

## Lu Hsün's "Regrets for the Past" and the May Fourth Movement

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### ABSTRACT

One of the main characteristics of the May Fourth Movement is the pursuit of personal freedom and emancipation in order to reform the society and to save the country. Women belong to one of the most oppressed groups and their subjugation has become the most visible sign of China's backwardness at that time. Lu Hsün, as one of the leading iconoclastic thinkers and writers, spoke for women who were suffering from the conventional customs and beliefs and trying to revolt against them in some ways or others. His short story "Regrets for the Past" is a famous example of the so-called Chinese new woman who emulated Henrik Ibsen's character Nora to leave her family and pursue her freedom and emancipation. However, what concerns Lu Hsün most is the aftermath of Nora's brave action. Lu Hsün's pessimism toward Chinese women's emancipation is shown in his speech "What Happens after Nora Leaves Home?" delivered in 1923 and his story "Regrets for the Past" published in 1925. Through the analysis of the story, we can see how Lu Hsün changes his perceptions about literature and social reform from the Ibsenian individualism to the leftist or Marxist ideology in order to solve China's social and national problems. This transformation is typical of many May Fourth intellectuals who start with the discovery of the individual's suffering and end up with the prescription of collective struggle.

**KEY WORDS**

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Lu Hsün is one of the representatives of the iconoclastic thinkers who castigated the backwardness of conventional customs and beliefs in China during the May Fourth era. Like other intellectuals of his time, Lu Hsün always regarded social progress as the ultimate goal of the adoption of foreign thoughts and also of his personal literary career. He gave up the study of medicine and shifted his attention to literature in order to deal with illnesses of the spirit rather than with those of the body. This concern for politics was very much in the tradition of Confucian intellectuals who regarded the management of the country as the purpose of their studies. Therefore, the cultural and political aspects of their scholarship are closely related. It is one of the main characteristics of the May Fourth literature, which, roughly speaking, inherited Liang Chih-chao's 梁啟超 theory of saving the country by writing fiction at the end of Ching Dynasty, and developed into the revolutionary literature in the 1940s. Lu Hsün's 魯迅 devotion to literature, which he thought is in conflict with politics, becomes increasingly politically-oriented because of bureaucratic corruption, power struggle, and the Japanese invasion. Preoccupied with social and national concerns, Lu Hsün eventually turned from being a liberal individualistic writer who kept aloof from any political activities and became a leftist who sympathized with the communist revolution.

Lu Hsün's journey from the individualist's stance to the leftist or Marxist ideology has undergone a long way. This transformation was typical of many May Fourth intellectuals who started with the discovery of the individual's suffering and ended up with the prescription of collective struggle. Owing to his intellectual responses to the immediate social realities of his time, Lu Hsün changed his perceptions of literature and revolution. Harriet C. Mills has phrased this change as

"from Mara to Marx." After Lu Hsün transferred his study from medicine to literature when he was in Japan in 1906, he was immersed in the study of western literature and cultural history, paying special attention to the works of the "oppressed people" of Eastern Europe. He ignored the political activities of Chinese student groups and even remarked coldly on the heroism and martyrdom of Ch'iu Chin, who is a predecessor of Chinese Nora in real life. What he believed, in this period, is the theory of evolution and social Darwinism, and he vented his hope for salvation in the superior man, probably as a result of Nietzsche's influence. He appreciated Ibsen's philosophy of individualism and the rebellious spirit of *mara* poets such as Byron. He had contempt for the mediocrity of the masses that stifle men of genius and conscience and sacrifice brilliant individuals. However, he also had sympathy for the oppressed peasantry against the ruling gentry at the same time (Mills 191-93). Basically, he believed neither in K'ang Yu-wei's 康有為 idea of constitutional monarchy in 1899 nor in the Republican revolution led by Sun Yat-sen 孫逸仙 in 1911. He was extremely individualistic in advocating the potential capacity of literature to transform the minds of Chinese people, which he thought was the fundamental solution to national illness.

The continuing political chaos and hierarchical social structure, in spite of some superficial changes, following the 1911 Revolution, contributed to Lu Hsün's disappointment, and reinforced his pessimistic views on social reform. However, he was still persuaded by Ch'ien Hsüan-t'ung 錢玄同 to write for the progressive magazine *New Youth* 新青年, at least working with those who had a similar ideal of intellectual revolution. His first vernacular story, "The Diary of a Madman 狂人日記," published in May 1918, is also the first example of modern Chinese fiction. As Lin Yü-sheng points out, here begins a period of total rejection of the cultural heritage of the Chinese past.

