

Responsibility in All Creatures Great and Small and Its Reception

Fangqi Niu

Beijing International Studies University, Beijing, China
Email: 2190877203@qq.com

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Abstract

Since the first season of *All Creatures Great and Small* aired in 2020, the series has garnered significant attention and received favourable reviews on mainstream Chinese film and television review platforms. Existing domestic research on this series has largely focused on its cultural essence, subtitle translation and its relationship with anti-globalisation, whilst there has been relatively little exploration of its reception mechanisms within the Chinese context. Consequently, this paper takes the gentleman culture portrayed in the film as its point of departure and employs textual analysis to identify scenes that reflect the concept of responsibility—one of the core values of this culture. It then utilises the theory of the aesthetics of expectation to analyse how these depictions of responsibility align with the audience’s horizon of expectation. The protagonist’s professional responsibilities and the spirit of solidarity and mutual aid within the Darrowby community align with the concept of responsibility advocated by Chinese Confucian culture and the view of responsibility promoted by Xi Jinping. They meet the expectations of Chinese audiences. The core objective of this paper is to explore the reasons behind the series’s positive reception in China, using the concept of responsibility depicted in the series as a starting point.

Keywords

All Creatures Great and Small; Gentleman Culture; Ethic of Responsibility; Aesthetic of Reception

1. Introduction

1.1. All creature great and small

All Creatures Great and Small is a TV series subscribed by Channel 5, a British television station. The film is adapted from the semi-autobiographical novel of Veterinarian James Herriot himself. It tells the story of his work as a young doctor from Glasgow to the countryside of Yorktown in 1937. The story not only contains heartwarming moments between people, but also the interaction between humans and nature. The author of the novel used James Alfred Wight as his pen name and

wrote about his entire experience. And with this series of novels, he was awarded the Order of the British Empire and became the best-selling book at the top of the New York Times. Since the first season of this TV series was aired on September 1, 2020, it has maintained an update frequency of one season per year. And every year, a Christmas special episode is also aired. As of 2026, the film has been updated for six consecutive seasons. The story of *All Creatures Great and Small* focuses on the rural areas of northern England in the 1930s and 1940s. The film not only depicts the daily life of a rural veterinary clinic and the challenges faced by veterinarians during their medical practice, but also showcases a close-knit and united rural community. The core protagonists of the film include the young doctor James Herriot, the owner of the veterinary clinics Siegfried Farnon, the housekeeper of the veterinary clinics Mrs. Hall, and Siegfried Farnon's younger brother Tristan.

James' story begins in the fictional village of Darrowby in Yorkshire. It was only after his boss, Siegfried Farnon, accidentally offered him a job that he truly embarked on his adventure as a veterinarian. Siegfried Farnon is one of only two veterinary clinics in the small town. It is small but undertakes the treatment of livestock for the entire rural area. One by one, the tasks made James gradually realize that the work of a veterinarian in the countryside was far more difficult than what he had learned at school, and there was also a great deal of uncertainty. Every season of the film *James' Days* is filled with many unexpected emergencies and humorous incidents.

The series has achieved impressive viewing figures in both the UK and China. According to the online news site *Deadline Hollywood*, the first episode was watched by 3.3 million viewers and secured a 20.4% audience share in the UK, making *All Creatures Great and Small* Channel 5's highest-rated programme since 2016. It went on to become the channel's most popular programme of all time. On *IMDb*, a relatively mainstream and influential film review website in the UK, *All Creatures Great and Small* received a rating of 8.6, surpassing the first season of *Downton Abbey*. On *Rotten Tomatoes*, based on 46 critics' reviews, it achieved a 99% "Fresh" rating, with an average score of 8.5/10. (The "Fresh" rating on *Rotten Tomatoes* is based on the percentage of positive reviews from professional film and television critics. A programme must receive over 60% positive reviews to qualify for the "Fresh" badge.) Michael Hogan, the television critic for *The Daily Telegraph*, also praised the programme highly, describing it as "family-friendly comfort viewing. A soothing balm for a feverish mind" (paragraph 10).

In China, the first two seasons of the series have garnered nearly two million views on the video platform *Bilibili*, with an average rating of 9.8. Across all six seasons, the series achieved an average rating of 9.4 on *Douban*, outperforming 97% of similar titles on the platform. With over 200,000 Chinese netizens contributing reviews, healing and wonderful emerged as the most frequently cited keywords. It briefly became one of the most popular TV series promoted by Chinese online

marketing accounts. Its viewership and rating levels are significantly higher than those of similar British TV series, demonstrating its high acceptance among Chinese audiences.

