

A Literature Review of *The Great Gatsby* Research in China (1980-2019)

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Keywords: a literature review, *The Great Gatsby*, Fitzgerald, the focus, the problems, the trend.

Abstract: As the spokesman of “The Lost Generation” and the Jazz Age, Francis Scott Fitzgerald (1896-1940) published five novels as well as more than 160 short stories in his writing career of more than 20 years. His masterpiece *The Great Gatsby* proves to be an accurate description of the corrupted society and the impossibility of the “American Dream” in the 1920s, illustrating the Jazz Age and demonstrating Fitzgerald’s outstanding talent and writing skills vividly. *The Great Gatsby* has enjoyed great popularity in China as well as in the English world. After a brief introduction to Francis Scott Fitzgerald and his masterpiece, this paper will highlight the research focus, the problems and the trend of *The Great Gatsby* research in China in the past 40 years by analyzing several paper theme pie charts and publication year line charts, which are cited from China National Knowledge Internet.

1. An Introduction to Francis Scott Fitzgerald and *The Great Gatsby*

As a representative of “The Lost Generation” and the spokesman in the Jazz Age, Francis Scott Fitzgerald (1896-1940) published five novels, *This Side of Paradise* (1920), *The Beautiful and Damned* (1922), *The Great Gatsby* (1925), *Tender is the Night* (1934) and *The Last Tycoon* (published posthumously,1941), as well as 160 plus short stories in his writing career of more than 20 years. *The Great Gatsby*, an accurate description of the corrupted society and the impossibility of the “American Dream” in the 1920s, illustrates the Jazz Age and demonstrates Fitzgerald’s outstanding talent and writing skills vividly. *The Great Gatsby* has enjoyed great popularity in the English world. For example, it has been a must for American high school students; the past one hundred years has witnessed six film versions of the novel. As the second in the list of 100 Best American Novels of the 20th Century, *The Great Gatsby* has been recognized as a classic in the world of English literature.

The Great Gatsby proves to be a favorite for the Chinese audience and scholars as well: more than 70 Chinese versions of *The Great Gatsby* can be found in China; with “*The Great Gatsby*” as the key word, 1199 journal papers, 188 master’s theses and doctoral dissertations and 12 conference papers can be found in China National Knowledge Internet(which is shortened as CNKI). With a focus on an analysis of the paper themes and their publication years, this paper analyzes the research on *The Great Gatsby* in China from 1980 to 2019, aiming at revealing the research focus, problems and development trend of *The Great Gatsby* in the past 40 years.

2. *The Great Gatsby* Research in China(1980-2019)

2.1. Journal Papers

2.1.1. The Top Key Words

The top twenty key words in the analysis of the 1199 journal papers borrowed from CNKI are *The Great Gatsby*, Gatsby, Fitzgerald, American Dream, North America, the U.S.A., Jazz Age, the

great Gatsby, the hero, symbolic meaning, folk literature, the narrator, the masterpiece, feminism, artistic techniques, *Tender is the Night*, symbolic techniques, Wilson, Scott and Wu Ningkun. The most popular twenty key words, which are listed in the following pie chart, demonstrate that Chinese scholars have paid attention to Fitzgerald's life as well as *The Great Gatsby* in the past 40 years with a focus on the theme(American Dream), social background (Jazz Age), characterization(Gatsby and Wilson), symbolism, feminism, narrative techniques, artistic features, translation studies, and the comparative study of *The Great Gatsby* and Fitzgerald's other novels. Among the twenty top key words, *The Great Gatsby*, Gatsby, Fitzgerald and the American Dream rank first, accounting for as much as three quarters of the total, which shows that the top priorities of theme research and character research are given to American dream and Gatsby respectively.

