

# A Critical Exploration of American Culture Values in The Great Gatsby: A Tri-Dimensional Analysis and the Trajectory of Value Distortion

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## Abstract

This thesis is an attempt to assess and apply the current research trends of the American culture values in *The Great Gatsby*. The rapid development of American capitalism in the Jazz age made the United States enter the modern society of industrialization. However, American people pursue the achievement of social value that has been abandoned, deviating from the original intention of the American dream early beliefs. It elaborately analyzes the literature called *The Great Gatsby* which embodies the profound study of American cultural values, aiming to further comprehend that the values play an essential role in people's understanding and transformation of the world. This thesis analyzes the American culture values embodied by *The Great Gatsby* from three dimensions including individualistic value, material culture and social stratum culture, visually presenting the different levels of the positive and negative aspects of the mainstream American culture. It also objectively reappears the fact that the transition between old and new American culture values in the money-oriented society of the 1920s, showing the inevitability of the distortion of the American culture values.



Full Text Article



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**Keywords:** American Culture Values; The Great Gatsby; Jazz Age; American Dream; Enlightenment

## Introduction

The publication of *The Great Gatsby* established F. Scott Fitzgerald's position in the history of modern American literature, becoming the spokesman of the jazz Age in the 1920s and one of the representative writers of the Lost generation. The rapid development of American capitalism in the Jazz age made the United States enter the modern society of industrialization. This significant period that represented the formalization of American mainstream cultural pattern when the transition between old and new American culture values in the jazz Age.

Many scholars both at home and abroad analyze in *The Great Gatsby* which embodies the profound study of American cultural values, pointing out that the individual unlimited expansion of desires under the influence of consumer culture. They state that American people pursue the

achievement of social value has been abandoned, deviating from the original intention of the American dream early beliefs. Eventually, it leads to the distortion of personal values, thus revealing the tragedy of Gatsby and the inevitability of the subsequent disillusionment of the American dream.

The jazz Age in the 1920s in the United states experienced rapid economic development and transformation from an industrial society to a consumer society, and people's accumulated material wealth had highlighted the lack of spiritually barren. This paper discusses American cultural values in *The Great Gatsby* at the core of the kernel, aiming to further comprehend that the values play an essential role in people's understanding and transformation of the world. What is far more important is that values affect people's understanding and evaluation of matters, searching for values is to find the true meaning of life. Through the elaborate study of American values, it will find out the underlying factors that influence and shape American culture values, and obtain enlightenment from individualistic value, material culture, and social stratum culture.

This thesis consists of six chapters. Chapter one introduces the analysis of American culture values in *The Great Gatsby*. Chapter two deals with reflections of different American Culture Values in *The Great Gatsby*, including individualistic value, material culture, social stratum culture. Chapter three discusses that reasons for the conversion of American culture values in *The Great Gatsby*, including political influence, economic development, social background. Chapter four analyzes that the study on the enlightenment of cultural values embodied by *The Great Gatsby* to China. Chapter five introduces the conclusion of the thesis.

### ***Reflections of Different American Culture Values in The Great Gatsby***

It introduces that the analysis of Gatsby's different culture values from different perspectives, including the perspectives of individualistic values, material culture and social stratum culture. Firstly, the American value of individualism encouraged people to constantly explore and improve themselves so as to realize social values. Secondly, under the influence of material and cultural pessimism, people are selfish and vain and have no moral values. Thirdly, in the environment where money worship and hedonism are prevalent, class solidification is getting more and more serious.

#### ***Individualistic Value***

Individualism is the core of American culture and has always influenced the thoughts and behaviors of Americans. The American values of individualism in the 1920s were clearly reflected in *The Great Gatsby*. According to the essence of values, one is the development of Gatsby, the hero, who holds an optimistic attitude and individualistic values. The other is Daisy, the heroine, who embodies the extreme individualistic values of the bourgeoisie.

