society and the philosophical ideas woven into the story.

The Painted Veil is analyzed in the study using Edward Said's thesis of Orientalism to show how it both questions and reflects Western views of the East. Theories of transcultural literature will also be used to evaluate Maugham's navigation between Chinese cultural components and British literary standards. This study intends to find whether Maugham's depictions of China provide real insights into Chinese society or merely support colonial preconceptions.

Ultimately, the study aims to offer a thorough knowledge of how the novel adds to the larger conversation on cultural representation in literature. Emphasizing the difficulties Western authors have in genuinely portraying Eastern cultures, it will investigate how cultural experiences inside the book affect narrative structure, character development, and thematic depth.

1. East Meets West: The Influence of Chinese Philosophy and Traditions on Western Literature

Chinese philosophy has a rich history, with ideas that shaped not only their cultural landscape but also influenced other cultures, particularly in the West. Three of the most significant aspects

of Chinese philosophy are Confucianism, Daoism, and Taoism. Confucianism emphasizes the importance of the family, respect for the elderly, and moral integrity. It is about how individuals interact with society and maintain harmony through relationships. This way of thinking has a strong influence on the development of character and social themes in literature.

As Western writers started to investigate Oriental ideologies against a backdrop of rising interest in different cultures, the interaction between Asian and Western ideas became more important, especially in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This exchange led to a deeper understanding and appreciation of various perspectives, which translated into innovative literary approaches. Claudia Clarke (2002) addresses how this idea of interchange lets Western authors include Chinese philosophical topics into their writings, hence broadening their storytelling horizons. Having visited China in 1919–1920, Maugham is a great example of this literary legacy since he had abundant material for his stories. His experiences during this time shaped *The Painted Veil* and earlier works like his trip sketches called *On a Chinese Screen* and the play *East of Suez*, published three years before *The Painted Veil*. Drawing on his experiences and relationships in Asia, Maugham shows a complex involvement with Chinese culture in these pieces (Wright & Cheng, 2015, p.67). Maugham catches the intricacies of the cross-cultural interaction by including ideas from his travels and philosophical influences. *The Painted Veil* especially shows this dynamic interaction of ideas, as the experiences of the protagonist, Kitty Fane, bring to life themes of colonialism and the conflict between Western individuality and Eastern collectivism. Maugham, as previously noted, weaves in philosophical musings that speak to both Confucian and Taoist legacies as Kitty Fane negotiates her relationship with the Chinese terrain and its people. The book is a beautiful canvas showing the transforming effect of cultural interactions throughout her trip. An example of a prominent work is the novel by Pearl S. Buck, *The Good Earth*, which illustrates the Confucian principles through his characters and their relationships. The protagonist, Wang Lung, exemplifies the Confucian ideal, in particular in his obligations towards the family and society. He works hard to provide for his family, showing the value attributed to work and responsibility in Confucian thought. His commitment to his ancestors and the earth highlights the Confucian notion of branch piety, which emphasizes the respect and care of parents and ancestors. The representation of Wang Lung's relationships with his wife, O-Land, and his children also reflects Confucian ideas on family dynamics and social order, underlining the importance of harmony and hierarchy within family ties (Jensen, 1997).

The integration of Chinese philosophies into Western narratives reflects a wider cultural exchange, allowing a deeper exploration of

universal themes. This mixing led the authors to adopt a more global perspective in their narrative, making the stories more recognizable across cultural borders. Elman (2020) discusses how this integration produces a richer literary identity that is not limited to a tradition and promotes a more inclusive narrative. Chinese philosophical ideas continue to resonate in contemporary literature, promoting greater understanding between cultures. Farh & Cheng (2000) show that as the authors draw from various traditions, they create narratives that speak to a diversified audience. This intercultural dialogue encourages empathy and understanding between readers and fills the gaps created by cultural differences. Lok & Crawford (2004) point out that by incorporating these philosophies, contemporary works can address complex themes, reflecting an increasingly interconnected world.

Overall, Chinese traditions and philosophies are not only historical elements; They are dynamic forces in the narrative that continue to influence and enrich Western literature. Their persistence in modern narratives serves as a reminder of the shared human experience, highlighting the ability of literature to cultivate understanding and connection between different cultures (Nakayama & Wan, 2019). This current relevance shows the adaptability of literary traditions and strengthens the idea that narration is a powerful tool for cultural exchange.

