

A Feminist Analysis of *Li T'ung: A Chinese Girl in New York*

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Abstract. With the development of feminism, analyzing literary works from a feminist perspective plays an important role in promoting the development of literature and feminism. In this paper, the author uses textual analysis to explore the feminist ideas reflected in *Li T'ung: A Chinese Girl in New York* through an in-depth analysis of the content; analyzing the impact of the historical ups and downs on women's destiny and the dilemmas of the society at that time in the light of the background of the twentieth century; using feminist theories to analyze the work, combining with the feminist literature critique and the feminist social theories. The analysis is carried out with Li T'ung, the main character as the center. This paper explores the work from a feminist perspective, analyzing the narrative techniques and Li T'ung's character, and exploring dilemmas of women in the 20th century shown in this story. From this study, readers can understand the objectification and marginalization of women's value in the society, as well as the constraints on women's social roles under the patriarchal society, and the mainstream culture of the patriarchal society had suppressed the germination of feminism and limited the development of women's subjective consciousness.

1 Introduction

Li T'ung: A Chinese Girl in New York is one of Pai Hsien-yung's masterpieces after he went to the United States, including in the *New Yorkers*. *The New Yorkers*, written in the 1960s, shows the situation of Chinese people in a foreign country and their search for cultural identity, and is of great literary value and social influence. Pai Hsien-yung is a representative writer of modern Chinese literature. Combining traditional Chinese writing techniques with modern Western artistic methods, Pai Hsien-yung is known as "the best at writing about women in the twentieth century". His classic work *The New Yorkers* is very characteristic of the times, and the whole book shows the meaning of the rise and fall of history and the vicissitudes of the world. Against this backdrop, the stories depicted in *Li T'ung: A Chinese Girl in New York* and the colorful women portrayed in the book reflect the changes and development of women's social status, social roles, and social life in the twentieth century [1].

Feminism emerged in Western societies in the nineteenth century, and along with the advancement of the productive forces of society, feminism, with Western progressivism as

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its cornerstone, ushered in three phases of development after the Industrial Revolution. Feminism and the women's liberation movement today focus primarily on social theories and political movements that seek gender equality, using women's experiences as a source and motivation. Feminist studies are an important approach to contemporary research. Exploring *Li T'ung: A Chinese Girl in New York* from a feminist perspective helps to promote the development of feminism and feminist studies, thus digging into the root causes of women's subordinate position in society, politics, and economy [2].

Under the flourishing development of feminism today, this paper tries to explore *Li T'ung: A Chinese Girl in New York* from a feminist perspective, starting with the main character Li T'ung, and analyzing it from the aspects of narrative techniques and the interpretation of Li T'ung's personal interpretation, in order to understand the tragic destiny of women in the context of her time. This study attempts to gain enlightenment on contemporary feminism from the reflection on the dilemma of women in the text. Based on feminist theories, this paper will explore the limitations of women's values and the social and cultural constraints on women in a patriarchal society from the perspective of sex and gender [3].

2 Narrative technique

2.1 Historical narratives

Li T'ung: A Chinese Girl in New York is unique in its narrative technique. First of all, it utilizes the historical storytelling that Pai Hsien-yung is good at. At the very beginning of the article, it is written that in 1946, four girls, who called themselves the Big Four of China, the United States, Britain and Russia, left Shanghai for the United States, pointing out the background of the times and paving the way for the later transformation of the characters' destinies [4]. When they left Shanghai for the United States, they wore red cheongsams, with Li T'ung's being the most colorful; after arriving at the Whistler Ceremony, the four girls were still in the limelight, while Li T'ung was considered the Emperor's Princess from China, and was still given preferential treatment and privileged life, just as she had been when she was in Shanghai. For example, "She walked around in a different dress every day, but it was just as attractive. Some of the American boys would see her in her sparkling silks and playfully ask if she was a Chinese princess."

The twist of fate in the story is the breakout of the civil war in China, with Li T'ung's parents being shipwrecked on their way to Taiwan on the Taiping Wheel. The ship sank on the way to America. Li T'ung's family, which had brought her wealth, status, and a princess-like life, was lost, and Li T'ung fell from the sky to the earth in an abrupt moment [5]. Everyone's attitude towards Li T'ung changed after the family tragedy, "They all agreed that Li T'ung had become unappealing.", this is the calamity that history has brought to Li T'ung, a fairy lady. *Li T'ung: A Chinese Girl in New York* uses historical narrative to show the impact of the flood of the times on the fate of women.

