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## Americans' Eastward Journey - Intercultural Communication in *The Portrait of a Lady*

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### Abstract

In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, a heat of travel abroad especially to Europe arose among Americans. With *The portrait of a Lady*, noted for its international theme as the research subject, this paper intends to interpret some leading causes including context, prejudice and ethnocentrism resulting in cultural conflicts. Meanwhile, a closer observation will be given to the process and types of cultural adaptation, containing culture shock, assimilation and integration. This paper, lastly, expresses that a more smooth intercultural communication is urgently needed for an ideal culture integration.

**Key words:** Intercultural communication; Cultural conflicts; Cultural adaptation; Henry James

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### INTRODUCTION

As Gertrude Stein once put it, "Henry James was the first person in literature to find the way to the literary methods of the twentieth century." (Follini & Horne, 2008, p.1) Being the founder of psychological realism which is a prelude of stream of consciousness later on, James skillfully focuses on exploring characters' internal

world and subjective mood. In addition, his sufficient intercontinental experiences provide valuable materials for his creation. It could be peeped that international theme is one of the distinct features of his writing. He earnestly explores the responses and consequences of the meeting between Americans and Europeans, the Old and the New world.

*The Portrait of a Lady* is renowned for its international theme. It primarily deals with the beautiful and innocent American lady Isabel crossing the Atlantic to Europe with revere and fancy. She continually refuses two nearly perfect marriage candidates and chooses an artist with nothing who at the bottom is hypocritical. Contrary to her imagination, it is a marriage trap set for her. After tasting much bitterness of life, she begins to grow mature gradually in self-reflection.

The past years have witnessed that *The Portrait of a Lady* has attracted the academic attention widely. Take a panoramic view of the past studies, it is clear that an increasing number of scholars both at home and abroad dedicating to conducting studies ranging from the theme of the novel as J.T. Laird (1981), Lahoucine Ouzgane (2001), Chen Li (2002), Mao Liang (2009) presented; the controversial ending with reference of the studies by Leon Edel (1963), Kimberly Lamm (2011) overseas and domestic ones by Dai Xianmei (2008), Zhang Ruwen (2013); the main characters' psychological analysis having been carried out by such scholars as Gorkem Satak (2008) and Tang Yao (2018); feminist criticism enjoying the attention from scholars in the person of Anna Despotopoulou (2014), Hu Jiangbo (2014), Zhang Xiaoman & Gui Bao (2017); characters' analysis covered by Laurel Bolinger (2011), Patrick Fessenbecker (2011) and Cheng Shiqian (2013); marriage choice possessing the studies by Beth Sharon Ash (1990), Phyllis van Slyck (2013) and Hu Jiangbo (2013); the novel's writing style and technique having been emphasized primarily at home in the representation of Dai Xianmei (2006),

Fu Shuqin & Yuan Xuesheng (2014), Wang Yuehong & Xing Zhaolu (2017) to the international theme studied by D.M.Moghadam & W.R.W.Yahya (2014), Zhang Ruwen (2002) and Ding Pu (2009) etc. Based on the former fruits, this paper is to focus on the intercultural communicative problems with some suggestions on how to adapt to different cultures so as to enrich the studies on the classic work *The Portrait of a Lady*.

With the convenience of science and technology, intercultural communication currently is no more an unusual deed. According to Samovar, intercultural communication involves interaction between people whose cultural perceptions and symbol systems are distinct enough to alter the communication event. (Samovar, 2009, p.12) Different culture has its own internal unanimous conventions. Thus, when diverse cultures gather under the same environment, people from different surroundings will respond differently, no doubt. And there also come communication difficulties naturally.

It is acknowledged that America's short history makes it impossible to form a solid and profound culture as Europe's. Benefited from the accumulation of capital, some Americans could afford to have a journey abroad. Europe full of cultural ambience, cultural deposits and high civilization became their first choice. Thus, more and more embarked on their eastward "anti-Columbus" journey. Nevertheless, the journey was not always scattered with laughter. Instead, Americans were confronted with the sharp intercultural conflicts in the process of cultural adaptation. With studies on it, the former cross-continental experiences will give a lesson to us in today's global talks.

## 1. CULTURAL CONFLICTS AND AMERICANS' ADAPTATION

James' family was one of the eastward crowds. His father Henry James Sr. attached great importance to his children's education and considered that exposing to the diverse culture and life is necessary in one's life. The frequent intercontinental comes and goes enabled James to have a close contact with both European and American cultures. Being aware of the differences of both cultures, James intends to expose the possible conflicts occurring in the intercultural communication and shows his hope of realizing the cultural fusion in his works. Throughout the novel, *The Portrait of a Lady*, though the settings mostly are in Europe, main characters are primarily from America. The moment they step onto the unfamiliar land, intercultural communication has begun.

