

Analyzing Lu Xun's View on Love in Regret for the Past from a Social Perspective

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Abstract: During the May Fourth Movement, Enlightenment thought swept through China, and at that time, most young people and intellectuals were influenced by it, leading to the liberation and development of their thoughts. This study focuses on the advanced views on marriage and love of that era, particularly using Mr. Lu Xun as an example. It analyzes the views on love revealed in his literary work *Regret for the Past* and examines its connotations from various social perspectives, including the historical context of the time. In conclusion, Lu Xun's view on love is complex and profound, encompassing both the pursuit of ideal love and criticism of real-life dilemmas. His works re-examine love, revealing the poison of feudal thought on individuals, reflecting a critique of traditional views on love, emphasizing individual freedom and liberation, pondering how to keep love fresh, focusing on the status of women, and also revealing the close relationship between love and society. Furthermore, they analyze the profound impact of his views on love on modern concepts of marriage and love and modern society.

Keywords: Ideological enlightenment, ideological liberation, views on love, feudal ethics, gender equality.

1. Introduction

During the May Fourth Movement, Lu Xun, to express the lack of freedom in marriage, used the form of a novel to link the issues of women's marriage and young intellectuals with the transformation of the entire social and economic systems. Thus, he created *Regret for the Past*, which reflects his views on love. The period when *Regret for the Past* was written coincided with the time when Lu Xun's relationship with Xu Guangping was becoming increasingly warm, and they established a romantic relationship.

Regret for the Past is Lu Xun's only short story that uses love as a theme to reflect the fate of intellectuals during the May Fourth period. It is a short story imbued with the unique tragic colors of love in modern Chinese society. It not only reveals the harm caused by feudal thoughts but also highlights the May Fourth spirit centered on "freedom of love." This work holds significant importance for the study and organization of modern and contemporary Chinese literary history. It is worth mentioning that the study of Lu Xun's views on love also has certain implications for modern views on marriage and relationships. With the continuous development and progress of society, people's views on marriage and relationships are constantly changing and evolving. In modern views on marriage and relationships, people show a greater emphasis on equality and happiness in marriage, value communication, and have a more open and inclusive attitude towards love.

This study employs various methods such as literature review, close reading, and comparative research to more comprehensively reveal the connotations of Lu Xun's views on love—love is a changeable, conditional, and transient theory. True love is based on equality, respect, and understanding, and must be constantly renewed. Although "Regret for the Past" has been around for 84 years since its publication, it still holds timeless relevance. In today's world, where issues such as resource depletion, financial crises, employment pressure, interpersonal relationships, college students cohabiting, "online dating," and "flash marriages" continue to trouble contemporary young university students, it is especially important to establish a correct outlook on life and love to avoid tragedies. The inquiry into the human predicament and the barriers between people depicted in "Regret for the Past" offers profound modern insights. It still holds timeless relevance and inspiration for contemporary college students regarding how to approach love and how to choose their paths in life and development.

2. Current Research Status

As a prominent figure in the history of modern Chinese literature, Lu Xun's literary achievements and intellectual depth are widely recognized [1]. However, research on Lu Xun's personal emotions is relatively scarce, particularly studies on his views on love, which are even more insufficient. The lack of interdisciplinary research has led to an incomplete understanding of Lu Xun's views on love. Therefore, a deep exploration of Lu Xun's views on love not only helps people gain a more comprehensive understanding of this literary figure's inner world

The work *Regret for the Past* showcases the conflicts and contradictions faced by educated youth between reality and ideals, the West and tradition, as well as critiques of male supremacy in marriage. *Regret for the Past* is the first choice for many scholars studying Lu Xun's views on love through literary works. They analyze the love story between Juan Sheng and Zi Jun to understand the tragic essence of their relationship [2]. Most scholars, from a gender perspective, have concluded that Lu Xun supported gender equality, opposed the remnants of feudal ethics, and aimed to eradicate the remnants of feudalism. As Ren Youqing discusses in *National Narrative and the Politics of Forgetting: Rereading Lu Xun's Death from the Perspective of Gender Studies*, it is believed that women are trapped in the prejudice of seeking a "new path of life," and that there are deeply entrenched biases in patriarchal society [3]. Some other scholars, from the perspective of historical and political backgrounds, believe that Lu Xun's expression of advanced views on love was influenced by the May Fourth Movement, which liberated his thoughts and led him to accept Western theories of love. As mentioned in Song Jianhua and Zou Jingjing's *Regret for the Past: Lu Xun's Confusion and Reflection on Ideological Enlightenment* include the theory that love is changeable, conditional, and transient [4].