Gatsby, the hero of the Great Gatsby, was a typical embodiment of American individualism. His optimism, diligence and enterprising were the necessary prerequisites for realizing the American dream. In despite of Gatsby came from the lowest strata of society, he was eager to realize the American dream and hope to change his fate by his own efforts when he was very young(Liu XiaoFang, 2024). Franklin realized the American dream through his own efforts, so Gatsby took

him as his goal and motivation. According to Franklin's time plan, Franklin arranged a precise and reasonable timetable for himself and executed it rigorously. For instance, “No more smoking or chewing”, “Bath every other day”, “Read one improving book or magazine per week” etc. He firmly believed that he can rely on his own efforts, starting from scratch, living a wealthy and happy life and realizing the value of life. He is a person with the spirit of self-reliance. He not only gets rid of the shackles of other people's thoughts, but also can use his own potential to realize his own wishes. Compared with the property Tom inherited from the previous generation, Gatsby came from lower class. However, he was not willing to be mediocre and had great ambitions for his future development. Although he was cheated by Cody's mate for his reward, he did not hate her, nor was he depressed, and his dreams had not been destroyed. He looked for opportunities and obtained Wolf Sam's trust within three years. Gatsby's ability is amazing, but his talent is not only limited to accumulating wealth, but also includes other aspects. More importantly, Gatsby, relying on his own efforts, was never willing to live a life of mediocrity. He held the belief that one's dream could be realized ultimately as long as one strived to realize their dreams and personal values. These above convey a conviction that Gatsby possessed the indomitable spirit of individualism which was admirable and respectable.

The values of extreme individualism embodied in Daisy were quite different from the positive values of the protagonist Gatsby, and the inherent characteristics of the bourgeoisie were fully reflected in this heroine. A society that values money will not cultivate gentle women. In the corruption of materialism and money worship, the souls of women like Daisy were etched with pits and blemishes by the times. However, this hedonistic lifestyle had already robbed them of their own identities, and they were led step by step into the abyss by false guidance, without realizing that it was wrong, and they thought that this was exactly the kind of happiness they wanted(Liu Dongyang, 2014). Daisy was the symbol of beauty and wealth, and she was also the embodiment of Gatsby's dream. However, at the same time she was selfish and indifferent towards lower class, and she had no sense of responsibility but just took the belief of material supremacy as her pursuit. It was precisely this feature that, in face of money and benefits, she abandoned Gatsby who treated her with sincerity and married Tom without hesitation who was rich and had high social position, thus obtaining a stable life brought by money and wealth. Faced with morality and humanity, she blamed Gatsby for killing Tom's mistress. The despicable means led Gatsby to be shot by Wilson, who was deceived, and paid the price of life. As long as Daisy's own desires could be satisfied and her own crimes could be escaped, she could even sell her own lover and close friends. She didn't care about the loss of others' interests and whether she was condemned by conscience or not.

The extreme individualism embodied in Daisy reflects the inner conformity of the American people in the Jazz Age from the pursuit of pleasure to decadence in life values. "The Great Gatsby" intuitively presents the positive and negative aspects of American cultural values. It objectively reproduces the fact that the United States has changed from old values to new values, and shows the American social scene in the 1920s.

### *Material Culture*

The rapid development of economy made the consumption-oriented material culture permeate the whole American society. After the First World War, the economy of the United States entered the

track of rapid development, consumers were free to choose and buy goods according to their own needs. The rich material life, such as the dazzling array of goods, drunken life, and the pursuit of money and fame and wealth, shows the cultural transformation era of the United States from old values to new values. The traditional ethical values had been unprecedentedly challenged by the psychological consumption with material culture as the core. It highlights the value orientation of the American people under the influence of material culture and consumer culture, and people's psychological state of emptiness and helplessness under the control of material desires.

