

# Ideological Modernization of the Chinese Gentry in Bette Bao Lord's Spring Moon

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**Abstract:** Chinese American writer Bette Bao Lord, drawing on her own family history, fictionalizes the Zhang family in her novel *Spring Moon*. Set against the backdrop of modern Chinese society, the novel traces the transformation of the Zhang family from the late Qing Dynasty onward. As portrayed in the text, the Zhang family serves as a representative example of the traditional gentry class, a distinctive social group in modern China. The ideological transformation of this class played a significant role in shaping China's path toward modernization. This thesis examines the ideological evolution of the gentry as represented by the Zhang family in *Spring Moon*, focusing on four key dimensions: economy, politics, education, and ethics. It further interprets this transformation as a broader process of ideological modernization. Through a close analysis of the novel, the study explores both the causes and the consequences of this shift. In particular, it highlights the novel's generally positive stance toward the ideological modernization of the gentry, while also revealing its endorsement of traditional ethical values, especially those emphasizing the importance of family.

**Keywords:** *Spring Moon*; Bette Bao Lord; the gentry; ideological modernization; cultural transformation

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Introduction to *Spring Moon*

This chapter is a brief introduction to the literary work *Spring Moon* and the definition of the gentry.

The novel *Spring Moon*, written by Chinese American Bette Bao Lord, spans from 1879 to 1972 AD, with *Spring Moon*, a woman born in a feudal and authoritarian family, as the mainline, depicting the experiences and fate of the members of the Zhang family in Suzhou for five generations in the late Qing Dynasty. Combined national history and the author's family history, it outlines a grand historical picture of modern China from the late Qing Dynasty to 1972.

The main plots of the novel focus on the experiences of the main characters Bold Talent, Noble Talent, *Spring Moon*, and Lustrous Jade. In the complex social background, members of the Zhang family, who were born into the gentry, began to actively or passively change the values and codes of conduct that were originally in their minds and accepted western thoughts.

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The patriarch Bold Talent once studied in the United States, and after returning to China, he succeeded the patriarch of the Zhang family and supported the reform and development of modern industry and commerce. The patriarch's younger brother Noble Talent began to serve in the Beiyang New Army, and after the defeat of the Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895), he decided to join the Revolutionary party against Qing. The patriarch's niece, Spring Moon, received a new education but was also a follower of feudal morality.

In terms of the definition of the gentry, two well-known scholars give their definitions of the gentry. "The so-called gentry should refer to the social group out of the central power with the examination degrees as the main body, and also include those who have obtained official identity and title through other channels (such as contributing money, or guarantee, etc.)" (Ma, 2003). Ma Min emphasizes that examination degrees or official titles are the basic symbols of the gentry. "The term shen-shih (lit., officials and scholars) is usually translated as 'gentry'. It refers to officials who had retired or were temporarily out of office and scholars in the local scene. But this term was often used by local gazetteers of the mid-nineteenth century to refer to local power-holders, including some who had no degrees" (John King and Kwang-Ching, 2008). John King believes that well-known scholars in local and local power-holders also belong to the gentry. Thus, it can be summarized that the main groups of the gentry include people with examination degrees and official titles and scholars in local and local power-holder.

According to the definition mentioned above, it can be judged that the Zhang family exactly belongs to the gentry. Members of the Zhang family are with examination degrees or official titles. Some of them are scholars in local and the Zhang family belongs to the local power-holder. The old patriarch of the Zhang family, the father of Bold Talent, had an examination degree and held an official position in Suzhou, belonging to the upper gentry. The successor patriarch had a background in studying abroad and was a well-known scholar in the local area. At the same time, the Zhang family was also a local landlords, owning a certain number of land and tenants.

The Zhang family is a representative of the gentry. Taking the Zhang family as the research object, by analyzing the experiences of the main members of the Zhang family, the ideological modernization of the gentry can be grasped.