1.2. Literature Review

The 2020 British television series *All Creatures Great and Small* centres on the daily life of a country vet in Yorkshire during the 1930s and 1940s. With its heart-warming narrative, pastoral aesthetics and expression of traditional values, the series has garnered high acclaim and significant attention in both the UK and the Chinese market. Academic research on the series in China began following its broadcast success. Existing studies have largely focused on four key areas: gentlemanly culture, British humour, pastoral nostalgia and the construction of British identity. Although a systematic analysis specifically addressing the reception mechanisms of Chinese audiences has yet to be established, these studies have provided a solid textual and theoretical foundation for further exploration of the series' popularity and audience resonance in China.

Domestic cultural interpretations of *All Creatures Great and Small* initially focused on gentlemanly style and British humour. In the first year of the series' broadcast, Zhang Chong (2020) analysed the gentlemanly characteristics of the British middle class portrayed in the drama from the perspective of gentlemanly culture. These figures are well-educated, observant of etiquette, compassionate and self-restrained, embodying both Puritanical moral discipline and a principle of consideration for others. Employing textual analysis, the study examines the behaviour of key characters such as James and Farnum in relation to specific events and the natural environment. Zhang Chong's exploration of the film's cultural essence through the lens of gentlemanly culture offers a concise insight and provides inspiration for the analytical approach adopted in this paper.

As research perspectives have broadened, academics have begun to situate the series within the social contexts of globalisation, deglobalisation and Brexit, exploring the underlying logic of its pastoral nostalgia and the construction of British identity. Gao Jia (2025), drawing on Stuart Hall's theory of cultural identity and Boim's theory of nostalgia, proposes that the series shapes British identity through two distinct pathways. Firstly, restorative construction: utilising the pastoral landscapes of Yorkshire, rural lifestyles and traditional values (responsibility, gentlemanliness) as vehicles to create an idealised rural community, resonating with British society's spiritual yearning for stability, indigenous culture and traditional values in the post-Brexit era. Secondly, a reflective construction: through memories of war trauma, the development of female characters, and narratives of ethnic minorities and marginalised groups, the series breaks away from a singular nostalgic perspective to present a portrait of British identity that blends tradition and modernity. This study closely integrates textual analysis with

the social context, highlighting the series' cultural function within the UK.

As a defining feature of British culture, the culture of gentlemanliness has evolved over centuries to form a stable spiritual framework centred on responsibility, self-restraint and honour. Existing literature offers extensive research into the definition of the culture of gentlemanliness, its spiritual characteristics and its application in various media, thereby demonstrating its suitability for the analysis of film and television texts.

Academic circles have generally established the core components of gentlemanly culture. Mahmut Terzi (2013), in tracing the historical evolution of the concept of the gentleman, points out that it has shifted from a marker of class identity to a moral ideal of character. The essence of the gentlemanly spirit is manifested in a sense of responsibility towards others and society, self-restraint in emotions and behaviour, and an unwavering commitment to honour in matters of character and principles. Liu Rui and Tian Liping (2015), in their research on British and American literature, further emphasise that the British spirit of gentlemanliness originated from the chivalric tradition. With responsibility, self-restraint and honour as its intrinsic logic, it has formed cultural characteristics of reserve, self-discipline and propriety, which are key to distinguishing it from other cultural personas.

Scholars such as Newman and Letwin have verified the spiritual core of gentleman culture from both moral and philosophical perspectives. That is, the responsibility of fulfilling obligations, the restraint of self-restraint, and the commitment to honor. These three points provide a relatively clear train of thought and analytical dimension for the responsibility analysis in this article.

At the film and television application level of gentleman culture, Christine Berberich proposed that gentleman culture has become one of the important symbols expressing the "British nature" of the UK. And this culture has also been repeatedly used and analyzed in mass media. The spiritual connotations and qualities contained in gentleman culture have the characteristics of transcending eras. Therefore, for film and television works, when analyzing the characters' personalities, the plot of the film, the conflicts of the story, and even the theme of the story, gentleman culture can provide a relatively clear cultural support and analytical framework.

With the continuous updates of the *All Creatures Great and Small* series, the positive feedback on this film in China has gradually increased, and it maintains a high evaluation level on mainstream Chinese film and television review platforms. At present, the analysis of this drama in China has not yet involved the research on the acceptance mechanism of Chinese audiences. For a British TV drama with a relatively high degree of localization, the reasons why Chinese audiences have a relatively high degree of cross-cultural acceptance of it have not yet been analyzed. Therefore, this article will take gentleman culture as the entry point and use the method of text analysis to explore the responsibility ethics presented in the film.

This paper analyzes and compares the two aspects of personal professional responsibility and community unity responsibility, thereby exploring the reasons why their values are in line with those of Chinese audiences.