2. The Interplay of Chinese Culture and Colonial Perspectives in W. Somerset Maugham's *The Painted Veil*

The representation of the Chinese society of Maugham includes various traditional practices that reveal the structure of family life and the community. Through the lens of characters like Kitty and the Chinese doctor, Dr. Walter Fane, the narrative discovers the importance of values such as loyalty and duty to family, which are highly appreciated in Chinese culture (Pramesti, 2013). For example, the character of Dr. Fane embodies the duality of living in a world-oriented world while clinging to the traditional values of its Chinese legacy. This motivation of the character provides information on how deeply rooted traditions can influence individual actions and decisions. On the contrary, British characters, such as Kitty, often show a lack of understanding or appreciation for these cultural elements, revealing the conflicts between British colonial attitudes and Chinese social customs.

Within the context of British literature, Maugham's work is significant as it provides a specific perspective on colonialism and cultural interactions. *The Painted Veil's* depiction of China mirrors a more general colonial attitude whereby Westerners view Eastern nations through their cultural prism. This perspective often leads to appeal and misreading. Kitty Garstin, as a key character, embodies

this struggle. She first travels to China with notions of superiority and exoticism; later, she confronts the intricacy of Chinese society. Tong (2024) notes that “Kitty’s first conceit is tested as she comes across the richness and depth of Chinese culture, which causes her to doubt her convictions” (p. 15). Kitty’s narrative illustrates how Westerners confront their opinions and prejudices in a society that challenges their assumptions.

Drawing on his personal experiences, Maugham criticizes the somewhat simplistic portrayals of “The East” in British literature and urges readers to reflect on their views on foreign nations. Edward Said’s *Orientalism* offers a critical lens through which to view this interplay since he claims “the Orient was almost a European invention, and had been since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings, and wondrous experiences” (Said, 1978, p.1). Essentially, Maugham’s story emphasizes this distortion, hence exposing Western representations’ tendency to oversimplify and stereotype rich societies. Urging readers to look past their conditioned preconceptions and acquire a deeper knowledge of Eastern cultures, he stresses that “the East” is not a monolithic entity but a varied tapestry of identities and customs (Said, 1978, p.12).

The novel integrates the image of the British colonial environment with Chinese cultural identity as a literary bridge. The story’s contrasts and tensions inspire readers to reflect on the complex interactions between Western and Oriental points of view, hence stressing the need for mutual understanding and respect. Maugham exposes a depth in Chinese customs largely overlooked by Kitty Fane and other Westerners. This story aspect implies that although British characters feel superior, they cannot value the richness and vibrancy of the surrounding culture. Holden (1994) said that “Maugham challenges the readers to see beyond the standard colonial narrative, which frequently diminishes non-Western cultures” (p.84).

Maugham explicitly explores the dynamics of power between the British colonizers and the local Chinese population, highlighting the complexities of cultural interactions. The relationships between the characters in the novel are used to illustrate how power can change and how badly it appears. For example, during the cholera epidemic, the British characters exhibit a sense of paternalism about the local population. They believe their Western medicine and healthcare visions are superior, but this is rooted in a simplistic understanding of Chinese disease and sociocultural context. Jiang (2023) discusses how this conflicting attitude toward health care reveals underlying tensions and shows a lack of respect for Chinese practices. This dynamic presents a critical view of colonial attitudes, suggesting that Western approaches are not only inadequate but also despise local wisdom.

The interactions between people are another important element of Maugham's depiction of Chinese civilization. These links sometimes expose more profound philosophical concerns regarding love, duty, and cultural identity. Interactions between Kitty and the Chinese characters, particularly with Waddington and the local community, provide a platform for Maugham to dig into problems of belonging and alienation. Hlaskova et al. (2020) note that "Kitty's journey of self-discovery is intricately linked with her engagement with Chinese culture, helping her confront her identity and choices" (102). This study shows how cultural antecedents shape human relationships, hence highlighting the complexity of love and obligation.

In addition, Maugham presents a different portrait of the Chinese characters, emphasizing their agency and depth, rather than reducing them to mere props in the Western narrative. The dialogue and actions of characters like Waddington and the residents highlight their resilience and wisdom, which contradicts British stereotypes. This characterization invites readers to rethink not only the characters themselves but also the broader implications of cultural identity in the context of colonialism. Through these thematic elements, Maugham effectively criticizes colonialism and invites readers to engage and appreciate the depth of Chinese culture. He challenges simplistic colonial binaries, asking readers to recognize the importance of understanding and respecting different cultural perspectives. Maugham's work emphasizes that involvement with other cultures offers valuable information that can transcend the limitations of colonial views, providing a richer understanding of human experiences.

