

# The Influence of Buddhist Androgyny on Woolf's Androgyny -- A New Exploration of *A Room of One's Own*

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**Abstract:** This paper makes an in-depth study of the formation of Woolf's androgynous view, pointing out that its formation not only depends on the western background, but also is greatly influenced by Buddhism. Firstly, the connotations of Woolf's androgynous view are summarized into three aspects: desexual connotation embedded in the "One", dynamic trait represented by the "taxi" image, and psychological tendency embodied in androgynous writing. Then the western background resources for Woolf's androgyny, feminism and psychoanalysis, are specifically analyzed. Finally, the logic of Buddhist androgyny affecting Woolf's androgyny is illustrated: this paper defines Buddhist androgyny as a spiritual state dependent on sexual conversion, gender combination and desexualization, which is both the path of enlightenment and the fruit of enlightenment. Woolf's androgyny works in the same way with Buddhist androgyny. Although Woolf herself had no direct connection with Buddhism, she was inevitably influenced by the widespread interest in it in her Bloomsbury circle, her husband's strong support for it and her cousin's eastward trip to Asia. The influence of Buddhism on the words and images in Woolf's writing is also confirmed in her works, such as *A Room of One's Own*. The three connotations of Woolf's androgyny can be proved to be related to the influence of Buddhist androgyny.

**Keywords:** Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, Androgyny, Buddhism

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## 1. Introduction

*A Room of One's Own* as one of Woolf's masterpieces is famous for its androgynous view. In the book, Woolf made use of the taxi image to formally discuss her idea of androgyny, which later became the tool for feminism. The current researches on Woolf's androgynous view mainly fell into the following groups: (1) Most studies about her androgyny were analyzed from the perspective of feminism, which was used as a theoretical tool to examine literary characters and writers. Such as Tracy Hargreaves' *Androgyny in Modern Literature* (2005); (2) Some made a genetic study of Woolf's androgynous theory based on her own mental state. For example, Elaine Showalter's *A Literature of Their Own* (1977) believed that Woolf's androgynous view was generated from her extremely unstable mental state and inclination to escape; Biographer Gillian Woolf's biography for Woolf, *Virginia Woolf: and the Woman who Shaped her*

*World* (2019), attributed the androgynous state of Woolf to the traumatic abuse she suffered during her childhood. (3) Some interpreted Woolf's androgynous view from other theoretical perspectives, or made a comparative study of her androgynous view with other theories. In the post-modern period, androgyny and feminism further fitted together with the waves of female movement. Therefore, androgyny now bears some prominent post-modern characteristics on the basis of feminism, further breaking through the gender binary opposition and developing towards a more diversified direction.

However, this paper finds that Woolf's androgyny is not only influenced by its Western background and works as a result of feminism, but also affected by the Eastern Buddhist thoughts. Some qualities of her androgyny are clearly related to Buddhist androgyny, and thus strip beyond the androgyny in the Western context. This paper tries to prove the logic of Buddhist influence on the generation of androgyny in Woolf: part one mainly introduces the Woolf's androgyny in her *A*

*Room of One's Own*, paying special attention to the connotations of Woolf's view of androgyny; part two summarizes the western resources for Woolf's androgyny, especially the feminist and the psychological resources; part three discusses the Buddhist influence on Woolf's androgyny, including Woolf's encounter with Buddhism, androgyny in Buddhism, and the probable effects of Buddhist androgyny on Woolf's androgyny.

## 2. Androgyny in Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*

In *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf illustrated her androgynous ideal in formal imagery, which is built based on the special image of "taxi" in *A Room of One's Own*. Combined with the book, the connotations of Woolf's androgynous view can be summarized into three aspects: the desexual connotation embedded in the "One", the dynamic trait represented by the "taxi" image, and the psychological tendency embodied in androgynous writing.

### 2.1. Desexual Connotation Embedded in the "One"

The academic definition of Woolf's androgyny tended to be sexual transition and combination of traits of both genders, which was influenced greatly by the Greek traditions of god Hermaphrodite and Plato's "third-sex". However, among the critics of Woolf, it is the desexual essence of her androgyny that is noted: in the title of *A Room of One's Own*, the pronoun "one" depersonalized and even degendered the subject; Woolf's ideal artist mysteriously transcended the sex, or was genderless at all [1]. Before that, however, Showalter devoted much of her time to analyze Woolf's unstable mental condition and her predicament, arguing that androgyny showed merely Woolf's inclination to escape. A Chinese scholar further pointed out that Woolf put forward this concept out of fear, and aimed to avoid the fixed gender identity, and she fell into the holistic theory of hyper-gender [2]. This paper does not fully agree with these comments. Woolf's androgynous view does have the connotation of desexualization, but her "holistic theory of hyper-gender" may be influenced by the other resources that is beyond the Greek traditions. Woolf selected the word "one" for her book, which clearly shows the desexualization nature of her own view, meaning all individuals do not distinguish between men and women, and implying a kind of expectation of achieving a "holistic theory of hyper-gender". In Woolf's view, all people should have an androgynous trait, which should not be sexual switch or a combination of sexual traits, but an androgynous thinking pattern. This kind of mindset is not only for women, but also for all people. Here we can see that Woolf is not an extreme feminist, and she is even committed to improving the state of mind of all people.