2.2 First-person narrative

In addition to the historical narrative, *Li T'ung: A Chinese Girl in New York* also features a very distinctive first-person narrative. It reveals the predicament of women at that time from a male perspective through the first-person narrative of Ch'en Yin, Hui-fen's husband. In Ch'en Yin's narrative, the characterization of Hui-fen shows the plight of women when they are wives. As Li T'ung's friend, Hui-fen chooses a completely different path from Li T'ung. For example, Hui-fen's delicate and white palms are made to skin off by the soaking of kitchen soap and water after she married into a man's wife from a young lady of the big

family. "After all, she was the daughter of an aristocratic family, accustomed to doing whatever she wanted, but since our marriage, she had been willingly and diligently doing all the housework, which made me stand in respect."

This small incident is seen as a sign of both displeasure with Hui-fen for her missy temper and heartbreak for her in Ch'en Yin's view. This shows the constraints on women's identity under a traditional patriarchal society. Hui-fen, as a wife, no matter how distinguished she is, has to take on the responsibility of household chores when she enters into marriage, whereas "I" (Ch'en Yin) has nothing to do except admire her but not do anything practical. Marriage is a contract in feminist theory, and in traditional society, it is the only proof of a woman's rightful existence. The unequal contractual relationship of marriage requires Hui-fen to perform household chores and raise children in her capacity as a wife, and I, as the dominant party, acquiesces to such behavior, which shows the unequal status of men and women in marriage.

Li T'ung's first official appearance is at the wedding of Ch'en Yin and Hui-fen. The use of flashbacks creates a more dramatic atmosphere for Li T'ung's first appearance. Li T'ung's appearance is characterized by a great deal of complimentary language, such as "Her eyes were dark, twinkling and mesmerizing. A head of shiny black hair, two-thirds combed over her forehead, fell loose over her left shoulder." Li T'ung's beautiful appearance was contrasted with the other women, and had another meaning from the male perspective. When Ch'en Yin first met Li T'ung he felt that Hui-fen's unwillingness to praise Li T'ung's appearance was a sign of jealousy and displeasure in her heart, believing that a woman's view of a woman is not quite accurate in the end. Ch'en Yin, as the subject of a patriarchal society, judged women based on their appearance with prejudice, showing that society's view of women at that time was limited to the external value of women's objectification, reflecting the limited value of women's existence [6].

3 Internal: Li T'ung herself

3.1 Li T'ung's rebellion against traditional female characters

Li T'ung, the main character, is the center of the whole story of *Li T'ung: A Chinese Girl in New York*, and her fate is the reflection of women in a patriarchal society. Li T'ung is a typical proud girl, a princess in every sense of the word, both in Shanghai and in the United States. Li T'ung began to change after the death of her parents and took a different approach to the traditional role of women. Li T'ung's chosen path arises from her need to be an individual, that is, to choose her own life in her way. This need is contrary to the basic requirements of traditional society for women's survival. In traditional society, women are expected to be ladies, to be good wives and mothers, and to raise their children at home. Li T'ung chooses to betray the social role she is supposed to play in traditional society. Li T'ung has become a vicious and ungrateful person. For example, she ignored Chou Ta-ch'ing, who was a good suitor in the eyes of the others; she preferred Manhattan to champagne, and refused Teng Mao-ch'ang's advice to buy BOLD LAD in horse betting.

In the 1960s, when feminism was ushering in the second trend of thinking, the feminist movement and feminism turned its focus to gender studies. In the social context of the time, feminists offered a critical explanation of women's subordinate position. Women were also oppressed because of their gender identity, in addition to being oppressed because of class and hierarchy. Under these circumstances, women could only change their oppressed status by challenging the higher status of men or revolting against patriarchy and male authority. Based on this background, Li T'ung's recklessness and misbehavior is no doubt her challenge to the patriarchal society.

Meanwhile, among the many female characters in *Li T'ung: A Chinese Girl in New York*, Hui-fen, the role of the wife, is in sharp contrast to Li T'ung. Hui-fen had been the first to get married and later had a daughter and became a mother. In traditional society, marriage and procreation are inextricably linked, and Hui-fen's choice of marriage also means that she must take on the responsibility of procreation. Marriage links fertility and sexual attractiveness, which are the main criteria by which women are judged in traditional patriarchal societies [2]. Under such rules of judgment, Hui-fen reaches a superior grade through marriage, while Li T'ung, who did not choose to marry, undoubtedly failed. [7] After so many years in which Hui-fen's daughters had grown up to be teenagers, and the other two sisters had chosen to marry and have children, Li T'ung remained in the game. At the party before Li T'ung's suicide, Li T'ung even took off her diamond ring and gave it to Hui-fen's daughter as a gift, calling the diamond a stone. Li T'ung is both lonely and indifferent to married life. While her three girlfriends as the Big Four are on a set path, Li T'ung takes a different one because of her sense of feminism, which has sprouted in the hardships of her life [8].