2. Theoretical Framework

Many textual details in the film reveal a strong sense of personal responsibility and community solidarity. These behaviours are largely consistent with the values of responsibility emphasised in gentlemanly culture. Any study of the reasons behind the high level of reception in China for *All Creatures Great and Small*, a work with a high degree of local cultural content, cannot be separated from the audience as the primary subject. This perspective aligns precisely with the core tenets of reception aesthetics: shifting the focus of research from the author centred and work centred approaches to a reader centred one. They emphasise that literary works undergo a process of reinterpretation and regeneration across different eras and cultural contexts. The acts of responsibility depicted in the film are driven by the culture of gentlemanliness. Within the Chinese cultural context, Chinese audiences are able to accept these acts of responsibility and decode the culture of gentlemanliness underlying them as Confucian thought and President Xi Jinping's contemporary view of responsibility. This explains why the ethics of responsibility in *All Creatures Great and Small* have been so widely embraced by Chinese audiences.

2.1. The Gentleman Culture of Britain

The concept of the gentleman is an integral part of the British national character, characterised primarily by qualities such as courage, wisdom, self-restraint and propriety.

In modern society, a gentleman is often widely used to refer to an individual with a good education. The Oxford Dictionary defines the word for gentleman as: a man who is polite and well educated, who has excellent manners and always behaves well. The interpretation of this concept and the meaning of the gentleman culture have also evolved and developed over the years in the UK. The concept of a gentleman originally referred to a certain group of the noble class, and later evolved into a moral code of conduct and the moral ideal pursued by mainstream British men. Only then did it have a fixed spiritual value. The chivalry emphasized in medieval England also became the spiritual foundation of the gentleman's culture. After being mixed with the values of the emerging class, it gradually formed a kind of spiritual product.

The term gentleman originated from the Latin "gentilis" and first appeared in English in a law of Henry V. It refers to young members of noble families who did not have the right of inheritance, in order to distinguish them from brothers and sisters with titles. In the Middle Ages, a gentleman referred to a specific group of people in a noble family.

By the 16th century, gentleman gradually evolved into a label of the upper class, referring to a specific group of people among the nobility. From then on, the term gentleman began to be closely associated with social systems. In 1583, Sir Thomas Smith divided the English people into four classes: The first class was the gentry (gentlemen), the second class comprised citizens and burgesses, the third class consisted of yeomen, and the fourth class comprised artisans and labourers. The gentry, situated in the first class, further comprised the high nobility and the lower nobility.

With the development of the British bourgeoisie during the 17th to 19th centuries, the definition of a gentleman began to shift towards the cultural sphere, placing greater emphasis on etiquette, self-discipline, moral responsibility and refinement. Its connotations shifted further towards moralisation and the standardisation of behaviour, ultimately crystallising into a cultural ideal centred on self-restraint, a sense of responsibility and a refined sense of etiquette.

During this transformation process, as the predecessor of the gentlemanly culture, the loyalty, responsibility and moral obligation advocated by chivalry were secularized and integrated into the gentlemanly culture, making responsibility one of its important cores. The social responsibility towards others, the moral responsibility towards religion, and the duty to protect women emphasised by chivalry were effectively carried forward by gentlemanly conduct following this secularisation.

In modern society, the concept of gentlemanly culture is manifested not only in outward etiquette but also in an individual's fulfilment of their own responsibilities and their sense of duty towards others within social relationships. Responsibility is therefore one of the key virtues of gentlemanly conduct.

It is precisely under this cultural background that *All Creatures Great and Small*, as a highly localized TV drama in the UK, its characters and community interactions more or less present representative characteristics of gentleman culture. The series not only illustrates professional ethics and moral responsibility through individual behaviour, but also portrays the spirit of mutual support and shared destiny within the community through the everyday life of rural society. This provides a textual foundation for the subsequent analysis of how Chinese audiences receive and reinterpret the series.

2.2. Aesthetic of Reception

Aesthetic of Reception emerged in the late 1960s. The Constance School, represented by Hans Robert Jauss and Wolfgang Iser, emphasised the reader's active role in the process of literary reception, arguing that the meaning of a work is generated during the reader's engagement with it. (任卫东) The student movements of the late 1960s brought the relationship between literature and reality to the forefront of academic discourse, calling into question the traditional author

centred research paradigm that emphasised the work's function of representing reality. It was against this intellectual backdrop that Hans Robert Jauss published *Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory*, whilst Iser published *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett*, marking the formal establishment of Aesthetic of Reception as an independent literary theoretical system. Hans Robert Jauss's essay is regarded as the foundational text of Aesthetic of Reception.

Aesthetic of Reception has overturned the central perspective of traditional literary studies, shifting the focus of research from the author centred and work centred approaches to a reader centred one. It has also transformed literary history from a history of creation into a history of reception. The emphasis has shifted from the creative intent and structural features of the text to an examination of the ways in which readers participate in the construction of meaning and the psychological mechanisms involved. It emphasises that literary works undergo a process of reinterpretation and regeneration across different eras and cultural contexts.