*The Great Gatsby* described a series of symbolic objects in Daisy's home, such as car, piano, cigarette, gift, etc. What's more, it demonstrated the magnificent decoration style and the fashionable interior design of the house. In fact, the space occupied by various consumer goods in Daisy's home was a metonymy for American social prosperity and economic abundance (Chen Xu, 2020). In the 1920s, under the influence of material culture, Daisy was completely different from the stereotyped traditional women. Daisy placed her ideal life on material benefits and showed a certain tendency of objectification under the foil of material. She was not only going to smoke and drink at wine parties, but also wearing heavy make up to go to all kinds of noisy parties. However, material affluence was difficult to fill the spiritual vacancy. Daisy can only cover up her inner emptiness and confusion by playing a noble and elegant member of the upper class and enjoying life in boredom. In the ostentatious environment, Daisy indulged in the pleasure of wealth and then transformed into a typical representative of materialism. She put aside and neglected Gatsby, who was full of enthusiasm but was lack of wealth. Under the temptation of material, she mercilessly abandoned Gatsby who loved her deeply. Tom had the tangible material wealth that Daisy craved, but Gatsby could not give her the sense of security she needed desperately.

In order to win Daisy's heart, the protagonist of the novel *Gatsby* spared no efforts to obtain the social identity and status. His lover Daisy was obsessed with wealth. In order to amass wealth, Gatsby was willing to collude with the underworld for smuggling, including tax evasion and mercenary. These illegal act led Gatsby who had been frugal and steadfast, going astray and losing his righteous bearings. The phenomenon reflected that people's values were alienated and distorted and the ugly human nature was exposed completely under the drive of material culture. The materialization of value was the inevitable production of the capital society and the erosion of the human value. At the same time, the intensification of value materialization made people's daily life become unprecedented utilitarianism, which became the main standard for evaluating and measuring people and things. Gatsby bought luxurious villas, yachts and famous cars to show his improvement of status. Meanwhile, in order to maintain his reputation, he kept inviting celebrities to hold parties in his luxurious villa. With material enjoyment and luxurious consumption, Gatsby became famous and his social status was greatly improved. According to the novel, "It has two small powerboats, a Rolls Royce that shuttles around town from 9 a.m. to midnight, and a station wagon that looks like a yellow beetle that shuttles guests to the train station." All these undoubtedly reflected the naked relationship of interests between people in the material society. At this moment, Gatsby was well-off and affectionate. When Daisy saw that Gatsby became a millionaire and held a luxurious party that could be attended by all members of the upper class, she might regret her original choice in front of material wealth. As mentioned in the novel, Daisy burst into tears in the pile of colorful shirts symbolizing wealth. However, what aroused Daisy's old love was not Gatsby's infatuated and sincere heart, but the luxurious decoration in the villa and Gatsby's luxurious life.

There is no doubt that Daisy's material desire and shallowness were obvious. The social atmosphere of money worship not only made people decadent in spirit and morality, but also made countless people gradually degenerate under the era of rampant material culture.

### *Social Stratum Culture*

*The Great Gatsby* described the tumultuous age of 1920s after the end of World War I in the United States. In the prevailing environment of money worship and hedonism, the phenomenon of stratum solidification was becoming more and more serious. The dreams and endings of the characters from three different classes in the literature elucidated and confirmed the phenomenon of the solidified social stratum and hierarchy in the United States, which only emphasized material abundance and ignored spiritual pursuit. Under the imprisonment of social stratum solidification, the American people deviated from the original belief of the American dream and lost the values of equality, freedom and democracy advocated in the previous time. Early Americans believed opportunities were equal that everyone had possibility to achieve their dreams through their efforts. However, with the development of American society, the social stratification was gradually distinct, and it became more and more difficult for people from the bottom of the society to realize the dream of leaping the stratum, and it was also difficult for them to have the opportunity to realize the transformation of identity.