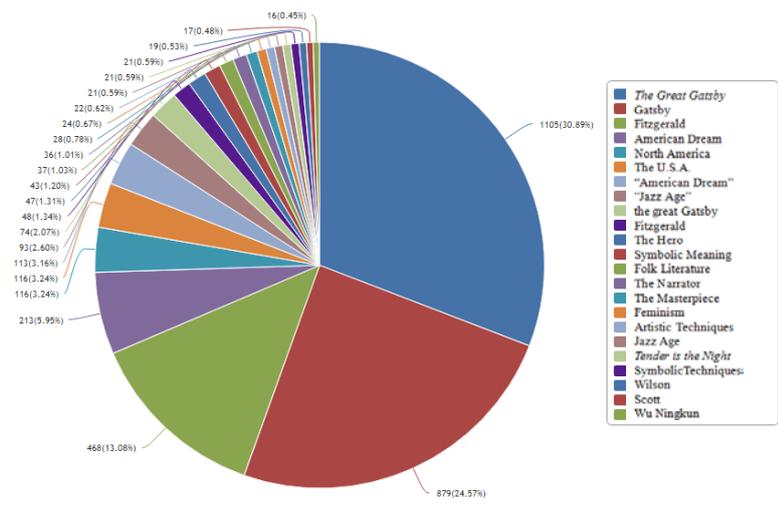


Figure 1 The top key words of the journal papers.

2.1.2. The Publication Years

The number of journal papers published per year was nearly the same from 1980 to 1992; only a few papers were published per year. Except occasional drops, the years between 1993 and 2005 witnessed a slow increase, with the number of papers rising yearly from a few to twenty plus. The number of papers published each year began to surge from 2006 onwards, reaching its peak in 2014, in which 117 papers were published. However, the number of papers has dropped sharply since 2015. The year 2019 shared an identical number of published papers with the year 2007. The rise and fall are well illustrated in the following line chart.

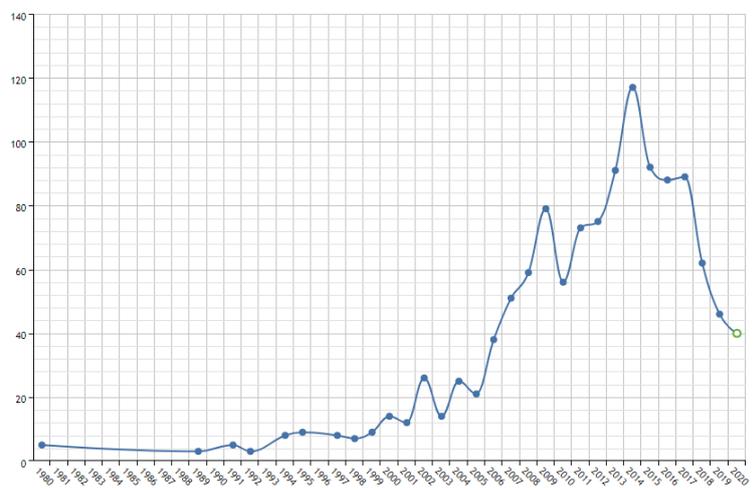


Figure 2 The publication years of the journal papers.

2.2. Master's Theses and Doctoral Dissertations

2.2.1. The Top Key Words

In the 188 master's theses or doctoral dissertations, *The Great Gatsby*, Gatsby, Fitzgerald and American Dream topped the top four, accounting for nearly three quarters (70.57%) of all. Sharing such key words as *The Great Gatsby*, Gatsby, Fitzgerald, American Dream, North America, the U.S.A., Jazz Age, the great Gatsby, feminism, the Lost Generation, artistic techniques, *Tender is the Night*, and Wu Ningkun with the journal papers, there are some new key words topping the list of the master's theses and doctoral dissertations. Chinese versions, translation strategies, consumerism, Qiao Zhigao, the history of American literature, comparative study, narratology, fiction production, literary creation, American fiction and narrative art indicate new researches:

- A. More detailed discussion about translation strategies in dealing with *The Great Gatsby*.
- B. The increasing interest in Narratology.
- C. *The Great Gatsby* was interpreted as a mosaic in a wall of American literary history or a slice of the Jazz Age.
- D. *The Great Gatsby* was frequently studied together with other novels.