Whether or not Lu Hsün is a totally iconoclastic reformer is controversial. Chang Chao-yi disagrees with Lin Yü-sheng by saying that Lu Hsün never totally rejected traditional Chinese culture. On the contrary, he appreciated the traditional characteristic of self-confidence in responding to foreign culture during the Han and T'ang Dynasty. He

appreciated the native heritage in art and folk culture. During the May Fourth period, Lu Hsün opposed the conservative scholars who championed traditional culture and the study of classics because the tradition Lu Hsün appreciated was different from the tradition they advocated. To advocate the recovery of the studies in the Manchu period was to be in conflict with Lu Hsün's principle of nationalism. Therefore, Lu Hsün radically criticized those who blindly kept the old culture for fear of adopting new ideas. This sense of fear and the loss of self-confidence were the product of the oppression and conquests by the regional tribes like Mongolia and Manchuria. This is the reason why Lu Hsün thought that the fundamental solution to the salvation of China was to reconstruct the original confidence in the nature of Chinese people. And the method was to learn from the experiences of East Europe, Russia, and Japan. If Lu Hsün was anxious to criticize Chinese tradition, it is because he sensed the urgency of adopting new ideas to refresh the old culture. Therefore, he was not totally rejecting the whole Chinese cultural heritage, although he, along with other fellow intellectuals, advocated many iconoclastic ideas. He intentionally criticized the numbness of Chinese people with some exaggeration in order to heighten the public awareness of the need for reform.

Early in his literary career, Lu Hsün was dedicated to unmasking the hypocrisy and cruelty of conventional social norms, which mistreat women in various ways. Women, who constitute half of the population, stay illiterate, unemployed, and physically handicapped throughout their lifetime because of their bound feet. Starting with the Hundred Days' Reform of 1898, the woman question was connected to the national question, because politicians and scholars realized that it has been a great loss of productive force in terms of national resources since women do not work. Woman's subjugation has gradually become a symbol of all the oppression from the received customs and standards of behavior, and hence the most visible sign of China's backwardness. The liberation of women thus seems to be a prerequisite for China's modernization. According to Wolfgang Kubin, the most plausible achievement of the May Fourth Movement (五四運動) with regard to the woman question was the discovery of the reality of woman, and

especially of women of different class origins. In other words, the politicians and scholars in the Reform Movement of 1898 dealt with only the enslavement of women of the gentry and saw no problem with the roles of women in the entire social context. But the intellectuals during May Fourth Movement discovered the suffering of the individual and expressed it in their writings (127-28). Lu Hsün's views on women, central to the May Fourth thinking, are therefore not only an important part of his critique of Chinese culture and customs but also part of his vision of the possibilities and limits of the human condition.

In Lu Hsün's short stories, women characters like *Wife of Shan* the fourth, *Ai-ku*, and *Hsiang-lin's wife* are all ignorant rural women oppressed by the so-called feudal system. Their physical and mental endurance through hardships illustrates the strength in their character. But they never know how to assert their human dignity. They fall into the trap of traditional teaching about women's conduct and are destined to lead miserable lives. Lu Hsün is obviously very pessimistic about women's status, especially when these rural women try so hard to protect the order of the system which continues to victimize them. As Wolfgang Kubin notes, "... the woman does not belong to herself, but is part of the male possessive order manifested in the family." "The rupture with one's family thus seemed at that time to be the initial step towards emancipation" (130).

With the onset of anti-traditional thinking during the May Fourth era, women began to realize the possibility of going beyond the family domain in which traditional doctrines rule women's lives. The May Fourth scholars, most of them male, were inspired by Henrik Ibsen's character *Nora* and encouraged their contemporary women to escape from the bondage of family and to seek personal freedom and fulfillment. Free love as opposed to arranged marriage by the parents became more and more popular. It is the first and most urgent action women had to take for the actualization of individualism advocated by those May Fourth intellectuals.