### 1.1 Cultural Conflicts

To achieve the ideal intercultural communication is not easy for everyone. Sooner or later, when one attempts to adapt into another culture, more or less latent roadblocks

may trouble him or her so that cultural conflicts arise.

First and foremost, cultural conflicts may be resulted from different contexts which just like background, refers to the information that surrounds an event whose meaning is inextricably linked with the context. Different nations have their own unique communication styles. Between the America-Europe intercultural communication, America comparatively belongs to the lower context culture. A low context (LC) communication is that the mass of the information is vested in the explicit code. (Hall, 1976, p.91) While Europe enjoys a comparatively higher context culture. It means people in this kind of culture are inclined to express in a relatively implicit way.

Contextual difference is the most obvious original reason of cultural conflicts, usually showing in conversations. When Isabel and Ralph first met in Gardencourt in Britain, they have a conversation:

... Ralph: "I see, she has adopted you."

Isabel: "Adopted me? ... Oh no; she has not adopted me. I'm not a candidate for adoption."

Ralph: "I beg a thousand pardons...I meant - I meant-"

Isabel: "You meant she has taken me up. Yes; she likes to take people up. She has been very kind to me, but,... I'm very fond of my liberty." (James, 2011, p.15)

Apparently, Ralph intends to prove his mother's kindness on the one hand. On the other, since the word "adopt" literally means "to take someone else's child into your family", his utterances as a matter of fact attempt to express his gladness of Isabel's arrival and embrace Isabel a sense of easiness, making her feel at home. But Isabel, from America, takes the word in a deflective meaning. She thinks that adoption means she is under other's management and manipulated by others, even she should obey the rules laid by others. Thus, she anxiously declares her identity and her cherishing of liberty. It indicates that different contexts may lead to misunderstanding in communication.

And there is another conversation between different contexts:

Ralph: "What do you mean to do with her?"

...Ralph: "But after that - I mean after three months - what do you mean to do with her?"

...Ralph: "I should like to know what you mean to do with her in a general way." (James, p.34)

As shown above, Ralph successively asks three questions containing the same meaning to his mother. Mrs. Touchett, as described in the novel, is a quite independent woman. Her conducts are very clear-cut and always have the knife-like effect. Though living in Europe for over 30 years, she still dresses American traits. While Ralph has absorbs the European arts of language. Thus, there exists a cultural gap between them. The conversation above quoted reveals nothing but a fact that the talk between low and high contexts is quite sweaty for it usually needs further explanation.

Communing between different contexts sometimes will cause misunderstanding which is the beginning of cultural conflict. It calls on more attention should be paid to different culture habits. It reminds us that a wider horizon should be equipped and a reservoir of cultural knowledge should be accumulated in the intercultural communication. What's more, as Lord Warburton recollects, "Americans in England would need to have a great many things explained to them." (James, p.60) Therefore, cultural tolerance and patience should be cultivated last but not the least.

In the second place, prejudice is also one of the main causes leading to cultural conflicts. It, actually, is a deeper level of stereotype which is common in daily life and often emerges unconsciously in people's mind and controls people's attitudes towards a group of people or even culture. As Macionis stated, prejudice is irrational to the extent that people hold inflexible attitudes supported by little or no direct evidence. (Macionis, 1998, p.217) As depicted in *The Portrait of a Lady*, it is easy to find some relative clues which prove the prejudicial obstacles Americans themselves set in their intercultural exchanges.

Henrietta could be described as an insightful correspondent who doubtlessly has a wide horizon. Nevertheless, she can not get rid of the prejudicial eyesight neither when approaching to another culture. In the novel, the most obvious evidence should be her insistent interference of her friend Isabel's option of marriage candidate. When the proposal from Lord Warburton arrived, she holds strong prejudice towards this English aristocrat and makes it clear that she will do anything to prevent Isabel from marrying any one of the "fell Europeans." Indeed, not a bit of preference could be located in her towards this English gentleman. "He (Lord Warburton) owns about half England; that's his character. That's what they call a free country." (James, p.269) She despises Warburton's aristocratic identity and even upgrades her prejudice onto the national level. When Isabel asks for her advice, "Pray, have I hurt Lord Warburton?" she answers, "It serves him right if you have." (James, p.270) Between the lines are full of nothing but prejudicial biases. In her opinionated mind, Europeans are depraved and boastful. She even predicts that Isabel will change her ideals which are cultivated in America if she lingered in Europe and made friends with those "hypocritical" Europeans, and, worse more, she will give up her own country after a long-term contact. As a dutiful "ambassador", "I want to save those ideals," (James, p.106) Henrietta announces. She then makes every effort to help Caspar Goodwood, her American compatriot, to win Isabel's good graces.