## *1.2 Literature review*

The current studies on the work Spring Moon are mainly in the following aspects. Firstly, from a cross-cultural perspective to study the Chinese image described by Chinese American writers, such as Hu Yong (2003) believes that the author of Spring Moon tries to describe the historical development of China in the 20th century through a large family history spanning a hundred years, providing Western readers, with a real Chinese image to break through the old framework of Chinese literature with Orientalist in Western literature, and organically fits the truth of history with the authenticity of art. The focus of such studies is to highlight the authenticity of the Chinese image in Spring Moon and the contribution of the novel to the spread of Chinese culture.

Secondly, the studies of the spring moon mainly include the content of the text. For example, Chen Guifeng (2009) studies the prologue before each chapter in Spring Moon.

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He points out that from the perspective of the narrative structure of the novel, the prologue gives the novel a deep cultural significance so that the content of the novel echoes the history. Chen Guifeng (2012) also studies the main characters in *Spring Moon* and explores the role of different characters in *Spring Moon* in promoting the development of the plots.

The study of the ideological modernization of the gentry can be divided into two main categories according to the research objects.

Firstly, according to the geographical division, the gentry in a certain region is studied. Wang Guoliang (2019) takes the gentry in Guizhou as the subject of research and points out that the first change in the gentry's thoughts was that the gentry no longer despised the merchants, and began to support the members of the family to engage in commercial activities, and began to care about state affairs. The gentry gradually formed modern patriotism and local consciousness through the confrontation between China and the West. Through the study of the gentry in central Yunnan, Su Peng (2019) believes that the modernization of rural society in Yunnan had led to changes in social thoughts, and the values of the Confucian tradition were gradually declining, while values such as pragmatism had spread in rural society. This affected the gentry's thoughts. The gentry began to abandon feudal thoughts and was willing to learn new knowledge to adapt to the development of society.

Secondly, the studies focus on the case study of a certain gentry or gentry family. Shen Yaxue (2019) points out that the concept and structure of knowledge of the gentry class changed. From the perspective of knowledge structure, the composition of knowledge of Confucianism was broken by Western knowledge such as mathematics, physics, chemistry, and medicine. From the perspective of concepts of knowledge, the connotation of knowledge was greatly expanded, and scientific and technological knowledge that was not accepted by traditional concepts was gradually approved by society and received great attention. Practicality became the criterion for evaluating knowledge, which was closely linked to the social needs of the late Qing Dynasty. Gang Miaomiao (2019) takes the gentry Xie Jiafu as a research object to explore the process of modernization of his thoughts and pointed out that Xie Jiafu firstly advocated that the gentry should take the responsibility for disaster relief voluntarily and gradually turned to pay attention to Westernization Movement, trying to learn advanced Western technology to save feudalism, and put forward the idea that education can save the country.

However, a gap remains in the existing literature. While previous studies have examined either the narrative features of *Spring Moon* or the historical transformation of the gentry, few have integrated these two perspectives by analyzing the ideological modernization of the gentry through a literary text.

Therefore, this study attempts to bridge this gap by taking *Spring Moon* as a case study to explore the ideological transformation of the gentry in a literary context. In doing so, it not only enriches the interpretation of the novel but also provides a new perspective on the study of gentry modernization.

### *1.3 Research Task*

The primary objective of this thesis is to investigate the process of ideological

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modernization of the gentry, as represented by the Zhang family, and to examine the author's ideological stance toward this transformation. More specifically, this study seeks to address the following questions: how is the ideological transformation of the gentry represented in *Spring Moon*, to what extent can this transformation be understood as a process of modernization, and what value position the author adopts toward this change.

Methodologically, this research employs close textual analysis to identify and categorize the expressions of ideological transformation within the Zhang family as depicted in the novel. By situating these changes within their historical context, the study interprets their nature as a form of ideological modernization. Furthermore, the causes of this transformation are analyzed from both internal and external perspectives, including shifts in individual consciousness and broader socio-historical forces. To evaluate its wider implications, the consequences of this ideological shift are examined across multiple dimensions. Finally, through a critical reading of narrative development and characterization, the author's implicit attitude and value orientation toward the modernization of the gentry are explored.

## **2. Ideological Modernization of the Gentry**

In the novel, the ideological transformation of the gentry represented by the Zhang family can be understood as a process of ideological modernization. This transformation is analyzed through four dimensions—economy, politics, education, and ethics.