Although modern scholars have made certain achievements in studying Lu Xun's views on love, there are still some shortcomings. For example, research is limited to analyzing literary works and life experiences, lacking deeper discussions and interdisciplinary dialogue [5]. Regarding

contemporary views on marriage and love, the modern implications and social significance of Lu Xun's views on love are also somewhat lacking.

3. The Influence of Ideological Enlightenment on Lu Xun's Perspective on Love

A person's marital and romantic status is an important reflection of their individual views on love, as it is condensed within the structural framework of social and cultural psychology and, therefore, converges with the values of the times. As an ancient civilization ruled by Confucianism and deeply influenced by feudal ethics for thousands of years, China's concept of marriage and love has different stage characteristics in different eras.

In contemporary China, the influx of Western ideas and the emergence of a new culture have exposed a generation of well-educated young individuals to progressive concepts such as freedom, democracy, and science. Driven by passion, they harnessed their fervor and creativity, using "blood as ink and new ideas as pens" to boldly strive for revitalization across the vast landscape of their nation. This drive culminated in the May Fourth Movement, leading to significant shifts in China's social fabric. As a result, the perspective on love also transformed, prompting people to reevaluate and reconsider traditional notions surrounding it.

Emphasizing the theme of individual liberation and free spirit, it posits that love should be based on spiritual connection and ideal pursuit, rather than material interests. The marriage customs from the imperial era, characterized by arranged unions facilitated by parents and matchmakers, are gradually becoming relics of the past. New ideas are spreading rapidly and uncontrollably. However, the evolution of society is seldom straightforward—it often involves setbacks or regressions. Traditions and outdated beliefs continue to permeate everyday life. Resistance to the Enlightenment has formed formidable barriers, and the advocates of change find themselves surrounded by opposition. The resistance to enlightenment has turned into towering mountains, rows of enemies, and the enlighteners are surrounded. The mountains echo with the cries of the enlighteners and the despair of the helpless.

The difficulty of ideological enlightenment made Lu Xun pay more attention to reality. In the process of ideological enlightenment, many enlightened literati saw that the future of enlightenment seemed bright and shouted everywhere, "I want enlightenment, I want freedom, I want democracy." However, Lu Xun had already seen the difficult places in enlightenment. Love is not just a castle in the air, but requires a solid economic foundation and spiritual resonance. As a result, he created 'Regret for the Past'. The story is set during the May Fourth Movement, and both Juan Sheng and Zi Jun are new youth influenced by the movement. They believe that love is independent and free, but love becomes trivial and mediocre after marriage, and Juan Sheng cannot accept such a marriage. Similarly, Zi Jun was trapped in firewood, rice, oil, and salt, which was completely different from the love declaration at that time. After marriage, he could only rely on his husband. The story is a complete tragedy. In the research of Wang Jiao and Guan Lixin, they mentioned that "Juan Sheng's diary wrote: 'Blindly loving for the sake of love, and completely neglecting the essence of other lives.' Firstly, it's about life. People must live for love to have something to attach to. The cause of Zi Jun's death was not due to worldly judgment or the abandonment of Juan Sheng, but rather to the fragility of love during the May Fourth period, including the need for food and clothing, daily life, and the fragility of love [6]. This happens to indicate that Zi Jun, from leaving the feudal old family to entering a new-style small family, essentially broke out of one cage and fell into another, without truly being liberated. This destined her to eventually return to the feudal old family under social oppression and die from depression.

The first point reflected in Lu Xun's view of love in *Regret for the Past* is the praise and criticism of love in the new era. In the story, Juan Sheng and Zi Jun were in an era of alternating old and new ideas, and the awakening of Chinese women fundamentally did not break free from the shackles of

feudal ethics. Although Zi Jun firmly declared, 'I am my own, and no one has the right to intervene,' he ultimately could not escape the tragic outcome of feudal ethics. From this, it can be seen that the love in *Regret for the Past* is a unity of rebellion and fragility. This is Lu Xun's cry of grief and indignation for the liberation of youth personality, which is the foundation for pursuing free love.