Material culture researchers argue that objects can "perform social functions", "integrate and differentiate different social groups, social classes or tribes" (Woodward, 2007). In a consumerist society, residential and other consumption items are re-coded as indices of social class. In *The Great Gatsby*, the upper class, the emerging class and the poor class were respectively represented by the places where three different characters live: East Egg, West Egg and Grey Valley. Tom Buchanan, the representative of the upper class living in East Egg, tried his best to protect the existing social status and was wary of other classes. He was especially afraid that the emerging class like Gatsby would threaten his status. The upper class represented by Tom distinguished themselves from other classes by means of good educational background and noble blood, so as to maintain his own noble social status. What's more, Daisy was also from the upper class. In the literature, she was called a beautiful little fool and a gold digger whose voice was full of money. She was constantly making choices in front of material wealth. In the later development of the story, Daisy and Tom used despicable means to put the blame on Gatsby after the hit-and-run. Not even a single member of the upper class attended Gatsby's funeral, and those stubborn old aristocrats just regarded Gatsby's home as a free entertainment place. Their innate sense of superiority revolted them and made them loathe anyone who might threaten their social status. As Nick said, they smash things, destroy people, and then put money into their pockets to let others clean up their mess (Fitzgerald, 2016).

As a representative of the emerging class, Gatsby had no noble blood, and the lack of strong family background had actually determined his social status. Without the support of both economic and cultural capital, Gatsby obviously could not reach the social prestige of Nick and Tom's family. Due to the impact of Franklin's early spirit, Gatsby determined to become a rich man, entering into the upper class and pursuing the heart of the green light, that is, the dream of wealth and love. What it had mentioned about these dreams that the middle and lower classes of American society had

always sought American dream. Owing to the different historical background, American society was full of material desire and solidified class structure in the 1920s. As long as you work hard, you could succeed definitely and everything is possible. This early belief in the American dream had been annihilated, and the alienation and distortion of the values of the American dream and the serious erosion of human nature had already made the American dream become an ethereal existence. Money cannot be the capital tool to break through class boundaries. Gatsby's efforts to accumulate wealth by hook or by crook and his hope to build a ladder leading to the upper class through money were doomed to fail. He thought he had completed the upward class transition, but he did not know that money could not be the "capital" that broke through class boundaries(Chen Jing, 2018). Gatsby's death had a great influence on the American dream and the jazz age, showing the sentiment of the post-war lost generation towards American dream was disillusioned. The upper class obstructed the channels against the middle and lower classes to move to the upper society, and the benefit culture of the whole society hindered class mobility. This model of allocating resources according to their ability had broken the social equity and justice, and social productivity would inevitably decline, which was not conducive to the stable and harmonious development of society.

Wilson and his wife living in Grey Valley represented the poor class. Wilson was a typical representative who had neither economic capital nor cultural capital to support him. The Wilsons' marriage was a hoax. He wore a borrowed suit and married a woman from the same class, but he was unable to remain marital relationship he had sought. Mrs. Wilson Myrtle's situation was quite different from her dream of marrying a rich man. Due to her unwilling to live a poor life with her husband, she held a lot of complaints with Wilson. Mrs. Wilson met Tom from the upper class. She tried to satisfy her desire to cross social strata by pleasing and relying on men, so as to make herself into the upper class. But from the perspective of wealthy people in the high class, she was nothing more than a vehicle for their own personal desires. For example, when Mrs. Wilson was killed by Daisy's car, Tom ruthlessly used his death to cheat Wilson so that he could escape his illegal act. Such kind of people could only be confined to their own social class, breaking away from the label of inferior identity and becoming the plaything of the upper class.

## **Reasons for the Conversion of American Culture Values in *The Great Gatsby***

The United States is a newly industrial country. At the beginning of establishing its nation, America was the earliest countries to shake off the shackles of centralization of authority and head for the road to democracy. Without a long history or cultural traditions, the United States had developed a diversity of values. Through the presentation of different types of American values, the Great Gatsby reflected the political, economic, social environment factors of the United States in jazz age.

### ***Political Influence***

The story took place in 1922, during the post-World War I era (1914-1918) when the United States was experiencing rapid economic growth, and this was also the decade before the Great

Depression (1919-1929), during which jazz was becoming popular among whites, so it was also known as the "Jazz Age"(Wang Xiaoping. 2023).