This paper also recognizes the desexualization or hyper-gendered feature in Woolf's androgynous view, and even takes such a feature as the main connotation of her view of androgyny. Of course, desexualization does not mean

there is no sex. It shows a tendency to exorcise people's gender consciousness. Back in 1924, long before writing her *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf mentioned in *The Patron and the Crocus* that a writer was of no gender [3]. Then Woolf restated her view in *A Room of One's Own*, but caught little notice [3]. She actually held that it was fatal for any writer to think only of his own gender when writing, which Showalter regarded as a kind of warning against people's overindulgence in feminism [1]. And this paper thinks that it is more to express a kind of orientation of desexualization. However, people's understandings about androgyny deviated to some extent, and the feminist androgyny showed its dominance. People who believed in feminist pointed out that Woolf was advocating a feminine way of writing, but such a conclusion was contrary to Woolf's warning of not laying too much emphasis on gender. It's widely believed by Western scholars that Woolf, through the character of Mary Barton, asserted that women must write in a gendered sentence structure, meaning to create a feminist syntax [4], which actually adapts to the sexual body, but contradicts the assumption that it is fatal for writers to think only of gender when writing. Such a contradictory interpretation can only be attributed to the misinterpretation of Woolf's intentions: If we understand that her emphasis on androgyny is out of the pursuit of desexualization and "hyper-gender", we will not identify her as seeking for a gendered syntax. As mentioned before, the desexual connotation of Woolf's androgyny is well shown in the title of *A Room of One's Own*. The "one" to great extent aims to drive away the consciousness of gender. Everyone can be the "one" in Woolf's title, not just the women, which thus shows Woolf's purpose to create universal awareness. In this sense, the "one" means desexualization.

### 2.2. Dynamic Trait Represented by the "Taxi" Image

Woolf did not pursue some more radical views on women's works. If she did, she might have proposed a more comprehensive theory of androgyny, which would have acknowledged the individual differences between women and men, instead, she insisted on their mutual dependence [5]. Woolf's androgynous ideal, as we have already pointed out, is unisex. Her androgynous style of writing is intended to make writers forget their gender. In order to achieve such a goal, she pursues an unbiased moderation. Therefore, her androgynous view may be regarded as a kind of "golden mean", which breaks through the duality of men and women on the one hand and promotes the dynamic integration of gender characteristics on the other hand. Some western scholars pointed out that *A Room of One's Own* was an example of how the idea of the mean fitted into Woolf's political views: the exploration of the "Mid-way", which was also found in her other works, was the best way to contemplate the diverse and changing streams of consciousness, the "maya" of identity and social construction [6].

In the current researches on Woolf's androgynous view, no one paid special attention to the question that whether

androgyny is dynamic or static. But this paper argues that Woolf's androgyny shows a kind of dynamic structure of integration. Woolf, in arguing about androgyny in *A Room of One's Own*, repeatedly emphasized the idea that a man and a woman go away in a taxi together, but why they are away in a "taxi"? Why not the man and the woman stand side by side? Why not the man and the woman lie down together? This paper thinks that the image of "going away in a taxi" already implies the dynamic trait of androgyny. For the image of "taxi", the two most famous writers in Woolf's study, Nancy Topping Bazin and Elaine Showalter who are already mentioned above, made some special discussions. For Nancy, the taxi image was the work of a bipolar female writer, alternating between the tender and effusive joy of femininity and the paralysis of patriarchy; In Showalter's view, the description of a man and a woman leaving together in a taxi revealed the image of a half-assed rebel, constructs a myth for her, helped her escape the confrontation with her painful womanhood, and caused her to suffocate and suppressed her anger and ambition [7]. This paper does not agree with these two kinds of explanation. The image of "taxi" is not merely a reflection of Woolf's unstable mental state or escaping mentality, it contains the dynamic state and infinite vitality in Woolf's androgyny. Woolf in her later work also mentioned that the androgynous brain was resonant and porous [8]. It's inherently creative and dynamic. Only the dynamic image of taxi can ensure the resonance and show vitality. The most important is that this dynamic image is an imitation of the typical Buddhist image of a benevolent ship, which takes all the people liberated from this miserable world analogized as a bitter sea to go to the other shore.

There is a connection between the connotation of desexualization and the dynamic trait of Woolf's androgyny. From the etymological point of view, desexualization, whose negative prefix "de-" comes from Latin, meaning "away" and "leaving", is itself a manifestation of dynamic state. In this way, "desexualization" echoes "dynamic", which together construct the connotation of Woolf's androgynous concept and reflect the influence of eastern religions. Just as there is the shadow of the Mean in Woolf's political ideas, her ideas about gender and writing represented by androgyny expresses a pursuit of the Mean. It also confirms the idea that Woolf is not a fierce feminist. "Desexualization" truly breaks through gender duality and reintegrates the sexes through dynamic integration. In this way, the "away" and integration can achieve the Mean and ensure the permanent vitality of androgyny.