The selection of these four dimensions is grounded in classical modernization theory. As Cyril E. Black (1966) argues in *The Dynamics of Modernization: A Study in Comparative History*, modernization is a multidimensional process involving transformations in economic structures, political systems, educational development, and cultural or value orientations. These domains correspond respectively to the material, institutional, intellectual, and ethical aspects of social change.

Therefore, analyzing the ideological transformation of the gentry through these four dimensions provides a comprehensive and theoretically grounded framework for understanding their transition from traditional to modern society.

### *2.1 Ideological transformation of the gentry*

This chapter is to analyze the ideological transformation of the gentry represented by the Zhang family in the novel mainly from the four aspects including economy, politics, education, and ethics.

#### *2.1.1 Economic thoughts*

In the novel, the transformation of the economic thoughts of the Zhang family is mainly expressed in two aspects. The transformation can be analyzed through the economic activities of the members of the Zhang family.

Firstly, the ideas of investment changed. As a landowner, the Zhang family stuck to the tenancy economy. The important characteristic of the tenancy economy is to gain income from land and tenant peasants.

From the following conversation between the patriarch's wife Golden Virtue and her grandniece Lustrous Jade, it can be seen that the patriarch's wife firmly disagreed with no longer exploiting the tenant peasant because the Zhang family's important and

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stable source of economic income was the exploitation of the tenant peasants by binding them to work on the land.

Can we not at least reduce the rents, my grandaunt?

Golden Virtue pretended not to hear and spoke of other things.

But Lustrous Jade would not be daunted and asked again and again. Finally, Golden Virtue said, 'The House of Chang has many responsibilities. Many in the courtyards cannot farm, many who have served the family for generations, many who cannot change, one who studies abroad, others who count on our help, the hospital, the beggars' guild...' (Bao, 1982: 23).

Land and tenant peasants are two important parts of the tenancy economy. The characteristic of the tenancy economy determines the method to gain more income. That is to buy more land with money. Land annexation leads to more tenant peasants. And then tenant peasants become cheap labor power again. So the gentry with a lot of land represented by the Zhang family in Spring Moon tended to invest money in land under the tenancy economy. Tenancy economy is a kind of backward economic model, after all, so the profit from this is still limited.

As patriarch, Bold Talent who had studied abroad, realized that investment in modern industry and commerce was gradually profitable. He began to invest money in modern factories.

Secondly, by analyzing Bold Talent investing in modern industry and commerce, another transformation of economic thoughts of the gentry can be revealed. That is, the modern concept of righteousness and profit begins to be gradually accepted.

Under the influence of traditional Confucianism, for the gentry, indulging in business for profit is unseemly. In the traditional Chinese Four People's Society, the gentry and the merchants were two separate classes, the gentry was in the highest class, and the merchants were in the lowest class. The merchants were not respected. However, with the popularity of capitalist economic thoughts, the modern concept of righteousness and profit is formed.

In conclusion, the modernization of economic thoughts is mainly expressed in two aspects. First, the idea of transforming money into capital is formed. Second, the modern concept of righteousness and profit is formed.

### *2.1.2 Political thoughts*

The transformation of political thoughts of the Zhang family is mainly from the idea of reform to the democratic revolution. The modernization can be analyzed from the political choices of members of the Zhang family.

The old patriarch of the Zhang family, the father of Bold Talent, first realized the gap between China and the West and began to support the reform movement.

"Think. In less time than that, our southern fleet was sunk. If she is to recover, China must modernize. But the Conservatives in Peking have shut down the Tung Wen Kwan for foreign studies and recalled all government students from abroad" (Bao, 1982: 32). This is what the old patriarch of the Zhang family said to Bold Talent. What the old patriarch said expressed that he accepted the thoughts of reform. The word modernize is explained as reform. The establishment of Tung Wen Kwan and sending students to western were both reform measures. The old patriarch was angry because of the failure

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of the southern fleet. He believed that to revive China, reform was necessary. This was the initial transformation of the political thoughts in the Zhang family.