The First World War resulted in the collapsed capitalist system and people's distorted traditional values and American people need to look for new values to guide their directions. The United States was going through the historical transformation of old and new values. At the same time, the United States made a great fortune by means of providing arms to both sides and became a creditor country from a debtor country when participated in the First World War. Meanwhile, the young generations realized the hollow morality of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century after participating in the war. People began to doubt what used to be considered sacred. After the end of World War I, this group of young generations reflected on the meaning of the war, beginning to search for cultural values that would reguide their lives—in the pursuit of today's pleasure, actually lost their values and outlook on meaningful life. It reappeared the mental outlook of the American people after the First World War and the confused ideological situation of the "American dream". The traditional cultural values were confronted with various challenges, and the new values had not yet been formed. As a result, Americans were morally corrupted and spiritually barren at that time. They dreamed of becoming millionaires overnight, and the pursuit of material satisfaction had become a social fashion.

In the novel, the author carefully selected characters representing different social classes and then reflected the American social life in the 1920s. Tom and Daisy were representatives of the old aristocracy at the time. They just used money to fill their boring and meaningless lives. They were morally depraved, selfish and irresponsible. As Nick said, they smash things, destroy people, and then put money into their pockets to let others clean up their mess. Gatsby accumulated wealth through a series of illegal crimes. These acts absolutely proved that Gatsby lost his conscience and personal morality in the process of pursuing his American dream. The Wilsons were the lower class of laboring people that led a miserable life. Mrs. Wilson tried to satisfy her desire to cross social strata by pleasing and relying on men, so as to make herself into the upper class. No matter what social class these characters belong to, they are advocating money and pursuing pleasure. Money has become the value orientation of American life. The United States in the Jazz Age was a mercenary and morally bankrupt society. The First World War was an important turning point, especially in the transformation of American cultural values. The material enrichment and spiritual emptiness brought by the war to the American people made the original American dream change secretly.

The traditional social order and norms maintained by Prohibition were in conflict with the modern consciousness held by Americans, which reflected the shaking of traditional values in the period of social transformation in the United States. Prohibition, enacted in 1920, prohibited people from making, transporting, storing, and selling alcoholic beverages in the United States. During the period when the government implemented the ban, the United States changed from an agricultural society to an industrial society, which strengthened the modern consciousness of Americans, broke the moral constraints, and shook and disintegrated the traditional cultural values. The prohibition of alcohol implemented by the institutional power in the United States provided a guarantee for the continuation of traditional morality. Prohibition was a symbol of moral taboos. People at that time broke through the moral taboos represented by prohibition and subverted the existing order and norms. In *The Great Gatsby*, Fitzgerald described the real situation under Prohibition, Tom's small family banquet and Gatsby's grand and noisy cocktail party typically reflected the American youth's

binge drinking during Prohibition. There was a real brass bar in the lobby, stocked with all kinds of gin and spirits, as well as the long-forgotten manna, and then the female guests, who were mostly young, couldn't tell one brand from the other. These scenes were the embodiment of the rebellious psychology of the people aroused by the implementation of Prohibition.