What's more, even her intention that coming to Europe to have a close observation of European life has dyed prejudicial color. "Henrietta was in the van of progress and has clear-cut views on most subjects; her cherished

desire had long been to come to Europe and write a series of letters to the *Interviewer* from the radical point of view" (James, p.44) On no matter what occasion, she always courageously voices her acrid attitudes towards those "fell Europeans" and old European culture, especially towards European upper class. On a supper banquet, she states ironically, "they (European lords) try to make us believe in America that they're all handsome and magnificent and that they wear wonderful robes and crowns." (James, p.113) She deliberately points out the exquisiteness of European dressing style which elicits Lord Warburton's response, "the robes and crowns are gone out of fashion"; then, she grasps the chance to speak out her viewpoint towards European hierarchy, "I don't approve of lords as an institution. I think the world has got beyond them - far beyond." Upon her interlocutor agreeing with her idea, she throws out the incisive question soon, "why don't you give it up then?" In her eyes, Europeans possess "plenty of meaningless customs, but none of those that would help along." (James, p.124) Due to the influence of the low context culture, she outspokenly shows her prejudice to Europeans' inconsistency in an ironic way.

Furthermore, Isabel describes her cousin as a "cosmopolite", but in this journalist's mouth, the interpretation becomes that it "means he's a little of everything and not much of any. I must say I think patriotism is like charity - it begins at home." (James, p.73) The severe prejudicial attitudes towards those long-inhabited American-Europeans could be clearly perceived. For her, they are the ones who indifferently abandoned their homes. Her response here is only a beginning. Since then, her sarcastic words which are teeming with prejudices are dropped out one after another. Instead of "cosmopolite", she labels Ralph as an "alienated American". Observing that Ralph stays at home without a support job though due to his poor health, Henrietta still criticizes that "he does nothing, he's a gentleman of large leisure. Well, I call that a shame." (James, p.76) It is true that American Dream has accompanied Americans generation after generation and inspires them to maximize their life value. They firmly believe that only by hard working and industry can they realize their dream. Thus, working is holy for them. Henrietta could not endure the fact that the European nobles lead an easy and comfortable life with everything provided. She attributes their idleness to the old European system. Her prejudice is so strong that it in the end rewards her the impatience of the host, as Ralph expresses that he "had lost his heart to their visitor." (James, p.75)

Prejudice is so powerful that the bridge between two cultures will be cut off. Therefore, it is of necessity to strangle the seed of prejudice. The most effective way is to increase personal contact. Henrietta's marriage is the best instance. With the frequent contacts with Mr. Bantling, an Englishman, something in him sways her stubborn and

prejudicial idea towards Englishman. She at last marries him and will settle down in the country where she once showed much biases to. It indeed is a great progress for her and also a good lesson for those who are involved in intercultural communications. Another plausible way is education through which one can previously learn different cultures and form an extensive-sighted world of view.

Besides prejudice, ethnocentrism is also a derivation of stereotype. In the intercultural communication, people are easily inclined to wrap their mind such an idea that their native culture is irrefutably superior to others. When people put themselves in a new culture, he or she will involuntarily compare the local culture with his or her native one. What's more, people tend to take their homeland culture as a criteria to evaluate the local culture. In fact, ethnocentrism can be either positive or negative. For positive, it is helpful to strengthen one's personal identity and also contributes to cultural identity. While for negative, it is not new to see that people often put their native culture in the center of others. And they believe that their culture is the most valid and powerful one. The extreme point is that people will form a mania that their values and beliefs should be imitated and adopted by other culture. (Samovar, 2009)

Evidently, a couple of characters in the novel take pride in their own culture and sing highly for their culture when facing a new culture. As a representation of American New Woman, Henrietta dares to challenge the conventional and always keeps free in mind. She judges everything based on her own standards. She is extremely sensitive in the question of nationhood. In her view, people wherever they go and live can not leave their motherland behind. Thus, when she is invited to be a guest at Gardencourt, the first sentence she utters is not a greeting nor an appreciation for invitation, but an incisive question - "Well, I should like to know whether you consider yourselves American or English." (James, p.72) People from low context culture usually arm themselves a kind of direct style in communication as previously mentioned. The question sounds ironic and impolite for it is ethnocentrism that plays the cardinal role in her communication. She would not allow outside culture to invade her native culture. She once interviews Ralph, "what do they (Europeans) think of you over here?" / "They delight in me." / "That's because you truckle to them." (James, p.78) She interprets Ralph's life as a kind of life of "parasite". The American-Europeans seem to live with no dignity in her eyes. Then Ralph asks back, "well, now, tell me what I shall do." She replies without hesitation, "go right home, to begin with." She spares no efforts to remind them where their original root is.