And then, Bold Talent became the successive patriarch. He also began to believe that the thoughts of reform could save China. "At last Bold Talent acted, joining with other concerned scholar-gentry in a Self-Strengthening Society, to explore avenues of reform" (Bao, 1982: 80). This is a description of the Bold Talent's political choice. Bold Talent began to join the Self-Strengthening Society which was an organization created by reformers with other concerned scholar-gentry. Bold Talent resolutely became a reformer and continuously carry out the thoughts of reform.

"He would go South to Canton, where lived those farthest from the Emperor's sway, and search out the rumored secret societies, dedicated to revolution" (Bao, 1982: 78). This is a description of the Noble Talent's psychological activities. Noble Talent was the little brother of the patriarch Bold Talent. Facing the failure of the Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895), Noble Talent lost confidence in the thoughts of reform completely. He felt that the Qing government was corrupt and incompetent so he turned to support the democratic revolution and believed in the Three People's Principles.

The political thoughts of Bold Talent transferred from reform to democratic revolution. "Most troublesome of all were the sums he gave to Noble Talent. Young Brother's requests were increasingly frequent, urgent, and always sizeable. Yet no one must ever suspect that the Chang treasury served the revolutionaries" (Bao, 1982: 188). This is a description of the Bold Talent's psychological activities. After the failure of the New Deal in the Late Qing Dynasty, Bold Talent no longer believed in reform. He knew that reform could not save China. He also began to support the Democratic Revolution by sending money to Noble Talent.

In this sense, Zhang family members chose different political thoughts, which exactly corresponded to the process of political development in modern China. Since the late Qing Dynasty, members of the Zhang family chose to believe in different political thoughts including reform, and democratic revolutionary. Under the guidance of different political thoughts, Zhang family members promoted the political democratization of Chinese society during different periods.

All in all, the political choice of the members of the Zhang family is a process of abandoning the old feudal autocracy and turning to exploring the democratic political system.

### *2.1.3 Educational thoughts*

The transformation of educational thoughts is from learning traditional Confucian scriptures which is the ideological foundation of Chinese feudal society to allowing young family members to receive western education, mainly including studying abroad, receiving church education, and modern military education, and the Zhang family also actively establishing women's schools.

In the feudal view of education, the gentry always regarded Confucian classics as the most valuable knowledge, ignoring the science and technology study. The gentry also maintained the conservative and arrogant ideas of the Celestial Empire, believing that Chinese culture is the best and foreigners' culture is only a bit of a trick, not worthy to learn. This kind of outdated educational thought was gradually changed in the Late

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In the face of the defeat in the Sino-French War of 1884, the old patriarch of the Zhang family was keenly aware of the necessity of learning from the West.

“But the Conservatives in Peking have shut down the Tung Wen Kwan for foreign studies and recalled all government students from abroad. We who oppose them must now send our people to study independently. You, my son, are a logical candidate” (Bao, 1982: 32). This was what the old patriarch said to his eldest son Bold Talent. Facing the crisis of the homeland, the old patriarch keenly realized the importance to study abroad to learn about western culture including advanced political and cultural concepts, science, and technology. But the Conservatives recalled all government students from abroad. He decided to let his son Bold Talent study in the United States.

“No. I have other plans for Noble Talent. China needs modern soldiers. He will enroll in the new military academy established by the governor of Shantung province” (Bao, 1982: 32). This is the old patriarch's plan for Noble Talent. Actually, in the traditional Four Peoples Society, the gentry was the most honorable, while the old patriarch began to attach importance to military education and allowed the second son Noble Talent to receive modern military education instead of studying Confucian classics, which was also the transformation of educational thoughts.

“You mean that ours is a school for boys and girls? The Matriarch sniffed. ‘Of course. Ours is an enlightened family.’ So. Spring Moon smiled to herself. Elders Uncle had been right. It was just a question of time” (Bao, 1982: 187). This is a conversation between Spring moon and her grandmother Matriarch. The Zhang family set up a school at home and girls are admitted. Spring moon surprised because when she was young, her grandmother disapproved of her study. The transformation of attitude toward female education in the family reflected the transformation of educational thoughts. Although Spring Moon grew up in a relatively authoritarian feudal family, under the guidance of Bold Talent, she still systematically received a modern education and learned English. Lustrous Jade studied in a church school from an early age, received a more systematic Western education, and grew into an independent and brave modern woman.