### *Economic Development*

After the First World War, economic growth in the United States was out of control during the Roaring Twenties (Hisa, Min, & Tia, 2021). Material hedonism was rampant, and the traditional values had received unprecedented influence. At the same time, material affluence did not bring spiritual enrichment. People fell into a state of materialistic emptiness, and the spiritual pursuit of human value deviated from the cultural values embodied in the United States. In the case of material abundance, people became more and more utilitarian under the pursuit of money and fame. These qualities were fully reflected in the character descriptions of Daisy and Mrs. Wilson in *The Great Gatsby*. In order to live a luxurious life, Daisy did not hesitate to marry Tom who she did not like at all, just because Tom inherited a huge family property. The description of Daisy's wedding culminated in her utilitarianism, when Tom traveled south with 100 guests in four chartered buses, rented the entire floor of the Mauerbach Hotel, and the day before the wedding, he gave Daisy a string of pearls estimated to be worth \$350,000. Through the wedding of luxury hotels and the value of pearls embodied in the utilitarian behavior, people's psychological desire for material and status reflected the rampant materialism in the Jazz Age, which had impacted traditional cultural values. Mrs. Wilson was ostentatious, and she despised her husband because he had no money. She said that "I married him because I thought he was a gentleman and he had some manners, but he was not fit to lick my shoes". Attracted by Tom's money and social status, Mrs. Wilson became his mistress while being haughty to those around her. When utilitarian existence brought people material satisfaction, it also made people confront the misfortune of spiritual poverty. The values for the purpose of satisfying material consumption and sensory enjoyment were constantly spreading and developing in the society at that time. They may led their different lifestyle, but the values behind them were essentially influenced by the worship of money. The unprecedented material prosperity of the Jazz Age and the increasing prosperity of capitalist society distorted people's traditional cultural values.

*The Great Gatsby* also demonstrates that people were dehumanized, while things appear to take on animate power. The more people lose their subject position and become objects, the more objects shift into subject position. Hence, social relations are transferred from people to things (Grosu, 2012). In a consumer society, everything in life became a commodity. Consumption was not only reflected in the material aspect, but also in the cultural level. Each consumer was not only the judge of the value of the commodity, but also became the target group judged by the public by virtue of owning the commodity. The purpose of people's consumption was not to meet the basic needs of life, but to get the symbolic meaning represented by the goods. Personal status and wealth were realized by purchasing luxury goods to obtain their symbolic meaning. At that time, consumption became essential behaviors to satisfy their growing desires, which influenced people's values imperceptibly. Mrs. Wilson came from the bottom of society and tried to convey her desire for identity through expensive clothes. She changed clothes three times a day, and the symbolic



meaning of the colors, styles and fabrics of the clothes changed her psychological identity. *The Great Gatsby* mentioned in the novel that after she arrived at the apartment, she changed into the delicate Florentine cream dress, which swelled her and filled the whole room, so that the room seemed smaller. She tried to create social status through luxury goods. The image of Mrs. Wilson reflected the fission of values in the American society under the influence of economic development.

### *Social Background*

Fitzgerald's work *The Great Gatsby* fully embodied the life atmosphere of the American society at that time, and vividly depicted the hustle and bustle, enjoyment and degradation of the 1920s by using vivid and concrete language. It was, in Fitzgerald's own words, an age of miracles, an age of art, an age of excess, and an age of satire.

In *The Great Gatsby*, the descriptions of railways, automobiles, newspapers, telephones and other objects appeared many times in the book, highlighting the rapid development of American technology and economy. The period of time brought an age of the miracles and art. The vigorous rise of the car and other means of transportation in this literature reflected the various situations in social life. Wilson's wife was always carefully selected to be able to show her gorgeous and noble status through the new car. The car was like a mirror reflecting the character's state of mind, exposing her strong vanity and desire to squeeze into society. The description of Daisy's white convertible and Gatsby's Rolls Royce in the work reflected that car became a tool for people to show their wealth and social status at that time. It not only represented the progress of society, but also showed the decline of morality. These products of the new age had provided the convenience of American life, but also the opportunity for human degradation. Material enjoyment would push people's spiritual world to the abyss and lose the right direction. It was also a metaphor for the development of such a capitalist society.

Critics have viewed American society in the twenties as a consumer culture. Other critics explain how the advertisements and media contributed to this consumer culture that influenced American society in 1920s(Beuka, 2011). The prosperity of American economy in the 1920s gave rise to the rapid development of mass media such as newspapers, magazines and movies. The emerging of mass media was closely related to the overall economic situation. According to Brevda, "the great Gatsby portrays the new age of advertising. People check out signs, fashion themselves out of fashionable images, and market themselves as that magical image, becoming signs themselves"(Brevda, 2011).