What's more, have a look at the argument between Mrs. Touchett and her, it can be found that ethnocentrism overshadows her in such an extreme degree Mrs. Touchett

belittles American ladies as "the slaves of slaves" which aggravates Henrietta. She then retorts, "they're the companions of freemen." (James, p.83) Henrietta anxiously defends their American image - it is a country with full of freedom and democracy. Her nation is pure and solemn in her heart. No one could despise it, especially those immigrants from America.

The third evidence could be found in her ironic criticism to European severe patriarchal system. Miss Molyneux (Lord Warburton's sister) sends a hint to her brother that it is time for them to go back home, but the gentleman does not hear that. So Miss Molyneux silently and patiently waits for him. Henrietta is truly a sensitive correspondent so that she could not lose any tread of a spider and trail of a horse to compare old European system with her American one. "If I wanted to go he'd have to go. If I wanted my brother to do a thing he'd have to do it...In America the gentlemen obey the ladies." (James, pp.117-118) Obviously, she looks down on European patriarchal system and advocates for America's equality of gender, democracy and freedom. By such comparison, the implication that Henrietta places her homeland culture at a standard position for other's reference is revealed.

Caspar Goodwood is another ethnocentric example. When his proposal announces bankruptcy, Isabel tells him that she has refused another excellent English suitor lately in order to give him some console. But his reply shows some contempt and no commiseration to his "peer", "...that doesn't make him my companion. Besides, he's an Englishman...They're not of my humanity, and I don't care what becomes of them." (James, pp.140-141) What can be perceived is that he is eager to discriminate himself from those Europeans. In his mind, Europeans are not on the same level as their Americans. It exposes that he holds a strong sense of pride of his own nation.

As discussed above, ethnocentrism is also an obstacle in the intercultural communication. To realize a more smooth exchange, some strategies listed below can be for a reference. The first step is to avoid dogmatism. (Samovar, 2009, p.181) When you judge something in foreign culture, ask yourself a question, how foreigners will appraise the equivalent in your culture. Then, being empathetic. Empathy enables one to place himself or herself in others' shoes so as to see the world from different perspectives. Moreover, try your best to open your worldview as much as possible.

Besides those three mentioned above, there are more possible causes leading to cultural conflicts so common even today. At the time when cultural conflicts impose an impact on our cultural communication, what we can do is to protect our cultural communication, what we can do is to protect our impetus of cultural communication. Instead of being dwarfed by potential cultural conflicts, we need to bravely face, and finally get over them. Therefore, it is necessary to preview the possible situations and arm ourselves physical, mental and cultural knowledge of

cultural adaptation in advance.

## 1.2 Cultural Adaptation

As Berry defined, the process of adaptation, i.e. acculturation, is a dual process of cultural and psychological change that takes place as a result of contact between two or more cultural groups and their individual members. At the individual level it involves changes in a person's behavioral repertoire. (Berry, 2005, pp.698-699)

When one is exposed to a new environment, he or she will face the unfamiliar signs and symbols. Not being accustomed to the new culture or the new culture contradicts the old one, people will experience culture shock. It is a mental state that comes from the transition that occurs when you go from a familiar environment to an unfamiliar one and find that your old, established patterns of behavior are ineffective. (Ryan & Twibell, 2000, p.412) People usually take culture shock as a cultural conflict, but viewing from a holistic perspective, culture shock is actually a dynamic process. Treating it positively, people going through culture shock equals to have a course of cultural adaptation. Generally, a whole process of culture shock contains four stages from front to rear, excitement phase, disenchantment phase, beginning resolution phase and effective functioning phase, an entire U-shaped curve. (Samovar, 2009, pp.398-399)

Human beings are a kind of animal always full of curiosity. Arriving at a new land, people are usually anxious to discover something new, to experience something different. During that period, one is in an exciting state. Isabel as a foreigner traveling to Europe is also dominated by that feeling. When Ralph introduces Lord Warburton to her, she replies, "Oh, I hoped there would be a lord; it's just like a novel!" (James, p.12) America, compared with England, is a newly-established country where class boundaries are obscure. The title "Lord" is a fresh and novel name for her. What's more, America is also a country free from complex etiquette. While in England, the long history forms a whole set of ceremony on different occasions passing down generation after generation. Isabel, growing up in a circumstance without ceremony, is shocked by the greeting scene which is a common routine in England, "Oh, we were received. There were about a dozen servants in the hall. And there was an old woman curtsying at the gate." (James, p.13) Attracted by the charm of Gardencourt, Isabel sends questions to Ralph, "How old is your house? Is it Elizabethan?" / "It's early Tudor." / "Early Tudor? How very delightful!" (James, p.14) Her interests are totally aroused and occupied by these new things. For one thing, she could not wait to see more and explore in this new land. For another, the cultural conflict caused by intercultural differences has sowed the seed under the table.

