

Obligation, tradition, and character in "spring moon"



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Chinese culture and traditions are well known, on the basis of modern writing, for their originality and peculiarity. The book *Spring Moon* by Bette Bao Lord offers a rigorous explanation of this kind of lifestyle through the story of a Chinese girl called Spring Moon, her family, and their customs. Throughout the story, the author reveals daily life aspects of Chinese life using different characters to represent her philosophies. One of the main characters, Bold Talent, Spring Moon's eldest uncle, shows during the first 12 chapters of the novel his obligation towards Chinese traditions, although he is occasionally obliged to depart from rigid practices.

At the beginning of the story, Bold Talent is found enjoying life in San Francisco, where he was sent by his father to study the sciences of the West. Once he arrives back to his native home, he felt his freedom fade away due to the obligations he must follow. This type of behavior was unusual, since many of the men in Bold Talent's society wouldn't have had such thoughts crossing their minds. However, Bold Talent comes home with American influences, specifically in his elimination of the transcendent queue hairstyle. The queue represents Chinese nationalism and faith in Chinese culture, and because Bold Talent had cut it off, the citizens of Soochow saw him as a disappointment to their city. The evidence of this status is seen in chapter 1: "Foreigner! The stares... crowds behind" (Lord, 1981, p. 50). Here, the text shows the astonishment of the crowd through the way that the author uses descriptive and powerful adjectives. Lord portrays the awkwardness and discomfort of Bold Talent through his body language, for example by the way he's forcing a laugh and by how hard he tries to keep confident and strong towards his citizens.

After his arrival, Bold Talent feels obligated to follow the tradition and honor of burying the Patriarch forty-nine days after his death. Once the Matriarch, his mother, decides to proceed differently, Bold Talent is forced to agree to her decision. He follows tradition by accepting the commands of his mother and not confronting them, showing that even though he wanted to fight for his father's wishes, he knew he should follow the rules he had been taught throughout his life. This mentality can be demonstrated in chapter 2, "She winced... much thought?" (Lord, 1981, p. 56), when Bold Talent conveys the respect he has for his mother by the way he formally speaks to her, accepting her wishes in a polite manner. It also shows how dramatic and self-centered the Matriarch is, as she dramatically sighs for an unnecessary cause, making it even harder for Bold Talent to stand against her.

Weeks later, after the burial of his father, Bold Talent, the actual Patriarch, goes against tradition in a more radical way. He teaches Spring Moon how to read and write, even though he is well aware of the consequences of this measure. The education of women meant danger, since it spoiled chances of good marriage and disturbed the harmony of a household. Knowing this, he doesn't place importance on what the Matriarch will say, showing significantly his opposition to tradition in a way never seen before in a typical Chinese home. To illustrate this idea, in chapter 2, "Too much... one hope." (Lord, 1981, p. 79), the author uses deep, detailed and serious language to show how dangerous and inappropriate reading and writing supposedly are for women. Also, the sympathy that Bold Talent manifests towards his niece is revealed thanks to the loving and caring tone that Lord transmits to the

readers through the language, making it evident why Bold Talent took such a big risk within his society.

After reading the first 12 chapters of *Spring Moon*, we can conclude that Lord uses varied and diverse vocabulary to transmit her ideas, thoughts, and interpretations to the readers. By examining Lord's distinct and unique language, the reader can see closely into the emotions, feelings and personality of Bold Talent, and can better understand his psychology and character. It thus be demonstrated that Bold Talent isn't the typical Patriarch. By the way Lord demonstrates and expresses this character's thoughts, it becomes clearly seen that he tries to balance his family's culture and traditions, operating contrarily from the rest of his acquaintances at times. Although the idea that Bold Talent must follow his obligations and traditions at home is clearly demonstrated, he enjoys this role. Furthermore, as the story continues, this Patriarch displays more characteristics of straying from tradition as he refuses to follow the knowledge he has been taught to value since youth. Bold Talent represents rebellion against the ordinary, and the ambition that many Chinese citizens once had of allowing modern ideas to change their actual mentality.