In order to stimulate sales and increase profits, enterprises began to advertise through newspapers, radio, movies and other effective channels as much as possible. The two most dominant forms of media were radio and film. The former brought news, advertising and jazz music into American families, while the latter became an ingenious way of lifestyle. These cultural forms, which represent the lifestyle of the urban middle class, are sought after by young people. The popular language, fashion style and behavior habits created by the media at that time changed the ideas and lifestyles of Americans, which had a profound impact on American society and culture. The novel described the public image of the characters in particular detail. Daisy and Jordan wore white dresses, Mrs. Wilson changed clothes three times a day, and Gatsby had a pile of high-end shirts of various colors. The characters' understanding of these lives came from mass media such as

magazines and newspapers. The characters in the novel adorned themselves with a lifestyle of higher class, but they were essentially out of the orbit of traditional morality and led hypocritical lives. Their cognition, thinking and behavior habits were carried out according to advertisement and commodity sales, which were based on the absence of any real life. The mass media spawned by the economic prosperity constantly influenced people's ideology.

After the First World War, the United States began a decade of economic prosperity. With the rapid development of capitalism, the traditional puritan convictions of diligence, thrift and simplicity were replaced by the value concept of pursuing material pleasure. This social environment led to spiritual poverty and emptiness and egoism, which gave rise to the people's life habits of profligate, passive decadent, extravagant waste. Under the influence of Prohibition in the 1920s, the American people were banned to drink alcohol, but the phenomenon of public drinking and revelry was common. What's more, under the administration of this policy, unscrupulous merchants became rich by illegally manufacturing or smuggling alcoholic beverages. In spite of possessing the abundance of material wealth, people's spiritual world was gradually barren and empty. They abandoned the traditional value culture, indulging in the material flow of the upper society.

### **Enlightenment of Cultural Values Embodied by *The Great Gatsby* to China**

Fitzgerald's themes range from the fulfillment of the American Dream, to the decadence of the wealthy, to economic inequality, to hero worship. Over the twentieth century, it has emerged to play a central role in how Americans know themselves, and *Gatsby* established or developed many of the tropes that would be dominant in that culture (Batchelor, 2015). The American cultural values embodied by *The Great Gatsby* emphasized the pursuit of material wealth through individual efforts, and people did not care about the harmonious relationships among groups. The communication between people was filled with indifference, selfishness and interests, and the friction and inequality between different classes were completely exposed. The above social problems have important enlightenment and reference value for us to advocate the Chinese dream. Therefore, this part will draw lessons from American cultural values to explain how to build a socialist country with Chinese characteristics.

Firstly, China's prosperity and strength are the result of the joint efforts of all its people. If we just pursue the prosperity of privileged groups, it will lead to the collapse of the Chinese dream. The Chinese dream is put forward from the height of the country, conforms to the wishes and expectations of all Chinese people, and strives to achieve the common happiness of all people. Therefore, the realization of individual dreams cannot be ignored. Only by adhering to the principle of putting people first can the state better handle contradictions among the people and stimulate their creative activities. In this way, we can construct a socialist harmonious society. We need adhere to this target about the realization of the people's all-round development. Common prosperity is not the prosperity of a few people, but the prosperity of all the Chinese people. It is necessary to make common prosperity for all the people in order to strive for the people's happiness. On the new journey of building a modern socialist country in all-round way, there has a far-reaching effect on the fruits of reform and development benefiting all the people in a more equitable way. Thus, this method can make tangible progress in promoting common prosperity for all.

National government should start from the fundamental interests of the masses, effectively protecting the economic, political and cultural rights and interests of the people, constantly improving people's life quality and enhancing their sense of gain, security and happiness.