The fever of delight does not disappear until she enters into another state of culture shock. From her conversation

with Mr. Touchett, a sense of alertness could be detected. "I like the place very much, but I'm not sure I shall like the people (Europeans)...I've no doubt they are very good people, but are they pleasant in society?" (James, p.48) With distrust, what she embraces will be continual adaptation problems which brew cultural conflicts. She does not approve the old English hierarchical institution for she believes one's edge will be smoothed by it so that one may lose self-control. "Imagine one's belonging to an English class!" (James, p.49) Finding the English culture is quite conventional and fixed, she asserts, "I don't like to have everything settled beforehand. I like more unexpectedness." (James, p.49) Different from her imagination, her aunt Mrs. Touchett has lost certain American traits. When the tone of Mrs. Touchett is in conflict with the American style, she defends, "When you criticise everything here you should have a point of view. Yours doesn't seem to be American - you thought everything over there so disagreeable. When I criticise I have mine; it's thoroughly American!" (James, p.50) What's worse, based on her short stay and contact, she undertakes to pick out the shortcomings of Englishman, "an Englishman's never so natural as when he's holding his tongue." (James, p.75) She judges Ralph as follows,

I don't know what's the matter with you, but I suspect you're a great humbug...I don't know what you care for; I don't think you care for anything, you don't really care for England when you praise it; you don't care for America even when you pretend to abuse it. (James, p.52)

At this phase, she gradually finds the difference between European and American culture, even in conflict. She realizes that something of Europe is engulfing her inner world. Thus, it is not until the end of the disenchantment phase that people turn to seek for the acknowledgement of identities.

The most manifest in retaining self identity lies in her persistent pursuit for freedom and independence. "...I like my liberty too much. If there's a thing in the world I'm fond of, it's my personal independence." (James, p.142) She makes resolution to defend her identity. When she receives the proposal from Lord Warburton, she noses out that some power may devour what she worships in America.

What she felt was that a territorial, a political, a social magnate had conceived the design of drawing her into the system in which he rather invidiously lived and moved. A certain instinct, not imperious, but persuasive, told her to resist - murmured to her that virtually she had a system and an orbit of her own. (James, pp.89-90)

Thus, she determinedly refuses Lord Warburton's proposal. It is the same case in Caspar Goodwood's proposal. After refusing the proposals from two perfect marriage candidates, she makes up her mind to marry Gilbert Osmond, even though one after another tries to persuade her to think over again. She builds a rampart

between herself and the outside world. She protects her mind free from being influenced by others. Based on her own contact, she concludes that Osmond

resembled no one she had ever seen; most of the people she knew might be divided into groups of half a dozen specimens... Her mind contained no class offering a natural place to Mr. Osmond - he was a specimen apart. (James, p.233)

... a man who has borne his poverty with such dignity, with such indifference. Mr. Osmond has never scrambled nor struggled - he has cared for no worldly prize. (James, p.312)

The judgement she made about Osmond is that he is a special and lofty artist, being aloof from politics and material pursuits. Besides, the words that Osmond encourages Isabel to "go everywhere, do everything, get everything out of life. Be happy - be triumphant." (James, p.277) rightly touch Isabel who happens to pursue freedom. His words disclose that she could still retain her self identity even if she partners him. According to her own theories, Osmond conforms to all her requirements and ideas of a partner and thus, becomes her best choice.

Her marriage choice makes it possible for her to share burden of an unexpected shocking amount of fortune. Even she believes she optimizes this sum of fortune.

At bottom her money had been a burden, had been on her mind, which was filled with the desire to transfer the weight of it to some other conscience, to some more prepared receptacle. What would lighten her own conscience more effectually than to make it over to the man with the best taste in the world? (James, p.385)

The marriage with Osmond makes Isabel comfortable and easy. Besides, she gains a sense of achievement in the new culture. The reason why Isabel refuses Lord Warburton lies in her claim of "I can't escape my fate." (James, p.166) She cherishes life chances and dangers, and would like to know and suffer. Her marriage with Osmond offers her opportunity to undergo suffering. Osmond is a hypocrite, instead of sweet words he compliments before marriage, his true nature tells that "he had expected his wife to feel with him and for him, to enter into his opinions, his ambitions, his preferences." (James, p.389) It is these sufferings that teach her to grow. Realizing that her worshiped freedom and self-identity are smothered by her husband, she embarks on a journey of re-chase. Though receiving severe objection from her husband, she determinedly takes train back to England to have a last meet with her cousin Ralph. At the end of the story, she returns to Rome to her husband. The ending is all the time a controversial one since its publication. Many scholars are quite disappointed by her choice and interpret it as the announcement of the failure of her re-chase. As a matter of fact, her returning celebrates her success of being freedom - mental freedom. Unfortunate as the marriage is, she does not escape, but courageously confronts the obligation and responsibility of marriage she should take.