Hans Robert Jauss's concepts of Expectation horizon and Fusion of horizons provide an effective methodological framework for analysing the reception of *All Creatures Great and Small in China*. The Expectation horizon refers to the cognitive orientation and other expectations that readers form by drawing upon their own experiences when encountering the text, as well as the satisfaction they hope to derive from it. On the other hand, Fusion of horizons refers to the interplay and mutual influence between the reader's horizon of expectation and the horizon of the text or of lived experience. An aesthetic distance serves as a bridge connecting the horizon of expectation and the horizon of fusion. Drawing upon their own cultural experiences, readers approach a text with pre-existing expectation. The disparity between these expectations and what the text actually presents is termed aesthetic distance. This distance can be broadly categorised into four effects: fulfilment (the work precisely meets the reader's expectations); Transcendence (the work is more brilliant than anticipated, offering a revelation); Disappointment (the work falls short of expectations); and Refutation (the work completely challenges or overturns the reader's expectations). Hans Robert Jauss argues that the value of a work depends on aesthetic distance. Those works capable of challenging the reader's horizon of expectation often possess greater literary value, whereas otherwise they are merely a tedious repetition of textual experience.

Drawing on Hans Robert Jauss's Reception Aesthetics, it is evident that when readers engage with a text, they do so with memories of familiar literary genres, themes, forms and language. In this process, readers enter a specific emotional state and develop expectations regarding the text. This process embodies the horizon of expectation (任卫东) that defines the reader's subjectivity in the act of reading. Specifically regarding James' portrayal of a veterinarian, Chinese audiences often associate the medical profession with responsibility, dedication and moral

commitment, drawing upon their existing experiences.

3. The British concept of responsibility aligns with China's horizon of expectations

3.1. The responsibility demonstrated by the characters in the film

In *All Creatures Great and Small*, the characters' embodiment of gentlemanly culture extends beyond mere outward etiquette. It is internalised as an ethic of responsibility within their professional practice. Different characters shoulder different responsibilities within their respective social roles, and the most representative example of this is the professional responsibility demonstrated by the protagonist, James, in his role as a veterinary surgeon.

As the core protagonist of the film's narrative, no matter what position or situation James holds, he always adheres to his gentlemanly spirit. His actions almost all revolve around honesty and loyalty. And he has always adhered to his personal responsibility. Whether he was a rural veterinarian or a pilot captain during World War II, he demonstrated a highly consistent ethical orientation. No matter what situation he is in, a veterinarian's professional norms and moral judgment always take precedence over his personal interests. This stable spiritual core and values are precisely the sense of duty emphasized by the British gentleman culture.

At the professional responsibility level, the responsibility demonstrated by James is reflected in his recognition of veterinary professional ethics and the internalization of these professional values. From the very first day he arrived in Darrowby Town to join Farnon's clinic, James had quickly embraced his role as a veterinarian. He shares and practices the same professional values and responsibilities as Farnon: animals always come first. This value and responsibility run through the entire six seasons of the film. This value not only serves as the core criterion for their medical practice but also becomes the primary standard they must follow when participating in ethical decision-making at work. In the sixth season of the film, even though the clinic was under long-term economic pressure and unable to handle its basic daily operations, James and Farnon still refused to sacrifice animal welfare for economic gains. They have always adhered to their professional bottom line and the responsibility of doctors, ensuring that animal welfare is not infringed upon by the allocation of market resources.

This sense of responsibility is particularly evident in the sixth series of the programme. Mrs. Hall, the housekeeper, has not returned to the clinic for a long time since she rushed home to take care of her son who was injured after the war. Meanwhile, the James family, who once lived with Farnon, have moved back to the countryside because James's wife Helen could no longer tolerate Farnon's irascible and stubborn temperament. Without support in terms of hygiene, food, accounting and other aspects at the clinic, not only was Farnon's life in a complete mess, but the clinic also faced a serious financial deficit, and even the salaries of basic employees

could not be maintained.

When James began to revamp the clinic, his first port of call was a highly lucrative position as the attending vet at Hensfield Racecourse. However, this was flatly rejected by Farnon. In the film, he bluntly turned down almost all unlicensed veterinary roles in animal racing: “I didn’t like the way the horses came second to the money”. Like horse racing, greyhound racing has long been part of the UK’s gambling landscape and remains a legal, large-scale industry to this day. Such events are divided into registered and unregistered venues—the latter being the unlicensed greyhound tracks mentioned in the film. As these tracks are not registered, they are not subject to regulation by the Greyhound Breeding and Racing Board (GBGB). Consequently, they face difficulties in strictly enforcing regulations regarding the health of the dogs and the rules of the races.