In conclusion, the transformation of educational thoughts was mainly expressed in abandoning feudal educational thoughts focusing on Confucian classics but actively learning western knowledge, military education, and supporting education for women. On the whole, it gradually tended to various and scientific education.

#### *2.1.4 Ethical thoughts*

The transformation of ethical thoughts is expressed mainly from feudal ethical thoughts, which strengthen absolute obedience to the elders in the family, to a new concept of freedom and equality for individuals. It is mainly manifested in the change of the concept of marriage and love, the parent-child relationship.

First of all, the change in arranged marriages is obvious. According to traditional ethical thoughts, children's marriage should be decided by the elders. For example, this is a conversation between Bold Talent and his mother, the grandmother of Spring moon.

“The Matriarch's spirits now were visibly improved. And since she is so special, my son, it is you who must choose a husband” (Bao, 1982: 92). This conversation was about

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the grandmother letting Bold Talent select a husband for Spring Moon. Spring Moon had no right to choose a husband for herself, her husband was selected by the patriarch of the family Bold Talent, and she did not even meet her husband before marriage.

The situation was different when Spring Moon's daughter Lustrous Jade got married. Lustrous Jade selected her husband because they were like-minded and had common ideals and beliefs. In this process, even though Spring Moon wants Lustrous Jade and Auguster Winds to be together, she did not obstruct Lustrous Jade's marriage. The choices of marriage gradually tend to be free.

Secondly, Spring Moon and Lustrous Jade had very different views on the parent-child relationship. For example, this is what Spring Moon said to his daughter Lustrous Jade. "You must not insult elders. You must not act as if you are wiser than they" (Bao, 1982: 329). When young people disagreed with their elders, Lustrous Jade believed that they should bravely point out their mistakes, while Spring Moon believed that they should not be impolite to their elders. It can be seen that in young people's minds, the parent-child relationship gradually tends to be equal.

To sum up, the transformation of the ethical thoughts expressed from feudal ethical thoughts strengthened the absolute power of the elder over the younger to attaching importance to equality between the elders and the younger.

## *2.2 Ideological modernization as the nature of the transformation*

Through analyzing the ideological transformation of the gentry represented by the Zhang family, the nature of the transformation can be identified as modernization.

To illustrate the reason for this definition, it is important to identify the concept of modernization. "The essence of the metabolism of modern Chinese society is to push forward modernization step by step in limited, that is, to eliminate feudalism and promote new democracy (capitalism)" (Chen, 1988: 68).

According to Chen Xulu, modernization is to get rid of feudalism and promote new capitalism or to say democracy. The ideological modernization of the gentry can be regarded as the metabolism in the field of social thoughts, which reflects the development trend from feudal thoughts to capitalist thoughts. Through the following analysis of the ideological modernization of the Zhang family from economic, political, educational, and ethical aspects, all members of the Zhang family tried to get rid of the shackles of feudal thoughts and pursued capitalist or democratic thoughts. This exactly reflects the ideological modernization of the gentry represented by the Zhang family.

### **3. Reasons for the Ideological Modernization**

The reasons for the ideological modernization of the gentry represented by the Zhang family can be explained from the external and internal perspectives. The external cause is the introduction of western thoughts. The internal cause is the inner motivation of the gentry represented by the Zhang family.

#### *3.1 The introduction of advanced western thoughts*

The introduction of advanced western ideas made the gentry represented by the Zhang family see the strengths of western bourgeois thoughts and realize the huge gap between China and the west. Suzhou, where the Zhang family lived, as the treaty port of modern China, was earlier and more deeply influenced by advanced western thoughts.