### 2.3. Psychological Tendency Embodied in Androgynous Writing

As mentioned above, a writer should write without paying too much attention to his or her gender, which is restated by Woolf in *A Room of One's Own* that a writer should be of no gender. Woolf actually promote a kind of androgynous writing which requires androgynous mind first.

In fact, both the desexualization and dynamic trait mentioned above indicate that Woolf's idea of androgyny

focuses on a kind of androgynous mind, which is different from the androgyny in Western tradition. Her androgyny can be roughly summarized into three levels, that is, the ability to coordinate the male-oriented thoughts and that of female; the ability to combine or unify psychological traits of both sexes; the free use of gender characters. It's a tentative explanation about androgyny with reference to Jack Block's theory of stages of children's gender identity. The three levels ultimately lead to a kind of androgynous mind. The present academic attention on androgynous mind was more or less from the feminist perspective, and paid more attention to the androgynous external allusion and representation, giving much attention to the behaviors, appearances or dress-ups of androgynous characters, but ignoring the fact that Woolf herself in *A Room of One's Own* emphasized the inner integration of binary factors. That is to say, when Woolf first expressed the androgynous concept, she referred to the writer's creative attitude [2]. It's the psychological tendency of androgyny that Woolf attaches extreme importance to.

## 3. Feminism and Psychoanalysis as Background Resources for Woolf's Androgyny

The three connotations seem to be closely related to the background of the Western world in Woolf's time, namely the female movement and the rise of psychoanalysis (the gender theories of which were taken to serve sexual equality), leading to the prejudice that people regarded androgyny as a subordinate concept of the female movements. Therefore, this part specifically analyzes the western resource for Woolf's androgynous view, that is, discusses the influence of female movement and psychoanalysis on Woolf's androgyny to see whether Woolf's androgyny is a pure outcome of western culture.

### 3.1. Feminism as a Driving Force to Write *A Room of One's Own*

Woolf's arguments and efforts for gender equality are there for all to see. For a long time, her androgynous idea was discussed and studied from a feminist perspective, so her book *A Room of One's Own* was also regarded as a kind of "rise of women". There is some truth to this argument, that's to say, the women's movement is to some extent the driving force behind Woolf's advocacy of androgyny. Woolf as a celebrity in the cultural circle, always wanted to show a way for women to literature creation, hence the noted book *A Room of One's Own* was created. Therefore, there is no doubt that the female movement is the source of Woolf's idea of androgyny.

There are enormous evidences to show Woolf's pursuit of sexual equality, which is also the focus of academic attention with reference to her *A Room of One's Own*. Here this paper will briefly enumerate some evidences of feminism in the book: (1) Woolf started by pointing out that her core purpose was to discuss women and fiction, and thus gave the famous

feminist idea that women's successful writing must be secured by money and a room [8]; (2) Creating a name for a fictional university ("Oxbridge") as a metaphor for the male-dominated higher education, Woolf expressed her dissatisfaction with the refusal of the university library to admit female readers alone [8]. (3) Woolf was outspoken on many issues of gender inequality. "Why did men drink wine and women water? Why was one sex so prosperous and the other so poor?" [8]. Such an aspect has been well researched, and this paper will not make further discussions here.

Western academia regarded Woolf as an important figure who entered the literary world with the view of androgyny and made some special discussions. Coupled with Woolf's identity as a female writer, her view of androgyny was widely seen as a weapon of feminist literary criticism for a long time.

### 3.2. *Psychoanalysis as Another Background Resource*

Although Woolf's androgyny shows its pursuit of gender equality, there is a more important intent to construct a psychological mode of androgyny, that is, to achieve a harmonious and whole state inside. It's said that Woolf was closely related to psychoanalysis: Woolf met Freud, and it was the Woolfs who first translated, published and actively introduced the psychoanalytic works to English readers. Woolf herself was mentally ill and always resistant to the treatment of psychoanalysts, which may contribute to her verbal rejection of psychoanalysis. So in any case, we can safely say that Woolf is influenced by the current of psychoanalysis. Some scholars pointed out that "in *A Room of One's Own*... Virginia Woolf interweaves her version of Freudian psychoanalytic theory with her interpretation of fascist dogma to explain the origins of patriarchal violence" [9]. So Woolf is in some sense a user of psychoanalysis, and psychoanalysis is very seductive to Woolf. Besides, as an acquaintance and promoter of Freud, Woolf must also have been influenced by Carl Jung, Freud's favorite student, whose psychoanalysis was said to promote women's struggle to some extent.