These quotations provide insight into Chinese philosophy, particularly the principles of Taoism, Confucianism, and Buddhism, which shape the thematic and moral framework of *The Painted Veil*. Through Walter Fane's adherence to Confucian duty, Kitty's transformation through Buddhist self-realization, and Waddington's understanding of Taoist principles, Maugham bridges the gap between Western literary tradition and Eastern thought. Furthermore, the novel's depiction of Chinese landscapes, customs, and social structures highlights both Maugham's appreciation of Chinese culture and his colonial perspective, illustrating the complexities of cultural representation in Western literature. These passages not only deepen the novel's philosophical undertones but also emphasize the cross-cultural exchanges that shape its narrative.

"It is the Way and the Waygoer. It is the eternal road along which walk all beings, but no being made it, for itself is being. It is everything and nothing. From it all things spring, all things conform to it, and to it at last all things return. It is a square without angles, a sound that ears cannot hear, and an image without form. It is a vast net and though

its meshes are as wide as the sea, it lets nothing through.” (Maugham, 1925, p.54).

This passage, spoken by Waddington, encapsulates key Taoist principles, particularly the notion that the Tao (The Way) is both the origin and the destination of all things. Taoism, a fundamental Chinese philosophical system, teaches that the universe follows a natural, spontaneous order, which humans should observe and follow rather than attempt to control. The description of the Tao as “everything and nothing” reflects its paradoxical nature—it exists yet remains formless and indefinable. Waddington, who has lived in China for years, seems to comprehend these ideas, unlike Kitty, whose Western mindset struggles to grasp the fluidity and non-dualistic nature of the Tao. This moment in the novel highlights the contrast between Western rationalism and Eastern metaphysical thought, a recurring theme in Maugham’s exploration of cultural exchange.

“The river, though it flowed so slowly, had still a sense of movement, and it gave one a melancholy feeling of the transitoriness of things. Everything passed, and what trace of its passage remained?” (Maugham, 1925, p.68).

Kitty’s reflection on the river’s slow but ceaseless movement echoes the Buddhist concept of impermanence, the idea that all things are in a constant state of change. In Buddhism, attachment to the illusion of permanence leads to suffering, and wisdom lies in accepting the fleeting nature of existence. At this point in the novel, Kitty is beginning to understand the transitory nature of life and human emotions, particularly her vanity, regrets, and misguided love. The river serves as a symbol of time and transformation, gently reinforcing her inner shift from self-centered indulgence to a deeper awareness of the world around her. Maugham’s use of the river as a metaphor also connects to classical Chinese poetry and philosophy, which often depict nature as a means of contemplating life’s ephemerality.

“He must have known how she regarded him and he had accepted her estimate without bitterness. She was a fool and he knew it and because he loved her it had made no difference to him.” (Maugham, 1925, p.72).

Walter Fane embodies Confucian ideals of loyalty, self-restraint, and moral obligation. Confucianism, a system of ethics deeply rooted in Chinese culture, emphasizes duty, harmony, and perseverance—even in the face of personal hardship. Walter’s quiet endurance of Kitty’s disdain and infidelity reflects his belief in honor and responsibility over personal happiness. Instead of seeking revenge or emotional validation, he remains committed to his medical work and his sense of rightness, even as he takes her into a cholera-infected region. His ability to absorb pain without retaliation aligns with the Confucian

ideal of ren (benevolence), which values virtue, integrity, and the preservation of societal harmony over impulsive emotional reactions. This passage highlights the contrast between Walter's self-discipline and Kitty's initial self-indulgence, reinforcing the novel's deeper moral and philosophical themes.

"But once within the convent, it had seemed to her that she was transported into another world situated strangely neither in space nor time." (Maugham, 1925, p.103).

The French Catholic convent, where Kitty volunteers during the cholera epidemic, represents a liminal space between two worlds—not just between life and death but between Western Christianity and Eastern philosophies. The nuns' selfless devotion to others is reminiscent of both Buddhist compassion (*karuṇā*) and Confucian duty. Their way of life, which focuses on serving others without seeking personal reward, stands in stark contrast to Kitty's previous self-absorption and materialism. The phrase "neither in space nor time" suggests that the convent transcends worldly concerns, allowing Kitty to detach from past regrets and future anxieties, a fundamental Buddhist principle. This marks a turning point in Kitty's character—she begins to see meaning beyond superficial pleasures and social status, inching toward spiritual growth and redemption.

"The nuns, Waddington and the Manchu woman who loved him, were fantastic characters in a masque; and the rest, the people sidling along the tortuous streets and those who died, were nameless supers." (Maugham, 1925, p.119).