3.2 Li T'ung's struggles and dilemmas

In *Li T'ung: A Chinese Girl in New York*, Li T'ung is mainly trapped in the following dilemmas. First of all, in terms of the positioning of female roles, Li T'ung is an atypical person who is different from a housewife. Li T'ung lingered in love affairs and did not stop for any man. Li T'ung was certainly a failed woman according to society at that time, and not choosing marriage was tantamount to losing the opportunity to prove her self-worth. Li T'ung was defined as a failure and a rebel by the cultural constructs of traditional society. This is because the social attributes constructed by the patriarchal culture define women as the second sex, forcing women to become subordinate to men, losing their autonomy and independence, and losing their gender advantages. Therefore, Li T'ung's social role is always in an oppressed position. Secondly, there is the suppression of women's emotions. Li T'ung lost her family's love early after her parents' death, and her resistance to marriage prevented Li T'ung from giving her sincere love. Li T'ung's hometown has been a vermilion mole in her heart for many years. Li T'ung misses her family and friends in Shanghai, but now that her family is gone, her friends who chose different paths have drifted away from her. Before Li T'ung's death, the text depicts Li T'ung's loneliness and isolation. "A small yellow lamp dangled from the ceiling, illuminating the porch in a dim light. Li T'ung's tilted her head over her right shoulder, with her hands resting on the armrests and her long, slender fingers dangling listlessly. Her long, dark-red dress almost touched the floor; in the fading light, it looked dull, as if it were an old, faded blanket."

At the same time, Li T'ung's emerging sense of feminism makes her eager to rebel against the inhibitions imposed on her by society and people. New ideas explode in Li T'ung's mind, while the echoes of old things remain continuous [8]. Finally, there is the restriction of women's social status. After losing the blessing of her parents, Li T'ung was alone in the United States, and removed the shell of wealth, identity, and status. Li T'ung gave birth to her subjective consciousness as a woman and chose to rebel against the male-dominated society in her act of rebellion. However, as written in the feminist book *The Second Sex*, the uniqueness of these "new wave women", such as Li T'ung's juggling of lovers and her sexual relationships with several men, highlights her essence as an object and the subordinate nature of women in society [2].

Li T'ung has an emerging sense of feminism, which makes her struggle in a patriarchal society. At the same time, Li T'ung is bound by the judgment of others and her own conflicts under traditional values [9]. In her heart, she finds the eruption of feminist consciousness and the constraints of the times, the loneliness of being alone in a foreign country, the sorrow of missing the wonderful past in Shanghai, and the resentment of her own destiny. All these

thoughts made up Li T'ung's tragic choice [10]. In the end, Li T'ung left only a color picture with the lines written at the back of it and jumped into the river in Venice. On the back of picture, she wrote: Dear members of the Big Four: This is the Pisa Tower. China, December, 1960. These last words are as lonely and as free as Li T'ung herself. This ended Li T'ung's beautiful and tragic life.

4 Conclusion

To conclude, by analyzing *Li T'ung: A Chinese Girl in New York* from a feminist perspective, we can deeply understand the dilemma of the times faced by women in the traditional patriarchal society. The objectification and marginalization of women's value in society led to their tragedy. The binding of women's consciousness by the mainstream culture of patriarchal society is a crucial dilemma that people in today's generation need to break through. The development of feminism will continue to promote gender equality and gradually eliminate the long-standing differences in status between the male and female genders. It is also necessary to eliminate the inequality caused by gender oppression. Modern creators need to think about how to break out of the female-mediated, male-dominated stereotype and create more colorful women's stories.

For feminist studies, the single perspective of feminist criticism should be avoided, and the development of feminist studies and feminist theories should be promoted by exploring from multiple perspectives. From the perspective of women themselves, they should get rid of the chains of the traditional concepts of the patriarchal society, overcome the long-standing limitations on women's social roles, and break away from the gender limitations that bind women in terms of "femininity". Starting from social relations and social roles, women should carry out feminist changes in the world, eliminate the tyranny of gender power in the past, and promote the birth of a new equality. Contemporary women should break the chains of traditional patriarchal society in terms of ethics and morals and all aspects of society. Women should give new energy to feminist revolution and the women's liberation campaign, starting from their own sense of subjectivity.

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