Not only successfully controlling her fate, she also makes it in cultural adaptation. Her refusal to Caspar Goodwood in the end is a representation. Deeply, it shows that the severe patriarchal system in Europe does not threaten and trap her. She still keeps being herself in European society.

Today, global village is a visible trend. People move here and there freely to see and experience more. The flood of crowds makes culture shock a more ever usual problem people face. But as Adler notes, "severe culture shock is often a positive sign indicating that the expatriate is becoming deeply involved in the new culture instead of remaining isolated in an expatriate ghetto." (Adler, 1997, p.238) Therefore, it is important to face culture shock with an optimistic attitude.

According to Samovar (2009), culture shock is the first step which provides necessary feelings and information for those immigrants so that they can hone their communicative skills and make a more successful culture adaptation. However, entire adaptation to a new culture does not always sail with tailwind. Usually, acculturation involves the equilibrium of both parties - the host culture and the native culture. Assimilation is one of the results of disequilibrium. Assimilation occurs when immigrants no longer wish to maintain their native cultural identity and seek to become absorbed into the host society. (Samovar, 2009, p.401)

At the first sight of Madame Merle who is gracefully playing the piano, Isabel supposes her as a Frenchwoman or a German. Having immersed in the European culture for a long time, Madame Merle's personality influenced by the stars and strips is faded gradually, and she becomes a total assimilated Europeanized American. As herself claims, "I suppose I ought to love the sea, but I hate it. That's why I don't return to America. I love the land." (James, p.155) She gives up her homeland of her own accord and throws herself entirely into the European culture. "Madame Merle liked almost everything, including the English rain." (James, p.168) When it comes to the tone of speaking, her words are quite thought-provoking. She is good at employing kinds of figure of speech, implicit but insightful. Once, Isabel catches some subtle evidence from her behavior and speculates that she's suffered much. Madame Merle replies by a vivid metaphor,

It's very true; there are many more iron pots certainly than porcelain. But you may depend on it that everyone bears some mark; even the hardest iron pots have a little bruise, a little hole somewhere. I flatter myself that I'm rather stout, but if I must tell you the truth I've been shockingly chipped and cracked. I do very well for service yet, because I've been cleverly mended; and I try to remain in the cupboard - the quiet, dusky cupboard where there's an odour of stale spices - as much as I can. But when I've to come out and into a strong light - then, my dear, I'm a horror. (James, p.171)

She has a good knowledge of applying the proper diction to indirectly express herself rightly. Moreover,

she is such a sociable person that “she has been a dweller in many lands and had social ties in a dozen different countries.” (James, p.172) Today, she goes to Sweden, tomorrow Malta, and England of course she is familiar with. She herself makes it clear, “I don’t pretend to be educated, but I think I know my Europe.” (James, p.172) Compared with America, the long history of Europe forms exquisite and dainty culture. In order to be immersed into the homeland culture, Madame Merle equips herself with every elegant manner. Just as the captious Mrs. Touchett describes her, “she does everything beautifully. She’s complete.” (James, p.157) Indeed, she is pretty popular in Europe because European culture is in her element.

As James usually labels Europeans as sophisticated and Americans as innocent in most of his international theme works, so does he do in *The Portrait of a Lady*. The most typical example should be the marriage trap Madame Merle, altogether with Osmond, sets for Isabel in order to get her fortune. The moment knowing Isabel gained a large amount of money, Madame Merle takes Isabel no longer an innocent young friend, but a prey. Using Isabel’s naive character and temporarily “stupefied” mental state, she launches a conspiracy. She promotes the close contact between Isabel and Osmond with every opportunity. Upon Mrs. Touchett perceiving their over-close contacts and intending to interrupt, she unctuously makes promise that she will do her a favor to smother their green love seed. In fact, it turns out that she secretly fans the love flame between them. Osmond, under the disguise of being pure and lofty, successfully wins Isabel’s heart. Machiavelli who was born in Europe has a great impact on her so that she, to some extent, could be counted as a Machiavellian person who carries out a treacherous stab towards her friend.