In *A Room of One's Own*, the traces of psychoanalytic androgyny is well shown: (1) Woolf refused to define the essence of woman. Woolf made it clear at the beginning of *A Room of One's Own* that she held "women and fiction remain, as far as I am concerned, unsolved problems" [8]. Women can be either characters or creators, and when they are characters of some writers, the writers that can be both men and women are demanded to harbor androgynous mind, which Woolf sees as a recipe for big trouble in her time. When women are creators for fictions, they are also required to think overall. (2) Woolf took the Shakespearean state of mind which is "incandescent" and "unimpeded" as the best mind for creation, for we actually know nothing about his state of mind, and "we are not held up by some 'revelation' which reminds us of the writer" [8]. That's to say, Woolf advocates here not focusing too much on authorship. Whether a writer is male or female should be less important than the freedom of creative mind. The "unimpeded" mind

should be one of androgyny that will not be constrained by the sexual identity of writer. The female state of mind is full of resentment and fear, while the male state of mind is hateful and terrible, neither of which can be seen as the creative mind without obstacles. (3) Woolf took "integrity" as the first criterion for writers, with which gender consciousness interferes in some way. Woolf took Charlotte as an example to criticize female writers for not being powerful because their works were permeated with anger [8]. A female writer being integral means to get rid of her mood cause by gender consciousness and thus to achieve an androgynous state of mind.

Woolf has been always emphasizing androgynous mentality in *A Room of One's Own*, and such a concept is influenced by psychoanalysis to great extent, especially Jung's holistic idea of gender, which is believed by many to promote gender equality, thus making people think that the androgynous mind is also a pure feminist view. But in reality, the psychoanalytic gender theory is not totally in the service of gender equality. Here this paper tries to dissect Jung's sexual archetypes as an example to illustrate the point:

Jung's concept of gender constructed with Anima and Animus as the core can be described as similar to androgyny. The correlation between Jung's gender theory and androgyny was recognized by scholars. Under the promotion of Singer and other female writers, androgyny gradually stepped out of the boundary of psychology and entered into the field of women's movement, and existed as a theoretical tool of women's movement. In fact, When Jung himself made a comment on the Secret of the Golden Flower, a Chinese classic translated by Richard Wilhelm, he specifically discussed the androgynous concepts of Anima and Animus, which could also reveal the tendency of gender bias in Jung's concept of androgyny. Jung's interpretation of Wilhelm was considered to be misinterpreted to a certain extent, which was not only due to the inaccuracy of Wilhelm's translation, but also related to Jung's own binary- opposition thinking mode [10]. All these lead to Jung's sexual prejudice beneath the gender equality: Jung's insistence on replacing the translation of animus with "logos" and preserving the concept of animus solely for women shows his sexism in two ways: (1) Jung believed that "logos" pointed to the universal and thus delivered a fact that the clarity and rational capacity of man's consciousness were universal. "logos" was distinguished from the Anima of individual tendencies, leaving room for storing various prejudices and opinions in the Anima. (2) Jung believed that the female animus was also mixed with prejudices and opinions, and was the logos of inferiority. Therefore, for women, whether in Anima or Animus, there were all kinds of personal things. So women could not recognize the nature of things. Moreover, according to Jung's conclusion, Anima was limited to expressing only female carnal desire [11], which also shows a kind of gender bias. On the other hand, the spiritual structure of men was composed of Anima and logos, which not only recognizes the rationality of men and the universality of transcendental consciousness, but also confirms the existence of their

viewpoints of individual tendency. Such an analysis of the spiritual construction of both man and woman illustrates the potential gender bias in Jung himself. This paper holds that he is still a gender conservative to some extent.

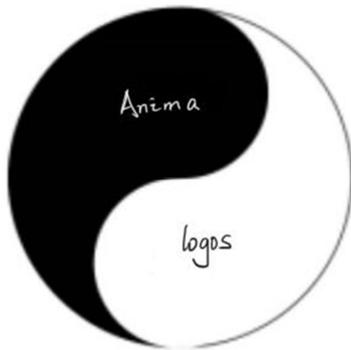


Figure 1. Man's mental structure.

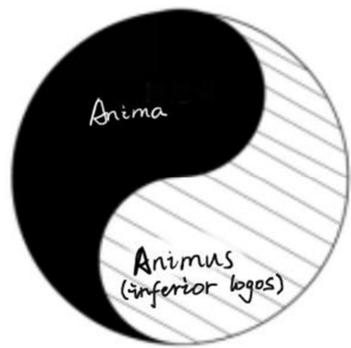


Figure 2. Woman's mental structure.