Under the mandatory requirements of the Dog Racing Welfare Regulations, every racecourse must have a practising veterinarian on site, who is responsible for conducting rigorous pre-race, in-race and post-race examinations of the racing dogs. The veterinarian has the authority to immediately disqualify any dog deemed unfit to race. Properly regulated racecourses are able to completely prevent situations where dogs are deliberately harmed through the manipulation of races. In contrast, in rural areas, unregistered competition venues often conduct underhanded operations by bribing the on-site veterinarians.

Unwittingly, James under financial pressure from the clinic, secretly took on this job behind Farnon’s back. However, Hensfield Racecourse operates within an unregistered greyhound racing system. In the absence of effective regulation, the track’s entire operational logic has deviated from the principles of animal welfare, serving instead to maximise gambling profits. In this context, the role of the veterinarian is caught in a conflict between professional responsibility and financial interests.

On his first day at work, out of trust and sympathy for a veteran, he cleared a championship dog that appeared to have been overfed. After the competition, he quickly identified the manipulative tactics behind this behaviour, tracked down the dog’s owner and the organisers, and urgently called for a re-examination of the dog. Overfeeding champion racing dogs allows the owners to manipulate the dogs’ rankings, yielding substantial financial gains for bookmaker. However, the various complications arising from gastric distension following strenuous exercise can directly lead to the dogs’ deaths.

The key to James’s approach lay in the fact that he did not stop at identifying the problem, but swiftly moved from highlighting a technical error to raising ethical concerns. He publicly questioned the event’s organisation, demanding not only that the organisers set up a treatment room for the racing dogs, but also that he be allowed to meet with the judges and officials to clarify the rules. He stated unequivocally: “Who cares about the dog?” “ If he tries that trick again, he’s out. I

don't care what anyone says." Even though the champion dog in question was the bookmaker's biggest bet, James chose to prioritise the dog's health and uphold the principle of putting animals first. He secretly joined forces with Farnon to cause a commotion at the racecourse, taking the ailing dog back to the clinic for treatment. His gentlemanly conduct was not merely about rescuing an animal, but about fulfilling his professional duty through the power of individual action amidst a breakdown of rules and institutions. Although he was unable to challenge the established order at Hensfield Racecourse, the act of stealing a racing dog to treat it was, in essence, a steadfast commitment to putting animals first and a reaffirmation of his professional duty as a veterinarian. This is precisely the profound essence of British gentlemanly culture: responsibility does not stem from the constraints of external rules, but from an individual's identification with and commitment to their own role.

3.2. The similarities between Confucian culture and gentleman culture are in line with the horizon of expectations of Chinese audiences

In the plot of the sixth season of *All Creatures Great and Small* mentioned above, responsibility is not only a narrative theme but has also become a key concept through which Chinese audiences interpret the characters' actions. In the analysis of the top 200 reviews of the sixth season on Douban revealed that expressions such as responsibility, diligence and doing one's duty appear with high frequency, occurring roughly once every 20 reviews on average. Some reviews directly describe the characters as "kind-hearted vets" and note that "everyone is doing their bit". Chinese audiences have expressed a high degree of approval for the sense of responsibility conveyed in the series and have readily developed an emotional connection with the characters. This is largely because Chinese audiences themselves harbour positive expectations regarding the fulfilment of professional responsibilities.

When it comes to James' image as a veterinarian, Chinese audiences often preconceive of the character's image. The image of a doctor should be just, responsible and accountable, and they will not compromise for money or exploitation. In the existing experience of Chinese audiences, doctors are usually associated with responsibility, dedication and commitment. This kind of cognition does not merely exist as an isolated case but has been formed under the long-term construction of China's social culture. Throughout history, China has had a large number of outstanding doctors. The excellent qualities of these characters will enable Chinese audiences to have a positive subjective perception of the role of doctors. For instance, Zhong Nanshan, an authoritative expert in respiratory diseases in China and an academician of the Chinese Academy of Engineering. He participated in two large-scale anti-epidemic efforts in China. In 2003, when fighting against SARS, he adhered to the responsibility of doctors to save lives and treat the

sick, and despite public pressure, publicly disclosed the severity of the epidemic to call on the masses to pay attention. At the same time, during the 2020 epidemic, at the age of 84, he went to Wuhan to participate in the fight against the epidemic. Sacrifice the self for the country. Tu Youyou spent decades researching to fight malaria and even personally tested drugs before finally developing artemisinin. In the Chinese context, the group of doctors has been repeatedly portrayed as a typical example where professional responsibility takes precedence over personal interests. This cultural accumulation constitutes the stable expectation of the audience for the profession of doctors, that is to take responsibility.

Based on the expectations of Chinese audiences for responsibility, the work will form a strong response and backlash to such reading expectations. When the audience is watching a film, this expectation may be tenaciously maintained or undergo transformation and reversal. That is “shift in perspective”. From beginning to end, readers are actively engaged in dialogue with the text, constantly revising, changing and expanding their expected horizons.