This passage highlights Maugham's complex and at times colonial perspective on China. By describing the Chinese citizens as "nameless supers" (supernumeraries, or extras in a play), the narration reflects a Western gaze that reduces the local population to background figures in a European-centered story. However, the novel is not entirely dismissive of Chinese culture—Waddington's relationship with a Manchu woman, for instance, demonstrates a genuine cross-cultural exchange. The phrase "fantastic characters in a masque" suggests an exoticized view of the East, but it also acknowledges the intricate dynamics between Eastern and Western individuals. While Maugham presents a detailed depiction of Chinese customs and landscapes, this line serves as a reminder of the imperial attitudes still in 1920s British literature.

"It does seem a long way to Harrington Gardens," she smiled. (Maugham, 1925, p.132).

This moment marks Kitty's realization of how distant her former life in London has become—not just geographically but spiritually and psychologically. When she first arrived in China, she viewed it with disdain, misunderstanding, and cultural ignorance. Now, after

her experiences with the convent, the cholera epidemic, and Walter's death, she sees her old life as foreign and trivial. The reference to Harrington Gardens (her home in England) underscores how much she has changed—she is no longer the naïve, vain woman who once dismissed Walter and pursued an affair with Townsend. Instead, she has absorbed elements of Eastern thought, particularly Buddhist acceptance of suffering and Confucian responsibility, into her worldview. This line encapsulates the novel's theme of transformation through cultural immersion and personal loss.

The novel is more than just a story about forgiveness; it's also a deep look at cultural exchange, philosophical change, and the conflict between Eastern and Western worldviews. The book combines Chinese philosophical ideas with Western literary storytelling through Kitty's spiritual awakening, Walter's Confucian sense of duty, and Waddington's Taoist insights. This creates a story that is both imperialistic and genuinely cross-cultural. China's landscape, which is full of traditions and symbols, sets the scene for Kitty's change and makes it happen. This adds to the novel's deeper thoughts on change, morality, and the human situation. In the end, it shows how literature can bring people from different cultures together by showing how thought, identity, and personal growth can be shared across borders of geography and ideology.

Conclusion

W. Somerset Maugham's *The Painted Veil* is a multifaceted literary work that not only narrates a tale of personal development but also offers a viewpoint from which British literature interacts with Chinese civilization. While also reflecting more general cultural interactions between the West and the East, the book investigates ideas of love, betrayal, redemption, and self-discovery via Kitty Fane's journey. Maugham's depiction of China, which includes aspects of Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism, is complexly interwoven and shapes the philosophical underpinnings of the book as well as its attack on Western individualism. Though Maugham wants to grasp Chinese thought, his story runs the risk of succumbing to Orientalist stereotypes since, as Edward Said points out in *Orientalism*, the Western portrayal of the East is sometimes filtered through a prism of exoticism and misunderstanding.

The novel depicts China as both a cultural background against which Kitty's growth develops and a place of change. Maugham's portrayal of Chinese society, especially via its landscapes, social practices, and intellectual traditions, shows a notable respect for the richness of Chinese culture. Rich as it is, this involvement is hampered by the story's foundation in British literary standards, emphasizing the perspective of a Western protagonist, hence marginalizing Chinese characters. This dichotomy emphasizes the complexity of cross-

cultural representation in colonial-era literature by reflecting both an involvement with and a separation from Chinese culture.

The difference between Western and Eastern worldviews is central to the conceptual framework of the book. Kitty's early ignorance and aloofness reflect a colonial attitude that views non-Western societies as alien and inferior. But she starts to get a better knowledge of selflessness and duty—two fundamental values in both Confucian and Taoist philosophies—as she goes through the discipline of a Buddhist monastery, sees Walter's self-sacrificial commitment, and interacts with Chinese customs. This alteration implies that Maugham shows China as a space where significant personal and philosophical transformation can take place rather than just using it as an exotic backdrop, supporting Said's claim that knowing the East calls for more than superficial depictions.

Furthermore, the book challenges British colonial ideas and the portrayal of non-Western nations in literature. Though Maugham shows knowledge of Chinese culture, his portrayal of Chinese people usually falls under Western literary standards. Though the story interacts with Chinese philosophical traditions, which deepens it, it does not completely embrace a realized representation of Chinese points of view. This highlights the larger conflict in colonial writing, where respect for alien cultures coexists with the natural prejudices of the age.

Examining *The Painted Veil* via the lens of literary Orientalism and cross-cultural interaction helps this paper to investigate how the book balances appreciation and misrepresentation, depth and distance, involvement and detachment. Maugham's work is a tribute to how Western literature has always treated Eastern civilizations, sometimes mixing real interest with inherited biases. Ultimately, the novel serves as a reminder of the need for more nuanced and inclusive narratives that transcend colonial viewpoints, echoing Edward Said's call for a deeper knowledge of the 'Other,' but also invites readers to consider the intricacies of cultural representation in literature and the transforming power of cross-cultural interactions.

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