As shown in the figures, androgyny is more embodied in the man's spiritual structure, meaning that there are both the universal logos which shows the light of consciousness and reason, and the Anima which shows some individual tendencies. That is to say, in Jung's consciousness and design, the spiritual structure of a man is in line with the "Dào". And if a man wants to maintain a sound spirit, he must be trained to be androgynous and make a reasonable allocation of yīn and yáng inside himself. Here androgyny is assigned just for men, which is somewhat different from that of Woolf in her design of characters. However, in Jung's theory, both components of the female mental structure (Anima and Animus) point to individuation. Except for the feminine part of Anima, animus is inferior, corresponding to the sensual aspect of man, and its universality is much lower than that of the logos in man, so it shows the tendency of yīn. Then, the spiritual structure of woman is composed of a "yīn" and a factor that is mostly "yīn" inclined, which conforms to both Jung's and the society's traditional setting for women at that time. It is also easy to create a misconception that Jung designs the ideas of Anima and Animus specifically for women, and then believes that the psychological idea of androgyny is proposed to achieve the equality of women. But based on the analysis in this paper, we know that this is not the case. According to the viewpoint of "Dào", yīn mixes with yáng to achieve "Dào", then the spiritual structure of

male is consistent with "Dào", and men can obtain "Dào". On the contrary, the female spiritual structure with double feminine factors is inconsistent with "Dào", and thus women lose the opportunity to achieve "Dào" in Jung's analysis. Therefore, when Jung constructs his view of androgyny based on "Dào", it is designed mainly for men. As a psychologist in the stage of modernism, it is understandable that he can not break through the gender bias. For men, it is easier to maintain a balance because they have a mental structure that points to both universality and individuality. For women, the mental structure of double yīn makes them more likely to be unbalanced, leading to hysterical pathology or producing extreme results. In a word, this paper believes that Jung's androgynous psychology is not created to promote the equality between men and women. It is actually mixed with the gender bias of the great psychologist.

The women's movement influences Woolf's androgyny to some extent, and her *A Room of One's Own* gives also a suggestion for female writers, but Woolf is not an extreme feminist; The concept of sexual wholeness in Jung's psychoanalysis attributes the female spiritual structure to double "yīn", and regards women as being difficult to obtain "Dào". Therefore, this paper argues that Woolf's androgyny is not an absolute feminist tool, and the psychoanalytic background does not serve gender equality. Therefore, it is imperative to find other sources for Woolf's androgyny.

#### 4. Buddhist Influence as Constitutive Resource for Woolf's Androgyny

Combining with the perspective of the dissemination of Buddhism in the West, this paper finds that Buddhism has a non-negligible influence on the formation of Woolf's gender concept, and her androgynous view is actually a product of cultural exchange between the East and the West. This part attempts to demonstrate the logic of Buddhist androgynous influence on Woolf's androgyny.

##### 4.1. Androgyny in Buddhism

The paper here is only concerned with the discussion of Buddhist androgyny in the academic circle, not concerning the practice. According to the research, androgyny in Chinese philosophy can be traced back to all the three major philosophical discourses, that is, Confucianism, Buddhism and Dàoism [12]. Buddhist belief in the ultimate immateriality of the phenomenal world produces a concept of equality, considers all sexual concepts to be spiritually attached, and identifies the enlightenment potential of every sentient being, thus transcending the culturally-prescribed gender dichotomy.

There are two ways to define androgyny and handle its relationship to desexualization:

##### 4.1.1. Androgyny in the Narrow Sense

Although the Buddhist ideal is more asexual, the idea of androgyny can occasionally be found in Buddhist practice and scripture: Amihā was often compared to a mother or a father in

the pure land [12]. Obviously, there is a distinction between “asexual” and “androgyny” here. Androgyny is defined as a kind of gender transition or sexual union: Amitabha can switch between male and female, being both man and woman. The idea of androgyny as gender transition or gender union is a traditional understanding model that is similar to that in Greek mythology and Plato’s description of androgyny, which is referred here as “androgyny in the narrow sense”.

This kind of definition may attribute to scholars’ semi-understanding of Buddhism. In fact, the Buddhist asexual ideal and the androgynous idea are both intended to achieve spiritual transcendence, and their purpose is to transcend the gender limits of the body in the course of Buddhist practice.

#### **4.1.2. Androgyny in the Broad Sense**

Diversely, some scholars combined the “asexual” and “androgyny” in the Buddhist ideal, making androgyny involve the third level of meaning, desexualization, and moved towards “androgyny in the broad sense”. For example, when historian Daniel Burton-Rose examined the androgyny in Buddhism, he first discussed the “non-male” and “non-female” in early Buddhist communities. He pointed out that in early Buddhist communities, “pandaka” was a social category that undermined sexual partition and male/female duality. The origin of the term was unclear, but it may be derived from “apa+anda+ka”, meaning “no testicles” [13]. The pandakas were seen as a distinct group, differentiated from both men and women in the time of Atharveda. Two kinds of androgynous traits -- sexual exuberance and impotence -- were seen as the characters of the pandakas. Thus it can be seen that the pandakas have unstable sexual desire, which is also an androgynous trait.

“Asexual” and “androgynous” overlap to some extent, although such a historical research is also not accurate entirely. In Buddhism, male and female is a pair of dialectic items, Amitabha can be both man and woman, and both non-man and non-woman. So it is one-sided to focus only on one aspect of the relationship between male and female, but the tendency to combine “asexual” with “androgyny” is already emerging. For what is “asexual”? Rose interpreted it as being non-male and non-female, but this paper suggests that this kind of explanation needs to be further improved and optimized. Moreover, as a historian, Rose explained the idealist idea of Buddhism with the historical phenomenon in the early stages of the development of Buddhism, which is suspected of transgressing. So only from the psychological and spiritual aspects can we better explain the two concepts of “asexual” and “androgyny”.