Madame Merle turns herself to be an European in any aspect. She absorbs European culture no matter it is civilized or perverted. Assimilation, actually, plays a part in helping the foreigners to gain a sense of belonging and acknowledgement. But meanwhile, it separates one from the native culture. The loss of assimilation is to uproot the rooted home culture at all.

Henry James, based on his own cross-Atlantic experiences, fully realized both advantages and disadvantages of American and European cultures. Thus, he assigned himself the undertaking to explore an ideal mode - absorbing the quintessence and forming culture integration. Cultural integration means one not only takes in but more importantly internalizes the essence taken from both native culture and host culture. Under such a condition, he or she can respond flexibly to different cultures on any occasion. The prerequisite of achieving culture fusion is to be a competent communicator. In intercultural communication, as Samovar noted, five basic elements could be used to measure whether one is a capable communicator or not, namely, motivation,

knowledge, skills, sensitivity and character. (Samovar, 2009, p.384) Dedicating to promoting culture fusion, in the novel, James erected a paradigm for us.

Motivation is the first step on the way to success in intercultural communication. It means that one attempts to step outside to contact people in different culture background. To talk with them, to understand different cultures, and to offer help to them in need. At the first arrival of his cousin Isabel, Ralph shows great interest and curiosity in her. He drops a row of questions to his mother in order to obtain more information about Isabel, and his mother’s replies help him to shape the primary impression of his cousin and judge how to react properly in their later talks. Moreover, at the time when Isabel and Henrietta plan to visit London, Ralph involuntarily offers to be a cicerone. He escorts them to the destination, shows them around the attractions of London and introduces friends to them. Apparently, motivation encourages one to be positively involved in the intercultural communication.

In the second place, one needs to store relative knowledge of different cultures as much as possible, such as rules, norms, habits, etc.

Ralph spent several terms at an American school and took a degree at an American university, after which, as he struck his father on his return as even redundantly native, he was placed for some three years in residence at Oxford. Oxford swallowed up Harvard, and Ralph became at last English enough...Ralph, on leaving Oxford, had spent a couple of years in travelling. (James, pp.31, 32)

Obviously, his bi-continental and rich foreign experiences equips him with relative knowledge of different cultures so that he can always resourcefully handle the abrupt unexpected situations.

Mr. Touchett: “Well, you may fall in love with whomsoever you please; but you mustn’t fall in love with my niece.”

Ralph: “He’ll think you mean that as a provocation! My dear father, you’ve lived with the English for thirty years, and you’ve picked up a good many of the things they say. But you’ve never learned the things they don’t say!”

Mr. Touchett: “I say what I please.”(James, p.8)

From the conversation, it can be seen that Mr. Touchett is an outspoken person. But their interlocutor is Lord Warburton, an Englishman. In England, a polite and reserved way of talking is more preferred. Ralph who has a good command of both cultures is well versed with this habit so that he soon mitigate the embarrassed occasion in an easy way.

Communication is not an inborn skill, but is tapered gradually by our consistent observation, listening, analysis and interpretation in the interpersonal exchanges. The conversation between Ralph and Isabel when travelling in London witnesses Ralph’s power of perception.

...Ralph: “You’ve answered my questions, you’ve told me what you want to throw yourself into it.”

Isabel: “It seems to me I’ve told you very little.”

Ralph: "You've told me the great thing: that the world interests you and that you want to throw yourself into it." (James, p.133)

In their conversation, it seems that Isabel does not say much and what she expressed is literal. But Ralph, as a perceptive communicator, is good at catching subtle implications. Based on his observation, he makes a proper estimation, and then interprets philosophies in his reply. "You've too much power of thought - above all too much conscience, it's out of all reason, the number of things you think wrong. Put back your watch. Diet your fever. Spread your wings; rise above the ground. It's never wrong to do that." (James, p.198) He not only handles well these basic communicative skills, but also grasps the skill of well-wording so as to achieve his communicative goal.

Since different people are accustomed to different communication styles, sensitivity requires one to be tolerant of strange behaviors and customs of other culture.

Henrietta: "Well, I should like to know whether you consider yourselves American or English. If once I knew I could talk to you accordingly."

Ralph: "Talk to us anyhow and we shall be thankful."

Henrietta: "I don't suppose that you're going to undertake to persuade me that you're an American."

Ralph: "To please you I'll be an Englishman. I'll be a Turk!" (James, pp.72-73)

Coming from America, Henrietta has been accustomed to the frank style of communication quite common in low culture. It is undeniable that her words are offensive as a guest to the host. But Ralph shows no trace of being uncomfortable. Instead, he is flexible, responding quickly according to the temporal situation as popular in the high culture. As the paper before mentioned, people living in the high culture do well in seizing the hidden message delivered by space, manner, dressing, body language etc. Thus, it can be concluded that one's ability of sensitivity in communication is related with his or her living context culture.