A large number of film reviews related to responsibility on Douban can prove that James’s commitment to the responsibility of a veterinarian meets the expectations and vision of Chinese audiences, and also conforms to the audience’s understanding that veterinarians should adhere to their responsibilities.

James’s examination of the racing dogs at Hensfield Racecourse and his protest against the disregard for the rules demonstrate his adherence to veterinary ethics and professional responsibilities. This meets the expectations of the Chinese public. The rationale behind James’s actions is closely aligned with the public’s pre-existing perceptions. Once a professional role has been assumed, one must fulfil the responsibilities that come with it. This correspondence between role and responsibility finds an intrinsic echo in the theory of role and responsibility that is emphasised in Chinese culture. When examining the concept of responsibility within the culture of gentlemen, the key point is that individual responsibility does not stem from coercive constraints imposed by external rules, but rather from the individual’s own moral conscience. This self-discipline in one’s actions and the active acceptance of the consequences are very similar to the Confucian concept of responsibility. Both express a conception of responsibility that springs from within. Gentleman culture emphasizes that responsibility does not stem from the constraints of external rules, but from an individual’s identification and commitment to their own role. This point bears a great resemblance to the responsibility emphasized by Confucianism in China.

The concept of responsibility in Chinese culture has been strongly influenced by Confucianism. Firstly, it emphasises the theory of responsibility based on roles. Secondly, it focuses on the self-awareness of the individual who assumes this responsibility and on their contribution to the wider social community. The Analects of Confucius state: “Let the ruler be a ruler, the minister be a minister, the father be

a father, and the son be a son” This reveals that different social roles are accompanied by specific behavioural norms and responsibilities. The British gentleman’s sense of responsibility is rooted in respect for honour and self-control. These constraints, which are linked to the individual’s social role, share many common features. Whether we are talking about the British gentleman or the ‘君子’ of Chinese Confucian culture, a sense of responsibility is by no means an abstract moral concept, but is rooted in concrete roles.

The phrase “The superior man makes righteousness the essence of his conduct” emphasises the duty to fulfil the obligations specific to the role one holds. ‘Righteousness’ is responsibility. It is the fundamental principle governing behaviour. In modern Chinese, the most common and general meaning of the term “责任” is that its basis lies in the character“任”. Responsibility stems from the duties to be performed in specific roles and positions within social life and social reality; it encompasses the tasks falling within one’s own remit, or the consequences incurred for failing to carry them out. This is a classic example of the theory of roles of responsibility, in which an individual or organisation assumes the responsibility corresponding to the role they play. (解琳那) The culture of gentlemen is influenced by chivalry, emphasizing that British gentlemen take honor as the core and self-discipline as the foundation. The pursuit of honor by gentlemen drives them to regulate themselves. Their recognition of the concept of honor makes responsible behavior proactive.

Based on these principles, Confucianism highlights the connection between individual responsibility and broader social goals, summarising this in the following maxim: “to cultivate oneself, regulate the family, govern the state, and bring peace to all under heaven” This implies that responsibility is not confined to the personal sphere, but rather manifests as a structure that constantly expands from the inner self to the outer world. It progresses from self-cultivation to responsibility towards the family, and further to contributions at the societal and national levels. Whilst the self-cultivation of the 16th-century gentleman emphasised personal moral development, in modern times its application has shifted towards maintaining order in society and public life, and showing consideration for others. Examples such as James’s adherence to personal professional ethics in the film, or Mrs Hall’s assistance to those in need within the local community, demonstrate that the British approach to fulfilling responsibility is shifting from self-cultivation towards social solidarity.

Therefore, the views on responsibility in the two cultures can be summarized into three common features: First, both define responsibility based on roles. Second, both emphasize the internalization of responsibility rather than relying solely on external constraints. Thirdly, all of them ultimately point individual responsibility towards the stability and harmony of society as a whole. It is precisely this similarity at the structural level that makes the expression of responsibility, which originated

from British gentleman culture, not seem strange when it enters the Chinese context. Instead, it is more likely to be understood as a self-evident way of behaving.

James' commitment to the welfare of racing dogs clearly demonstrates that he fully lives up to his responsibilities as a vet. This is entirely in line with the Chinese public's expectations regarding the fundamental duties of a vet and also aligns with their aesthetic ideals.

However, the film does not merely live up to the expectations already set.

James's strength lies in the fact that, in an environment where order, rules and systems have broken down, he nevertheless fulfils his professional responsibilities through his individual actions. The veterinary principles to which he adheres do not stem from pressure from social institutions, but from an inner awakening and a strong personal conviction. That is why he disregards economic and institutional constraints to steal a dog with Farnon to help it be treated. From a formal point of view, this act even goes beyond the scope of a private veterinary practitioner's activities. On a higher level, it reinforces his professional ethics. It is precisely here that the film exceeds the audience's expectations and breaks the initial aesthetic distance. This transformation of professional responsibility into a responsibility that goes beyond duty allows the audience to have their expectations met whilst prompting new reflections on values. We thus witness a shift in expectations.