No one specifically defined the Buddhist androgyny actually, and this paper will have a try here. This paper also tends to combine “androgyny” and “asexual” in Buddhism. It holds that in Buddhism, androgyny is not only reflected in the gender transition like “Amitabha as both the father and the mother of the Pure land”, but also in a tendency of desexualization. The path to enlightenment does not care about gender. Gender conversion is attributed to the same

spiritual entity of all living beings, and the purpose of desexualization is to achieve spiritual enlightenment, and there is no essential difference between them in the ultimate teachings of Buddhism. Buddhist enlightenment is possible for every sentient being and transcends the cultural dichotomy between men and women. This paper agrees that Buddhist androgyny is a state of mind in the sense of final salvation.

Alan Sponberg, professor of philosophy and religion, established four categories about Buddhism from the perspective of Buddhist social evolution: inclusiveness in the sense of salvation, institutional male-centrism, ascetic misogyny and androgyny in the sense of salvation. First of all, the core teachings of Buddhism and its way of salvation were inherently inclusive and gender-neutral; however, as Buddhism became institutionalized, it took on a social view of male’s superiority over female, which reflected not only the cultural attitudes towards women, but also the misogynists of male ascetics; finally, Sponberg observed that in the later time it attempted to deal with the incompatibility of the first three attitudes by integrating a more inclusive fourth view, which was more in line with the original equal acceptance of the both sexes on the path to salvation [14]. That is to say, androgyny is in line with Buddhist salvation and derived to cope with social and cultural discrimination against women. It reconciles the aforesaid institutional and social prejudices against women with core Buddhist teachings. In any case, androgyny in Buddhism is associated with salvation and enlightenment, and is committed to coming to the ideal way of salvation in Buddhism. If there is no gender discrimination evolved in the society, the original teachings of Buddhism will not need to solve the gender problem on people’s way to becoming Buddha. That is to say, the androgynous concept of Buddhism has a social and historical nature. In connotation, asexual or desexualization is in line with the purpose of restoring its original teachings in Buddhism through androgyny.

In summary, this paper defines androgyny in Buddhism as a state of spiritual transcendence which is regarded by the academic community as sexual transition, gender combination and desexualization, and as a combination of the above three connotations. Woolf’s androgyny works in the same way with Buddhist androgyny. It is both the way and the fruit of enlightenment. Compared with the narrow sense of androgyny which only focuses on gender transition and gender union, Buddhist androgyny is in a broad sense which is superimposed with the connotation of desexualization. It is these elements that make Woolf’s androgyny not just a product of Western feminism and androgynous psychology, but also a product of Buddhism, which will be proved by the following part.

#### **4.2. Woolf’s Encounter with Buddhism**

There are clues to the Buddhist influence on Woolf. Woolf was one of the most prominent figures in Bloomsbury, a group of famous people who either explored or practiced Buddhism. Woolf often communicated with her Bloomsbury friends, such as H. G. Wells, Herbert Read, Thur Waley, T. S. Eliot, George Santayana, etc., who were all known for their Buddhist writings [15]. In addition to her friends in literature

field, Woolf's husband, Leonard, was also a "semi-fan" of Buddhism. As a politician, he took it for granted to reject all religions, but "if he had had to choose a religion, he would have chosen Buddhism because to Leonard, it was superior to others..... he learned Sinhalese from a Buddhist priest while in Ceylon" [16]. It is likely that Woolf is influenced by her husband's opposition to other religions and his friendly attitude towards Buddhism. Besides, Woolf's cousin also traveled east to Asia to learn Oriental culture, which may also contribute to Woolf's contact with Buddhism. Woolf probably accepts some Buddhist ideas subconsciously.

Although Buddhism seeped into Woolf's life, few scholars explored the specific influence of Buddhism on Woolf and how it exerted its force. Only an American scholar, Patricia Lawrence generically mentioned that Woolf had absorbed the mysterious elements of Oriental metaphysics, which showed the importance of Buddhist or Daoist transcendental discourse to the 20th century. Many of Woolf's themes -- impermanence, the meaning of life, and other things -- were inextricably linked to Buddhist thoughts [17]. If such examples are only studies of the analogy between Woolf's works and Buddhist thoughts, then the usage of Buddhist vocabularies in Woolf's works is also enough to confirm the influence of Buddhism on Woolf. For example, in Woolf's book, *Between the Acts* (1941), there were many allusions to Buddhism. In the book, there was a compound word that was strange enough, that's, "one-making", which appeared once only, was probably linked in context to "at-one-ment" and "at-one-ness". The latter two items were introduced to England by W. Y. Evans-Wentz in his commentary on *Tibetan Yoga and Tantric Teachings*, published by Oxford University Press three years before Woolf's final novel [15]. The appearance of the word "one-making" directly proves the influence of Buddhism on Woolf. This also leads our thoughts to the main work of this paper, *A Room of One's Own*. It is undoubtedly a flag for feminism, a declaration of liberation among women, but why is it not titled "*A Room of Her Own*"? It seems more straightforward, more rebellious, and more in line with Woolf's role as a woman writer. This problem is not really difficult to solve. As long as the view that Buddhism influences Woolf is taken in, then can we have a clear understanding of her choice of "one". The "one" in the book title is not only to fight for women and speak for women, but also an attempt to involve all sentient beings. In Buddhism, the one means the many, the one is the whole, and this kind of dialectical relationship shows a universal concern, which requires a perfect inner state, that is, an androgynous mind.