Lu Xun once again expressed his attitude towards the issue of women's independence through "Regret for the Past". He sympathized with women like Zi Jun, was moved by her awakening, and was saddened by her failure. Since the New Culture Movement, the status of Chinese women and the independence movement have received much attention. In Jin Feng's research, he realized that the May Fourth Movement's writing on love was a female cry for the attitude of love declaration [7]. Lu Xun advocated for modern women to re-evaluate and position themselves as pioneers, and traced back to the excessive induction and suppression of women's psychological and behavioral norms by male rulers in the traditional historical order. He reflected on how women should bravely be themselves in the face of new environments and times [8].

4. Lu Xun's Rethinking of Marriage and Love

Juan Sheng realized a truth in his painful marriage life: "Love must be constantly renewed, grown, and created," which is also a reflection of Lu Xun's view on love. In Huang Qirong's research, he explicitly mentioned the reverse changes in the personalities of Juan Sheng and Zi Jun after marriage, from being positive and brave to cowardly and numb. Their relationship also went through a process from love to not love [9]. His love has certain similarities with Juan Sheng and Zi Jun. The writing of *Regret for the Past* happened during the period of Lu Xun's love story.

For Lu Xun, this event created a new love story - a strong love story with Xu Guangping, which helped him overcome the "pain of love" - and ended his loveless marriage with Zhu An. For Lu Xun, who was trapped in an old-fashioned marriage, this event was of great significance, as it prompted him to reflect on a new path of life. Therefore, behind *Regret for the Past* lies the graceful expression of Lu Xun's own emotional experience. The relationship between Lu Xun and Xu Guangping is widely regarded as a partnership based on mutual understanding and respect. Xu Guangping was not only a student of Lu Xun but also his partner and assistant. They supported each other ideologically and faced the challenges of life together. This also shows Lu Xun's concept of love and marriage: a partnership based on equality and understanding, rather than traditional attachment. However, the tragedy is that the marriage between Lu Xun and Xu Guangping, just like the marriage between Juan Sheng and Zi Jun, was filled with trivial matters and lacked novelty. This highlights another important point in Lu Xun's view of love. He began to think about how to keep love fresh and asked us how to pursue eternal love.

In both instances of love, love gradually disappeared, probably due to the influence of existentialism on Lu Xun. In most of his works, darkness and nothingness were the norm, which shaped Lu Xun's view of love. He believed that love was nothingness, and a strong tragic color was deeply rooted in his heart, adding darkness to the story of Juan Sheng and Zi Jun.

5. Influence on the Present Day

Juan Sheng and Zi Jun in *Regret for the Past* lived in the post-May fourth period. The Enlightenment trend of thought and intellectuals were facing differentiation and transformation. The new ideas and new culture, after opening the ideological doors of the young people, to some extent, imposed mental confinement, rigidity, and even alienation on their thinking, unable to promote the self-reflection and re-innovation of the ideological revolution.

The form of love in the May 4th period was represented by Juan Sheng and Zi Jun in Lu Xun's *Regret for the Past*, demonstrating the tragic fates of the intellectuals in the May 4th period. Both

Juan Sheng and Zi Jun were influenced by the May 4th Enlightenment thought, yet they did not completely break free from the brand of feudal ethical code. However, the spirit of resistance contained therein and the idea of advocating freedom in marriage and love have continued to this day. For example, Lu Xun emphasized the individual's self-awareness and free choice, advocating the pursuit of genuine emotions rather than traditional constraints in love and marriage. This view has been widely recognized in modern views on marriage and love. Many people pay more attention to their personal emotional needs and psychological compatibility when choosing a partner instead of the expectations of society or family. The concept of freedom in love in the present day interprets young people's pursuit of individuality, helps improve personal social skills, enables people to better understand themselves, establish their personal views on love, improve their own personalities, actively match themselves with others, clarify their own positions and thus strengthen their connection with society.