Secondly, the government should establish an impartial social environment for development so that everyone has an equal opportunity to achieve dream. The novel embodied that most of the wealth of society was concentrated in the upper class. At the same time, this phenomenon made the boundaries between the upper class and other classes more obvious, and the upward mobility of social classes was increasingly solidified. It reflected that upward economic mobility did not mean upward social class, and generational inheritance of social identity still hindered mobility between classes. According to the above phenomenon of stratification, China should adhere to the principle of fairness and justice. Furthermore, national government needs to formulate corresponding policies and regulations to ensure that the basic rights of social members are realized according to law. The fair distribution of social wealth is allocated according to each person's contribution to the society, which can narrow the gap between the rich and the poor and achieve common prosperity. The above measures have benefited the majority of social members and truly improved the quality of social development. Make ensure that every member of society can have roughly the same basic development opportunities and create conditions for the all-round development of personality. This method stimulates people to pursue the dream spirit so as to build a harmonious socialist society. The state should resolutely oppose social privileges to safeguard and realize social fairness and justice.

Thirdly, what China advocates is the simultaneous development of material prosperity and spiritual civilization.. If we only emphasize material affluence while neglecting spiritual civilization, the whole socialist edifice will eventually fall apart. It can be reflected elaborately in the United States described in *The Great Gatsby* is a society of luxury consumption and enjoyment, but behind all the luxury materials, it is a world of spiritual impoverishment and moral decay. These social problems have important enlightenment and reference value for us to make relevant measures. China should build a harmonious society with coordinated economic, political and cultural development. Material civilization is the foundation of spiritual civilization, and spiritual civilization is the leading function of material civilization. Only the joint development of material civilization and spiritual civilization can we promote the sustainable and healthy development of society. Under no circumstances can spiritual civilization be sacrificed in exchange for temporary economic development. While building material civilization, we should give prominent position to the construction of socialist spiritual civilization, steadily advancing the cause of socialism with Chinese characteristics. On the one hand, China should focus on economic development, deepen reform and opening up, promote scientific and technological development, give full play to the strategy of innovation-driven development, and consolidate the goal of making China a strong country. On the other hand, we should pay attention to the construction of spiritual civilization and further strengthen ideological education, vigorously cultivate and carry forward the socialist core value system, and establish correct values so that everyone can become the practitioner and disseminator of socialist core values. Citizens need carry forward the traditional Chinese virtues, understand the true meaning of dedication, solidarity, mutual assistance and friendship, internalize the traditional virtues in the heart and externalize in practice, and create a modern socialist civilized society.

## Conclusion

As a noted saying goes “taking history as a mirror”, *The Great Gatsby* describes the American cultural values in the 1920s. Under the influence of materialism and hedonism, the true portrayal of the lost generation is a profound reflection on the aspect of morality. In the rapid development stage of capitalism, people's material affluence and spiritual emptiness form a sharp contrast, deviating from the original faith of the early American dream and distorting the moral value culture. In the face of the trend of materialism and hedonism, the most important is to keep in mind that abolish the characteristic of selfish and vanity without moral values. What is far more important is that everyone need possess the positive attitude to attain goals and dreams, climbing into the ideal society by our own efforts, instead of indulging in the disillusionment of material affluence.

When the chairman Xi Jinping was visiting the exhibition called Road to Revival, he had put forward the Chinese Dream of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, which aimed at national prosperity, national rejuvenation and people's happiness. In this new era, the Chinese dream is not only the dream of the nation but also the dream of every Chinese. History tells us that the future and destiny of each individual are closely linked to the future and destiny of the country. To realize the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation is a glorious and arduous task, it requires the joint efforts of generations of Chinese people. It cannot achieve this magnificent goal without the unity of the people of all ethnic groups in China.

Through the research of the cultural values of the American society in Jazz Age, we can have a better understanding of American culture values and get the enlightenment conducive to the construction of a socialist country with Chinese characteristics. It is necessary to prevent long-standing problems that happened in the Chinese society. The findings of these problems will provide reference for China to raise one's vigilance and take preventive measures in the future. Through these persistent efforts, it is believed that China will build a harmonious society with coordinated economic, political and cultural development.

## Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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