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Western advanced bourgeois thoughts provided a template for the modernization of the gentry's thoughts. In the economy, western advanced economic thoughts attaching importance to modern industry and commerce were introduced to Suzhou. Advanced machines improved production efficiency. In politics, the western advanced democratic political thoughts allowed the Chinese to see the strengths of democratic political systems, such as constitutional monarchies and democratic-republican systems. In education, the western advanced scientific educational concepts, such as attaching importance to scientific and technological knowledge and equal rights to education for men and women, deeply touched the gentry represented by the Zhang family. In ethics, the introduction of the western concept of pursuing equality and freedom deeply attracted young people in the Zhang family who are bound by traditional ethics and morality which stress absolute obedience. The youths warmly welcomed and imitated western ethics.

These advanced western thoughts became the template for the modernization of the gentry represented by the Zhang family.

### *3.2 The inner motivation of the gentry*

The internal motivation of the gentry represented by the Zhang family has effectively promoted the ideological modernization of the gentry. The inner motivation of the gentry mainly comes from three aspects.

The first point is economic interests. Out of the economic interests, the gentry represented by the Zhang family began to invest in modern industry and commerce. Entering the 20th century, the development of capitalism in China gradually became an inevitable historical trend, and the development of Chinese national capitalism was relatively rapid. Investment in modern industry and commerce was profitable. In this novel, out of the goal of generating income for the Zhang family, Bold Talent began to invest family wealth in modern industry and commerce.

The second point is the sense of social responsibility of the gentry represented by the Zhang family. Under the influence of Confucianism, the gentry represented by the Zhang family in China always has the idea of social responsibility. This sense of social responsibility prompted them to find a way to save the country when China was facing a serious crisis. In the face of Western invasion, the Zhang family, located in Suzhou, a treaty port city, was the first to feel the seriousness of Western aggression so they awakened earlier, hoping to revitalize China and resist invasion by learning western advanced economic, political, and educational concepts from the West.

The third point is that the younger generation, represented by Lustrous Jade in the Zhang family, hoped to break through the traditional ethical concepts that backward ethics. Young members of the gentry represented by the Zhang family received a sound education. They have independent minds so they have a stronger desire to get rid of the constraints from the backward ethics.

## **4. Reflection over the Ideological Modernization**

This chapter is to discuss the reflection over the ideological modernization of the gentry represented by the Zhang family. In the context of the novel, the consequences of ideological modernization can be analyzed, revealing attitudes toward both modernization and traditional family-centered ethics.

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#### *4.1 Consequence of the ideological modernization*

The ideological modernization of the gentry represented by the Zhang family has deeply influenced society. As a unique existence only in modern Chinese society, the gentry played an important role in maintaining social stability and development in modern China. With a lot of land and a high reputation, the Zhang family was the famous clan in Suzhou. Its ideological modernization of it had a deep influence on society.

First, in the economic field, the Zhang family invested more capital in modern industry and commerce, promoting the development of modern industry and commerce in Suzhou, which further strengthened the national bourgeoisie, and to a certain extent safeguarded the economic interests of modern China.

Second, in the political field, under the guidance of democratic political thoughts, the Zhang family promoted the spread of democratic political thoughts and the practice of political reform and revolution. Bold Talent joined the reform societies mainly consisting of the gentry were formed, and Noble Talent became a revolutionary. Noble Talent even planned and participated in the assassination of an official of the Qing dynasty in Suzhou. What they did echoed the movement to overthrow the Qing dynasty.

Third, the modernization of the Zhang family's educational thoughts had a relatively successful impact. The Zhang family set up a school and let children in the neighborhood have a chance to receive an education. Women's schools founded by the Zhang family also provided girls with the opportunity to go to school. Women's right to education was guaranteed to some extent.

Fourth, the modernization of ethical thoughts of the Zhang family mainly gradually removed the shackles of the elder's absolute power on young people and advocated the new ethical thoughts of freedom and equality. The modernization of the ethical thoughts of the gentry liberated young people from the absolute power of the elders to a certain extent. Young members of the Zhang family had the freedom to choose spouses and had the right to point out the mistakes of the elders.

What's more, the ideological modernization of the Zhang family had a good impact on the construction of the local town. The local infrastructure was improved with the help of the Zhang family. Zhang family built the canal and taught tenant peasants to use western motor-pumped well, which facilitated agricultural production. The Zhang family also donated money to set up a mission hospital, which improved local medical conditions. Local backward social ideas were changed and local customs had been improved. For example, the patriarch Bold Talent taught servants hygienic knowledge, making them know that wash their hands with soap. Medical attitudes were also changed. With the efforts of the Zhang family, people in the town began to believe and accept the mission hospitals. Girls were no longer required to have their bound.