In terms of speech linguistics and pragmatics, Juan Sheng's behavioral changes were mostly related to his inner activities. His inner world was revealed through subconsciousness, hallucinations and so on, and externally, it manifested as the disappearance and indifference of his love for Zi Jun. Zi Jun's behavioral changes were mostly shown in her expressions, movements and other aspects. It can be seen from this that the two lacked proper verbal expressions and communication, and finally left a tragic love story. How people can establish in-depth ideological connections through appropriate ways of verbal expression is still an issue that we need to attach importance to today. Therefore, people can integrate the Doctrine of the Mean into the (getting along) between partners. As academic research shows, the Doctrine of the Mean thinking of both husband and wife can positively predict their perception of the quality of marriage for themselves and their spouses [10]. Meanwhile, the Doctrine of the Mean thinking attaches more importance to the relationship of "harmony" [11]. To ensure interpersonal harmony, consider the overall situation, and then reduce the occurrence of love tragedies through positive ways of communication.

At the same time, the practical rational thinking of traditional intellectuals and the practical model of "Chinese learning as the foundation and Western learning for application" made China's Enlightenment Movement extremely utilitarian. However, in terms of emotions, utilitarianism simply doesn't work. Being too utilitarian cannot touch on the connection and establishment between affections. Just as Juan Sheng didn't consider the realistic factors and only considered the ideal Enlightenment-style love, which led to the final tragic result. In response to this, in today's society, it is necessary to strengthen the protection of the sincere feelings of teenagers in interpersonal communication. Positive and inspiring articles can be selected and included in textbooks to guide teenagers to establish correct views on love. In Lu Xun's narrative process, there were profound descriptions from the side of Zi Jun's emotions. His emphasis on female roles and attention to their emotional needs have promoted the pursuit of gender equality in modern views on marriage and love. In today's society, women have more rights to speak and choose in marriage and love, and marriage relationships also emphasize equality and respect between both sides. With the further development of awareness, modern people generally believe that a healthy view on marriage and love should pursue equality between men and women, positive communication and the giving of genuine emotions, so that a healthy marriage and love relationship can be formed.

6. Conclusion

Lu Xun's view of love is complex and profound, including both the pursuit of ideal love and the criticism of realistic predicament. His works reflect the challenge to the traditional view of love, emphasize the freedom and liberation of the individual, pay attention to the status of women, and also reveal the close relationship between love and society. These views are not only of great significance to understanding Lu Xun's literary creation, but also provide a valuable perspective for the reflection

of love in contemporary society. From the social perspective, exploring Lu Xun's *Regret for the Past* view of love broadens the research field, and also increases the deep understanding of Lu Xun's view of love. Due to the limitation of historical conditions, behind the love story of the protagonists Juan Sheng and Zi Jun, Lu Xun's capture of various subtle emotions is reflected, and the reinterpretation of 'love' is conveyed. The analysis and research of *Regret for the Past* can not only deeply understand Lu Xun's writing narrative structure from a new perspective, but also understand his attention to the fate of intellectuals in the May Fourth period, which has historical and practical significance. Lu Xun believes that love cannot be separated from the social background and the environment of the times. His view of love is deeply influenced by social reality and shows his desire for social change. Lu Xun hopes to awaken people's reflection and improvement of the social status quo through thinking about love.

This study lacks the interpretation of the text of *Regret for the Past*, focusing on the interpretation of the story outline and the analysis of the concept of love. With the continuous innovation of research methods and the continuous improvement of the theoretical framework, the research on Lu Xun's view of love will achieve more fruitful results.

After that, the research needs to be expanded from the following aspects. Firstly, the theoretical discussion should be strengthened. At the same time, combined with the interpretation of the text content of *Regret for the Past* novels, Lu Xun's view of love should be placed in a broader theoretical framework for research. Secondly, it is suggested to carry out interdisciplinary research, combined with psychology, sociology and other disciplines, to further reveal the connotation and characteristics of Lu Xun's view of love; finally, it is necessary to vigorously explore the modern significance and value contained in it, and provide useful inspiration and reference for the modern concept of marriage and love.

Authors Contribution

All the authors contributed equally and their names were listed in alphabetical order.

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