This represents a more in-depth conceptualisation of the emphasis placed on responsibility within Confucian culture. Cheng Zhongying, a Chinese-American scholar, professor at the University of Hawaii and one of the leading figures of the third generation of modern Neo-Confucianism, has studied this concept in depth. He emphasises that this is an act of noble moral significance, through which one relies on one's own strength to guide society and lead it to perfection. It is an act of self-realisation that Western theology defines as "supererogation" .(涂可国) James' s decision at the racecourse embodies precisely this level of responsibility: his actions did not stem from institutional directives, but from an inner ethical conscience.

Consequently, this plot point in the sixth season of the series enables the audience to transition from maintaining an aesthetic distance to transcending it. By subverting the audience's original expectations, it facilitates a reinterpretation of the sense of responsibility demonstrated by the protagonist.

3.3. The responsibility and destiny in the film community are shared

All Creatures Great and Small not only illustrates professional ethics and moral responsibility through individual behaviour, but also portrays the mutual support within the community and the shared sense of destiny that characterises social relations in rural life. Responsibility is expanded into a form of moral practice at the community level. The culture of gentlemanliness is no longer merely a matter of personal cultivation and individual standards of responsibility. Rather, through

sustained acts of mutual aid, it transforms into a social value. In this process, individual responsibility continually extends and accumulates, ultimately giving rise to a cohesive sense of community responsibility.

The narrative of Season 6 is set in 1945. As the European theatre of the Second World War drew to a close, even the Yorkshire countryside, far removed from the main battlefields was overshadowed by the gloom of war. Soldiers returning from the front lines carried with them the lingering trauma of the conflict, whilst the entire town was affected by post-war shortages. Yet, against this backdrop, the characters do not retreat into a defensive shell in the face of scarcity. They maintain the basic stability of social relations through acts of mutual support in their daily lives. From individuals to the wider community, this mutual support demonstrates the importance of responsibility, reflecting the value orientation within gentlemanly culture where duty takes precedence over self-interest.

Mrs Hall's interactions with Maggie serve as a prime example of this sense of community responsibility in action. Having seen her son return home after being wounded in the war, Mrs Hall has always been particularly sensitive to the trauma that conflict inflicts on people. This experience has also led her to take on the responsibility of helping others in the community who share similar hardships. In the sixth series, Maggie is the landlady of the Drover's in the village of Darrowby. As the war draws to a close, her husband Arthur remains on the front line in Burma. She runs the village's only pub single-handedly whilst caring for her young children. At the same time, she is involved in the Women's Voluntary Service, undertaking tasks such as the distribution of wartime supplies and community support, assisting military families, and carrying out administrative and record-keeping duties.

When Maggie came to Mrs Hall to borrow some tools for a war fundraising event, Mrs Hall was astonished that she was juggling so many roles and was still involved in voluntary work even after the main European theatre of war had ended. Maggie replied: 'It's still needed. The war isn't over. Not everyone's on their way home.' The responsibilities of her many roles, her concern for her husband, and her longing for peace sustained her in her patriotic endeavours, ensuring that her individual actions remained firmly rooted in the public good.

When Mrs Hall visited Maggie's home for the second time, she saw through the window that Maggie was weeping over a letter. The film leaves a pause of nearly five seconds at this point. Mrs Hall's sigh and furrowed brow foster a sense of mutual sympathy between the two families, both deeply affected by the war. Her personal sense of responsibility has evolved from that of a neighbour to becoming a source of emotional support for her community.

Mrs Hall's response did not involve direct emotional intervention, but rather expressed her support in a more restrained and subtle manner. Mrs Hall baked a cake for Maggie; when Maggie was showing her young son a photograph of his father, she chose not to disturb them, quietly leaving the cake at her front door.

There was no verbal exchange, no sympathetic embrace, only the silent support of a neighbourly community. During this process, James's son, who had accompanied Mrs Hall to deliver the cake, asked in confusion, 'Aren't you going to talk to her today?' Mrs Hall replied, 'The cake will say everything I want to say.' Her silent care exemplifies the restraint of gentlemanly culture. Responsibility is not fulfilled through verbal declarations or overt displays of emotion, but is realised in a manner that is reserved, measured, and respectful of the dignity of others.

There is no grand gesture of consolation, only quiet emotional support. This low-intensity yet high-frequency form of social bonding ties together the responsibilities of every community member, constituting the everyday practice of social responsibility. It transforms emotional bonds between individuals into a stable network of social support. The belief in mutual support amongst neighbours is constantly demonstrated.