In *A Room of One's Own*, the image of a man and a woman leaving together lingers. Before such a typical image, Woolf arranged long lists of words for the bustling city life of London, describing all kinds of people and things, which attracted very little attention. Woolf deduced the image of man and woman leaving in a taxi from all kinds of busy people. When the crowd becomes the background of Woolf's vision, the images of the man and the women are highlighted, that is to say, they are actually the representatives of all kinds of people. Androgyny is thus a common representation of all

people. From this point of view, the light of Buddhism over Woolf is obvious enough: On the course of Buddhist practice, it is necessary to remove one's selfishness. Especially for the Bodhisattva practice, self saving equals saving all living beings, and the more care for all living beings, the closer to the realm of Buddha. As the old saying goes, the more bustling a place is, the more can it smooth the mood. It is in such a busy or even biostorous scene that Woolf realizes the essence of androgyny, which is an appropriate way for all people in common. Not only for just women, but also for all people. In addition, the man and the woman can walk together, but why does Woolf arrange a transportation here? Buddhism is seen as the boat to cross people to the western paradise. The appearance of the taxi in this imagery may also relate to Buddhist influences. In short, we can search extensively in Woolf's works for evidences to testify the Buddhist influence on her. In her view of androgynous mind, her imagery and verbs echoes Buddhist elements to some extent.

### 4.3. Buddhist Androgynous Influence on Woolf's Androgyny

As for androgyny, Buddhist influence on Woolf is also obvious, which can be shown in the following aspects:

#### 4.3.1. Influence of Buddhist Salvation on the Choice of the "One" in the Title

As mentioned above, Buddhist androgyny in the sense of salvation is specific to the gender discrimination in traditional culture. In order to transcend the cultural traditions of gender and return to the core teachings and ideals of Buddhism, some schools of Buddhism gradually develops the concept of androgyny, which regards androgyny as the nature of salvation. In this way, the purpose of androgyny is to realize spiritual transcendence. It itself harbors the connotation of desexualization or hyper-gender. The concept of androgyny is instrumental in Buddhism, aiming to achieve the ultimate goal of becoming Buddha and make Buddhism adapt to different cultures, which is also the embodiment of the powerful adaptability of Buddhism. As Sponberg notes, influenced by the male-centric and misogynistic views, the debate among early Buddhists over whether women could become Buddhas was intense, and many Matheravada Buddhists rejected the possibility of women's waking, even though they allowed the existence of female Arhatans. The problem was eventually not properly addressed (and a compensatory strategy developed). Later, when Buddhists tried to reassert the earlier redemptive sense of inclusiveness, some strains of Mahayana Buddhism were inspired to develop this original principle into a more positive egalitarian view, an androgynous affirmation of non-duality. It is rooted in the emerging philosophy of Mahayana emptiness. In other words, Buddhist androgyny is compensatory, egalitarian and redemptive from the source, which is designed for the cultural discrimination against women and can only be achieved by removing the sense of gender. In this sense, Buddhist androgyny is initially skewed towards women believers. All these echo the desexualization in Woolf's androgynous view.

The connotation of desexualization embedded in the “One” in the title of the book is closely related to the influence of Buddhist androgyny. Both Buddhist and Woolf’s androgynous view lay emphasis on people’s mind, no matter it is a man or a woman. Every aspect of her life related to Buddhism and exposed to the influence of Buddhist salvation, Woolf pursues an androgynous desexualization. The woman writer Elaine Showalter, who was greatly influenced by Woolf and even imitated the book *A Room of One’s Own*, said that Woolf “seeks a kind of calm androgynous “one-ness” (280) when talking about Woolf’s androgynous identity. The word “one-ness” which has a direct Buddhist origin is also used here by Showalter. We can hardly say that she does not take in this word because of Woolf’s influence on her. Being hyper-gendered does not mean being sexless, but is a necessary step towards individuals’ achieving “one-ness”, which is another expression for wholeness or integration.