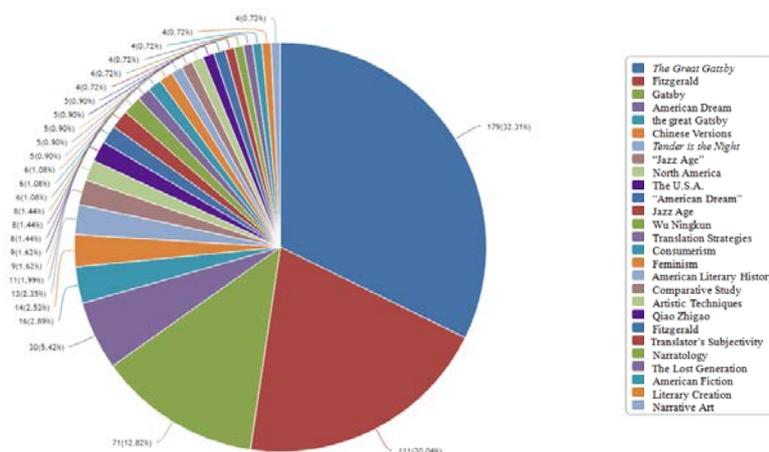


Figure 3 The top key words of the master's theses and doctoral dissertations.

2.2.2. Conferral Years for Degrees

The number of thesis or dissertation submissions increased or decreased in the years between 2001 and 2009; about ten theses or dissertations were finished each year. The number in the years between 2010 and 2016 held steady; about twenty theses or dissertations can be found each year. However, it began to fall below ten in 2017, which suggests the difficulty of further exploration for graduates instead of decreasing academic interest.

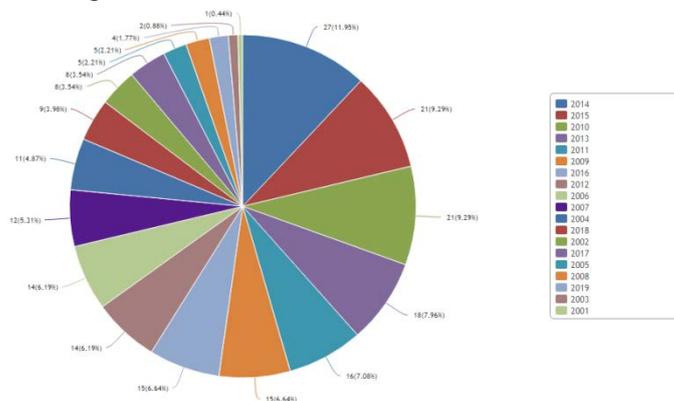


Figure 4 Conferral years for degrees.

2.3. Conference Papers

2.3.1. The Top Key Words

The top four key words in the conference paper pie chart are *The Great Gatsby*, Gatsby, Fitzgerald and American Dream as well, accounting for nearly a half of all(46.94%). There appeared new terms like *Zelda*, *The House of Mirth*, emotional power, ecological consciousness, the prejudice against women, their attitude towards money and geographic level, which demonstrate the attemptation to explore something new in the classical novel, and encourage an interdisciplinary and intertextual reading in *The Great Gatsby*.