This sense of responsibility was further reinforced in the post-war celebrations.

Following Japan's announcement of surrender, the entire community was filled with a sense of excitement and elation. Mr Farnon and Mrs Hall decided to organise a celebration in the town square. From the initial shortages of supplies and manpower to the eventual participation of the entire community, the event demonstrated the community's unity and the residents' sense of responsibility in building a stable community. Mr Wentworth generously contributed his home-brewed beer, whilst community members voluntarily helped to decorate the venue. Even Mr Wentworth, a man of few words who had never spoken more than three sentences to anyone, delivered a post-war speech: "We have kept the fires burning round here," "and whatever shall be, that has to be the thing on which we all agree: keep the fires burning always." The imagery of fire not only symbolises perseverance during the war, but also points to the mutual support and responsibility that continue to bind the community together in the post-war years.

From individual emotional care to collective civic engagement, what the play presents is not a series of isolated acts of goodwill, but rather a community ethical framework underpinned by a culture of gentlemanliness. Within this structure, responsibility manifests itself both in care for specific others and in the maintenance of the community's stability. It is precisely this practice of responsibility, expanding layer by layer from the individual to the community, that enabled Darobi to maintain basic order and cohesion amidst the post-war uncertainty. It also allows Chinese audiences to glimpse the power of unity.

3.4. The Community Unity Depicted In The Film Meets The Expectations of Chinese Audiences

In terms of how the work has been received, the help Ms Hall offers Maggie, as well as the solidarity and mutual support shown by the entire community of Darrowby, are not merely narrative elements. They also largely meet the expectations of the

Chinese audience.

In the Chinese context, individuals do not exist in isolation, but are part of a network of relationships centred on the family and the community. This relational structure leads the Chinese public to assess the behaviour of characters more from the perspective of collective responsibility than from that of individual decision-making. Both in the teachings of Confucius and in Xi Jinping's emphasis on responsibility in the new era, the values of family and community solidarity, as well as mutual aid, are strongly emphasised.

The Confucian tradition's reflections on neighbourly relations and social responsibility form a deep-rooted cultural foundation for this expectation. In Mencius: Teng Wen Gong I, the text highlights that "They go out and come in friendly to one another, and watch and assist one another". It emphasises that people should interact as friends in their daily lives, look after one another in difficult times, protect one another in times of danger, and care for others when they are ill, thereby achieving social harmony. In Mencius: Liang Hui Wang I, the passage "Treat with the reverence due to age the elders in your own family, so that the elders in the families of others shall be similarly treated; treat with the kindness due to youth the young in your own family, so that the young in the families of others shall be similarly treated." highlights the need to care for other people's children and elderly as one would for one's own family. This extends family responsibility to social responsibility. This logic of responsibility, which extends from the family to society, means that mutual aid between neighbours in the Chinese context is not simply a behavioural choice, but rather a normalised moral expectation.

Within this cultural context, the community interactions depicted in *All Creatures Great and Small* are easily understood by Chinese audiences, given their customary way of thinking. The discreet and subtle way in which Mrs Hall offers her support to Maggie, as well as the proactive engagement of community members in public affairs despite limited resources, bears a striking resemblance to the everyday experience of mutual support in Chinese society. It is precisely for this reason that viewers encounter no significant cultural barriers when identifying with these storylines, but instead form a natural emotional connection based on their own experiences.

In response to a question from Fico, the President of the Italian Chamber of Deputies, Xi Jinping replied: "I will devote myself to the people and live up to their expectations." Selflessness is both a state of mind and a sense of responsibility. Xi Jinping's understanding of responsibility fits into the unique context of our times and is based on solid theoretical foundations; it is closely linked to the Age of China. The contemporary concept of responsibility emphasises not only personal development, but also the value of serving society and the common good. Xi Jinping urges the consistent implementation of the 'people-centred' governance philosophy and a commitment to resolving the pressing issues that are close to the people's

hearts. Through institutional implementation and social dissemination, this philosophy is gradually becoming embedded in the public's behavioural norms and subtly influencing viewers' value judgements. When viewers see characters in television series making behavioural choices motivated by a sense of social responsibility, they tend to regard these as natural, further reinforcing the legitimacy and appropriateness of such behaviour.

In summary, the mutual support between Mrs Hall and Maggie, as well as the spirit of solidarity that animates the entire community of Darrowby, are not merely a cultural representation of rural British society. Furthermore, Chinese audiences have reinterpreted them as a practical expression of community responsibility, in keeping with local values. It is precisely thanks to this interpretative framework that the culture of gentleman described in the text has been able to transcend cultural boundaries to become an ethical expression rooted in universal recognition, thereby producing a dual effect: emotional resonance and adherence to values.

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