No one would like to communicate with one bearing unpleasant characters. Generally, a character marked with trustworthiness, honesty, respect, fairness, altruism, sincerity, goodwill and the ability to make good choices will be more helpful in intercultural communication and enables one to feel like a fish in water when exposed to other cultures. (Samovar, 2009) "You were always bright. I used to be proud of your brightness," (James, p.159) as Mr. Touchett said to Ralph. It is true that Ralph always displays optimism, humor and easiness in the communication. Bearing both American and European cultures, he plays well as a mediator to neutralize the potential conflicts. When Isabel is in bewilderment, the first person appears in her mind to ask for help is Ralph, for he always appears as a sage who can offer useful suggestions to her. Thus, Isabel comments on him, "I'll do whatever Ralph says is right, I've unbounded confidence in Ralph." (James, p.122) For Isabel, what Ralph delivers

to her is a sense of safety. She can rely on him without any misgivings whatsoever. Throughout the novel, it can be found that Ralph is good at playing the role of a life mentor prescribing others the "chicken soup for the soul" in time. Ralph is the one who in a real sense deserves the title, "philosopher". "You seemed to me to be soaring far up in the blue - to be, sailing in the bright light, over the heads of men. Suddenly, someone tosses up a faded rosebud - a missile that should never have reached you - and straight you drop to the ground." (James, p.310) He employs proper diction to teach Isabel not to be frightened by the swashbuckling appearances but be confident in herself and try her utmost effort to take control of her own life. Furthermore, "Ralph doesn't abuse people" (James, p.302) is the impression his mother Mrs. Touchett conveys. Upon judging Henrietta whose words are usually provoking, he can put prejudices aside and observe her with penetration. "Henrietta, however, does smell of the Future - it almost knocks one down!" (James, p.81)

As Leavis put it, Ralph can not simply be seen as an American or an Englishman -- generally, he combines the merits of both cultures but does not inherit any defects of them. (Leavis, 2002) James, no doubt, shapes a spokesman for his career of attempting to promote culture fusion. In intercultural communication, people who possess the five advantages above mentioned will enjoy the priority to adapt into another culture more smoothly and plainly.

Cultural adaptation is a progressive process rather than a one step action. In that process, personal attitude plays an important role which decides the direction one heads for. Positively, one may harvest unexpected fruit that helps to establish self-identity confidently in another culture. Negatively, one may sink into the mire that drags one to unpleasant cultural conflicts in vicious circle.

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## CONCLUSION

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Unanimously acknowledged, *The Portrait of a Lady* is one of Henry James' masterpieces which gives his conception of intercultural integration into a full display. To realize integration, intercultural communication can not be avoided. But past experiences have proved that it can not be dealt with readily. In the novel, James rehearsed some possible obstacles we may encounter in the intercultural exchanges, but also offered paradigms for reference.

Context is the most intuitive demonstration. It can be concluded that people from different contexts often feel exhausted in communication for misunderstanding is easy to be developed unwittingly. Prejudice is a weakness of human nature. Sometimes, it tightly controls one's mind so that it induces you to act like a hedgehog. People around you may be hurt by your poignant words or indecent manners, and your adaptation process will scattered with thorns. Ethnocentrism can be either positive or negative. If you play it negatively, the impression of arrogance is vividly impressed on others' minds. Ethnocentrism turns



one into an insolent and rude image which only will widen the communication distance. These possible reasons sometimes occur alone but mostly function together so that a tough wall is built in the intercultural communication.

When it comes to the cultural adaptation, culture shock is a common problem one may experience under different culture background. If not properly dealt with, a sense of alienation and isolation will take dominance and gradually devour your confidence and motivation in the intercultural communication. But if treating it positively, the process of culture shock is also a process of adaptation. It is the first step of adaptation and also lays foundation for further deeper and more smoother adaptation. Assimilation though is an outcome of active adaptation process. But it goes too far. It separates one from his or her old ones, and accept the host culture entirely, both its merits and shortcomings without hesitation. Instead, cultural integration is more preferred in intercultural communication. Unlike assimilation, one in cultural integration selectively absorbs good points from both cultures. Integration gives access to possess both cultures, but better than that, to erect an ideal combined one at last.

With the closer contacts between people from every corner of the world, globalization is an irresistible trend. Reminding ourselves of these potential problems does help to mitigate the cultural conflicts to some extent in the intercultural communication. Culture integration is not a negative process, but positive. Only we obtain necessary knowledge and skills so as to prepare for every possible conditions can we take the initiative in the intercultural exchanges.

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