#### 4.3.2. Influence of Buddhist Moderation on the “Taxi” Image

When some scholars talked about the androgyny in the sense of Buddhist salvation theory, they said that it psychologically expressed the goal of Buddhist practice as a dynamic state of non-binary androgynous mode [13]. That is to say, Buddhist androgyny has two dimensions of “breaking through duality” and “dynamic state”, showing a kind of moderation or “Mid-way”. And the Mid-way itself means maintaining a dynamic balance between the opposing poles. Some foreign scholars also recognized the dynamic nature of Buddhism, such as Brazier, who specifically mentioned the dynamic trait of Buddhism in his work [18]. This paper argues that Woolf fights for women’s rights, but opposes the radical feminism. What she purposes is also a kind of “middle way”, showing the dynamic trait. Combined with the influence of Buddhism on Woolf, we can say that Woolf’s androgynous view has the dynamic trait in the Buddhist connotation. Only the dynamic androgyny can save Woolf from her predicament. She is inspired by the Buddhist dynamic state and wants everyone to adopt an androgynous mindset to maintain a kind of moderate vitality. The image of “going away in a taxi” also enables Woolf to find the possibility of self-redemption and redemption for others, which reflects the influence of Buddhism on Woolf’s androgynous view.

#### 4.3.3. Influence of Buddhist Wholeness on Woolf’s Androgynous Mind

The androgynous writing promoted in *A Room of One’s Own* requires androgynous mind first, and since the psychological androgyny in the western world is still mixed with gender bias, the idea of androgyny reappearing under the background of gender equality is still to be discussed, and the generation of the concept of androgyny psychology needs a new opportunity to solve. This paper thinks that it has something to do with Buddhism and its androgyny. As mentioned above, there is also an androgynous paradigm in Buddhism, which is embodied as an emphasis on the spiritual wholeness. The wholeness of Buddha can also prove Woolf’s androgynous ideal and her emphasis on the logic of sexual

symbiosis. The most important role of Buddhism in the generation of Woolf’s androgynous ideal is to promote her emphasis on the inside self, which boosts a kind of androgynous mind of wholeness.

The Buddhist effect on androgyny may be attributed to the emphasis placed on the wholeness and universal connection in Buddhist thoughts themselves. According to some psychologists, Buddhism played an important role in training practitioners’ ability of overall thinking. According to such a logic, people who have contact to Buddhism are more likely to develop a kind of androgynous mind or thinking patterns. As Dr. Alan Samson pointed out, some cross-cultural psychologists showed a cognitive difference between Eastern and Western cultures, which was described as a holistic versus analytical (H-A) system of thinking (3). It was generally accepted that Buddhism contributes to holistic cognition. For this, he studied the holistic thoughts and thinking mode of Western Buddhists in his doctoral dissertation. In the dissertation, Dr. Samson referred to Jung and other psychologists’ experiment about Buddhism and cognition, in which Jung’s short version of Independence and Dependence (IND-INT) Scale of self-constructs produced such a result: “Asian-American students’ (about 1/3 of who identified with Buddhism) scores were more holistic on grouping (mean = 0.2, vs -1.3 for white and -1.0 for other non-white) and more interdependent on their IND-INT ratings (mean = -1.1, vs -1.8 for white and -2.0 for other non-white). They also were more familiar with Buddhist ideas (mean=5.2, versus 4.1 for white and 4.3 other nonwhite). Other American-born ethnicities (mainly Hispanic/Latino) did not differ from white Americans on any of the variables and were kept in the sample, while ethnicity was controlled for in all analyses” [19]. Jung’s experiment illustrated with data the effect of Buddhist thoughts on holistic cognition. There are two aspects to understand the experiment. On the one hand, Buddhist thoughts are more attractive to those people who have stronger ability to do overall thinking; on the other hand, Buddhist thoughts in turn strengthen the ability of practitioners to connect with other elements in their thinking. This experiment confirms the correlation of Buddhism and holistic thinking patterns. Buddhism, as a mind-inclined religion, focuses on the mode of interdependent connection, and is based on a universal causal relationship, which creates the overall thinking mode of Buddhist practitioners. Woolf is among those who are influenced by the Buddhist wholeness and thus forges her unique mode of androgyny, whose androgynous mind also lays emphasis on intrinsic wholeness.

## 5. Conclusion

Referring to Woolf’s huge book *A Room of One’s Own*, this paper firstly concludes the three connotations of her view of androgyny, namely, Woolf’s androgyny is desexual, dynamic and located in a psychological sense. We believe that such an idea of androgyny is closely related to Woolf’s western circumstances, two main factors of which are the feminist movement and the rise of psychoanalysis. On this basis, this

paper supplements the influence of Buddhism on Woolf's androgyny from the perspective of cultural exchange. First of all, Woolf does have a strong connection with Buddhist thoughts. The cultural circle she lives in, her friends and families are all related to Buddhism. This kind of association with Buddhism has led to a subtle influence on Woolf, which is reflected in the mystical elements in her works, some specific words and images, and the title of the book *A Room of One's Own*. Secondly, the paper tentatively summarizes the concept of androgyny in Buddhism, and holds that Buddhist androgyny has a subtle effect on the generation of Woolf's androgyny. In fact, all the three connotations of Woolf's androgyny can be traced to the influence of Buddhist androgyny.

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