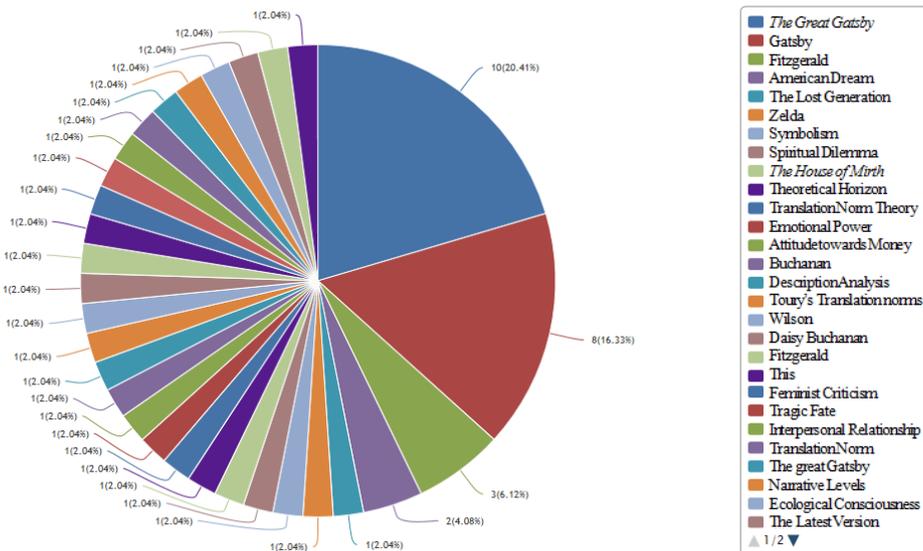


Figure 5 The top key words of the conference papers.

2.3.2. Publication Years

There is only one conference paper in each year with the year of 2017 as an exception.

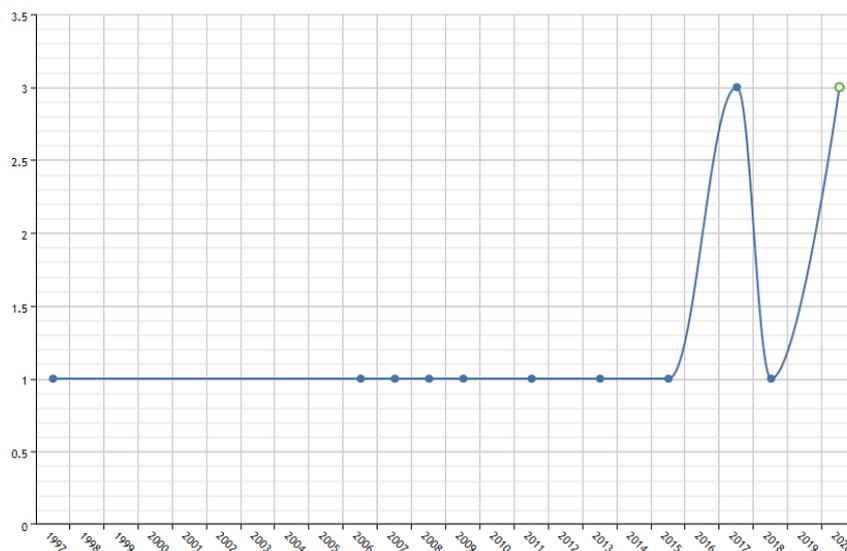


Figure 6 The publication years of the conference papers.

3. *The Great Gatsby* Research in China: the Charts, the Research Focus, the Problems and the Trend

As the masterpiece by a significant writer in the Jazz Age, Francis Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great*

Gatsby deserves academic attention. Chinese scholars have presented brilliant interpretations of the novel in the past four decades, as the three pie charts show, the focus being the theme of American Dream in the novel, the second significant theme being the Jazz Age and the third important theme being the character Gatsby.

However, according to the three pie charts, the journal papers, the theses and the dissertations, and the conference papers share so many themes, which suggests too much similarity between these papers. The fall in the number of the journal papers, the theses and the dissertations, and the conference papers around the year 2017 indicates the difficulty of further academic exploration of the novel, especially for the shallow scholars, as the three line charts reveal. Although much academic attention has been given to Fitzgerald and *The Great Gatsby*, while future academic exploration are expected to turn to an intertextual and interdisciplinary reading of the novel.

Acknowledgments

This work is supported by “A Study on the Model of Cultivating English Majors’ Patriotism in an Age of New Liberal Arts: Taking *British and American Literature* as an Example”, an Educational Scientific Planning Research Fund in Jiangxi Province (Grant No. 20YB364).

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