Game Theory Embodied in Jane Austen’s Novels
Ying-hua GU* and Jia-ling HAN
English Department North China Electric Power University, Baoding, Hebei, China
*Corresponding author

Keywords: Game theory, Strategic thinking, Choice.

Abstract. Game theory is embodied in the most of Jane Austen’s works. Choice, the base for people's action, is one of the main concept from game theory. This essay is to study how the characters in Jane Austen's novels make a choice in game.

Introduction
With the hundreds-of-year development, game theory has been applied to the research on modern mathematics, biology and economy widely, especially that on politics and military strategy. Though this theory is explored extensively on various fields, one is overlooked. That is literature. Many literary works reflect game theory more or less, such as Emma, Pride and Prejudice, The Count of Monte Cristo, Sherlock Holes, etc. Among the works, Jane Austen’s are rich in such theory. Michael Suk-Young Chwe, the politics associate professor at the University of California, Los Angeles, claimed recently that Jane Austen’s novels could be deemed as textbooks on game theory. In her 6 novels, “Pride and Prejudice”, “Sense and Sensibility”, “Persuasion”, “Northanger Abbey”, “Emma”, “MansfieldPark”, there are up to more than 50 strategic deployment and strategic manipulations. In particular, a series of manipulations and tactics nearly run through the novel “Pride and Prejudice”.

Choice – Basic Concept in Game Theory
The central theme of Jane Austen’s game theory is choice, (the choice is the base for people’s action), preference (people prefer the choice which could bring rewards), and strategic thinking (before action, people will consider others’ action and weigh it). One person's choice is reflected highly in his or her action. Strategic thinking could be named in different way, such as “insight”. Jane Austen illustrated the lack of strategic thinking by describing those who think they have strategic thinking skill, but actually not. In her works, those characters with strategic thinking excel in exploring people’s preference by observing their eyes. Then, we will take a look at Jane Austen’s 6 novels from the point of choice of the central theme of game theory.

To Jane Austen, “choice” is a central concept of game theory. First, in her novels, most of characters, especially female ones, are always in a state of decision-making, mostly the decision about marriage and people who they get married. These heroines firmly defend their “right of choice”. After hearing Harriet Smith refused Mr. Robert’s proposal, Mr. Knightly got very angry. However, Emma Woodhouse said to Mr. Knightly, “It is always incomprehensible to a man that a woman should ever refuse an offer of marriage. A man always imagines a woman to be ready for anybody who asks her (Emma, p. 64)”. In Pride and Prejudice, when Lady Catherine demanded Elizabeth to promise that she would not engage with Mr. Darcy forever, Elizabeth guarded her right of choice powerfully. “I am only resolved to act in that manner, which will, in my own opinion, constitute my happiness, without reference to you, or to any person so wholly unconnected with me.” “If Mr. Darcy is neither by honor nor inclination confined to his cousin, why is not he to make another choice? And if I am that choice, why may not I accept him?” But on the contrary, the timid, selfish Mary Musgrove, the sister of Anne Elliot, chose to stand by Mrs. Catherine, “I do not think any young woman has a right to make a choice that may be disagreeable and inconvenient to the principal part of her family (Persuasion, p.82)”. Second, considerate gentlemen realize and admit
that the female could make a choice. In Mansfield Park, Edmund Bertram prevented Lady Norris from persuading Fanny into playing in opera. Instead, put the right of choice in Fanny’s hand. Frank, in Emma, deems that friends-making is the right for women. But the men with simple mind will ignore this point. John Thorpe even does not know that it is necessary and polite to ask for admission when inviting a lady to dance. Instead, he went straight toward Catherine Morland “Well, Miss Morland, I suppose you and I are to stand up and jig it together again (Northanger Abbey, p.54)”. Third, Jane Austen thinks that it is always a good thing to be able to make a choice. In Emma, Austen mentions that it is better to be choosing than chosen. Choice-making needs ability. Elizabeth evaluates Mr. Darcy that he “has great pleasure in the power of choice. I do not know anybody who seems more to enjoy the power of doing what he likes than Mr. Darcy (Pride and Prejudice, p.205)”. Similarly, Emma did not think her father and she should take part in the dance party hosted by the people of lower level. But when they even did not receive invitation, she deemed that they should have the right to refuse. Correspondingly, to Austen, the worse refers to those people who fail to make a choice. In shopping, Marianne Dashwood really could not put up with “the tediousness of Mrs. Palmer, whose eye was caught by everything pretty, expensive, or new; who was wild to buy all, could determine on none, and dawdled away her time in rapture and indecision(Sense and Sensibility, pp.187-188)”. When Harriet failed to decide what to purchase, Emma pointed out impatiently that “That you do not give another half-second to the subject” and makes Harriet’s decision for her (Emma, p254)”. More seriously, though Miss Churchill married Mr. Weston with little prosperity regardless of her parent’s opposition, in her inner heart, she could not forget her ever luxurious life. Therefore, in their life, their revenue could not meet the needs of its expenditure. She never stopped loving her husband, but at the same time, she also desired to be both the wife of Capitan Weston and Miss Churchill of Encombe. Trapped deeply into hesitation, she passed away 3 years later.

To Austen, choice is restrained. Once you make a choice, you could not pretend that you do not. When Elizabeth visited Charlotte’s new family, she could not help feeling sorry for her good friend, “oorCharlotte!—it was melancholy to leave her to such society!—But she had chosen it with her eyes open (Pride and Prejudice, p. 239)”. After Mr. Willoughby married Miss Grey for wealth, he prayed for forgiveness before Marianne, Elliot said, “you are very wrong, Mr. Willoughby, very blamable…you ought not to speak in this way, either of Mrs. Willoughby or my sister. You had made your own choice. It was not forced on you (Sense and Sensibility, p. 373)”. The failure to make choices is due to the lack of determination. When Emma and Mr. Knightly discussed the reasons why Frank Churchill did not visit his father’s new wife until months later, Emma thought “his uncle and aunt will not spare him”, but Mr. Knightly could not understand “the difficulties of dependence (Emma, p. 156-157)”. However, Mr. Knightly firmly believed that “there is one thing, Emma, which a man can always do, if he chuses, and that is, his duty; not by manoeuvring and finessing, but by vigour and resolution (Emma, p. 157)”

Conclusion

The females have rights and ability to make choice which is the greatest guarantee for women to benefit most in one game. This is what Jane Austen believes and recommends.

Acknowledgement

This research was financially supported by “the Fundamental Research Funds for the Central Universities” (No. 2015MS72)

References