To sum up, the influence of ideological modernization on society is positive. The ideological modernization of the Zhang family promoted the progress of society in general.

#### *4.2 Positive attitude toward the ideological modernization*

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The novel's attitude toward the ideological modernization of the gentry can be inferred from the consequences discussed above. Overall, *Spring Moon* presents a generally positive but qualified evaluation of this transformation.

Specifically, the ideological transformation of the Zhang family contributes to social development in multiple dimensions, including the economy, politics, education, ethics, and local construction. As depicted in the narrative, the gentry represented by the Zhang family actively promotes local economic growth and the development of more participatory political practices. They also support the establishment of modern and diversified educational institutions, challenge outdated ethical conventions, and facilitate the modernization of local communities.

In this sense, the ideological modernization of the Zhang family can be understood as aligning with broader historical trends. The novel's favorable attitude toward this process is thus evident in its emphasis on the positive social outcomes generated by such transformation.

However, this positive attitude is not unconditional. As will be discussed in the following section, the novel does not advocate a complete abandonment of tradition, but rather supports a selective and reflective process of modernization.

#### *4.3 The balance between modernization and tradition ethical Values*

Building on this qualified positive attitude, the novel further emphasizes that modernization should be balanced with the preservation of valuable traditional ethical principles. The ideological modernization of the gentry does not entail a complete rejection of traditional Chinese ethics; rather, it involves the reform of outdated elements while preserving their valuable core. This dynamic reflects a process in which modernization and tradition are not mutually exclusive but can be meaningfully integrated.

On the one hand, certain hierarchical and restrictive norms — such as the unconditional obedience to the absolute authority of elders — are gradually challenged and transformed in the course of modernization. On the other hand, essential ethical principles, especially the emphasis on family, are carefully retained. For the Zhang family, the family serves as the foundation of individual identity, providing a lasting sense of belonging. This relationship can be likened to that between leaves and roots: no matter how far individuals travel, they remain closely connected to their familial origins.

This ethical orientation is vividly illustrated through various narrative details. For example, the children studying in the United States maintain regular correspondence with their father, Bold Talent, and members of the Zhang lineage eventually return from across the world to reunite with later generations. Such depictions highlight the enduring cohesion of the family, which persists despite the passage of time and social transformation. It is precisely this adherence to valuable ethical traditions that enables the Zhang family to maintain strong internal unity over the course of a century.

This reflects a form of selective modernization, in which modern values are adopted while essential elements of traditional culture are retained.

In conclusion, the novel conveys both a positive attitude toward the ideological modernization of the gentry and a clear appreciation for traditional ethical values centered on the family. Rather than advocating a rupture between past and present, the

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narrative underscores the necessity of balancing modernization with the preservation of enduring moral principles.

### 5. Conclusion

In conclusion, this thesis examines the ideological modernization of the gentry as represented by the Zhang family in *Spring Moon*, as well as the author's attitude toward this transformation. The study is structured in three main parts. First, it analyzes the ideological transformation of the Zhang family across four dimensions: economy, politics, education, and ethics, and interprets its nature as a process of ideological modernization. Second, drawing on the narrative of the novel, it explores the underlying causes of this transformation from both internal and external perspectives. Finally, it evaluates the social consequences of this ideological shift and its broader implications.

The findings suggest that the ideological modernization of the Zhang family reflects a process of moving away from traditional, restrictive feudal values toward the selective acceptance of modern, particularly Western, ideas. The author adopts a generally positive stance toward this transformation. At the same time, the novel expresses an appreciation for valuable traditional ethical principles, especially those emphasizing the importance of family. Rather than advocating a complete break from tradition, the narrative highlights the necessity of discarding outdated elements while preserving essential moral values. In this sense, the novel underscores the importance of maintaining a dynamic balance between modernization and tradition, revealing the inherent tension as well as the potential integration between the two in the context of modern Chinese society.

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