However, this phenomenon, which Vera Schwarcz calls the "Nora compulsion" (3), was seen as a trap by Lu Hsün since most Chinese women could not get economic support for their personal

pursuit of liberation in the early part of the 1920s. In December 1923, five years after Hu Shih's article entitled "Ibsenism" appeared in *New Youth* magazine,<sup>1</sup> Lu Hsün gave a talk entitled "Na-la tsou-hou tsen-yang?" [What Happens After Nora Leaves Home?] at the Peking Women's Normal College. In the talk he picked up the question Ibsen left unanswered at the end of the play when Nora slams the door behind her: how does Nora survive in a world which is not yet ready for independent women? In Ibsen's play, Nora has, at least, Mrs. Linde as a friend and example to follow. She will stay in her house temporarily and send for her clothing and things later. She will find a job as a secretary or something of that nature. But having lived and been raised as a housewife for so many years without any work skills or social experiences, it is doubtful that Nora can find a decent job even as a secretary. Some critics predict that Nora will go back home shortly since her mentality as a protected little bird is hard to change and she will never adjust to the working environment. However, Nora, who has awakened to the fact that she has been living in a doll house, can never resume the life she had with Torvald unless he miraculously changes.

Nora's inner crisis and shift of perception about reality are the key points of Ibsen's play. Nevertheless, for the Chinese reader who is confronting the problem within the contemporary social context, how to survive after leaving becomes more relevant and assumes more importance. Thus Lu Hsün goes beyond a simple promise of self-awakening and grasps the essence of the problem by saying that "the most painful thing is to wake up from a dream and find no way out" (159). Lu Hsün thinks that the awakening only makes a person more sensitive to the intensity of the misery, as if one's consciousness is heightened only to see one's own putrid corpse. When Lu Hsün was first invited by Ch'ien Hsüan-t'ung to write for the progressive magazine *New Youth* in 1918, he expressed his pessimism metaphorically that Chinese people are like those who are in deep sleep in a burning iron house which has no outlet. To write is to wake up those people to see their inescapable misery when they could have died painlessly and without being aware of their misery.

In spite of this frustrated mood, Lu Hsün still agreed to write for

the progressive magazine. But in the talk delivered in 1923, he came back to his metaphor of the burning iron house. Seeing not much change in society, he proclaimed that "at such times, there is something great about lying and dreaming," and that "if we can find no way out, what we need is dreams, not dreams of the future but dreams of the present" (160). These statements show Lu Hsün's characteristic hesitation and vacillation between despondency and hope. He always spoke negatively about the chance of success in social reform or political revolution—as he sarcastically commented on the martyrdom and heroism of Ch'iu Chin that "she is clapped to death" (Lyell 84). He even had doubts about the corrective power of literature to which he committed himself for the purpose of transforming the minds of Chinese people in general. Nevertheless, there is always a glimpse of hope in his pessimism that makes him keep on writing, even if he persists in his sardonic tone.

Lu Hsün therefore puts aside the longing for an idealized bright future and instead focuses on the present in order to be practical and specific. What concerns him is not Nora's courage to leave but what will become of her after she leaves. For a Chinese Nora, survival is almost out of the question since women's education is not extensive enough and work for women is so limited and rare. Lu Hsün, consequently, predicts two alternatives for the Chinese woman who decides to leave home: either she must return or she will probably become a prostitute.

Lu Hsün does not doubt the compelling impulse to be free but he raises the issue of its price and aftermath. He asserts that Nora is very much like a bird which has been caged for a long time. When it first finds itself outside the cage door, it faces a threatening environment. With atrophied wings and having forgotten how to fly, it has no future. For thousands of years Chinese women have been raised for a life within the family. The first thing a Chinese Nora has to face when she leaves home is an alien environment. Just as Florence Nightingale points out, the essence of feminist awakening is pain, but also the possibility of progress and free will (398). Therefore, the first women of self-realization are doomed to suffer, but that suffering points to a

bright future for later generations.

Hence, in his speech Lu Hsün expressed his admiration of Nora's courage but he also warned that the most crucial thing for Nora is money, or, to put it in a more elegant way, the economic resources. Money may not be able to buy freedom, but freedom can be sold for money. From the practical point of view, economic independence is indispensable for a woman on first crossing the threshold. Lu Hsün, in this sense, echoes what Virginia Woolf advocates in *A Room of One's Own*: a certain amount of money is a key element for a woman's access to independence. A Marxist-feminist critic like Michèle Barrett has stressed the material aspect of Woolf's politics by praising her insistence on the material conditions which, Barrett thinks, have structured women's consciousness (36).

As to the problem of how a woman can have the economic independence necessary for survival, Lu Hsün thinks that it requires a total change of the economic structure to provide equal opportunities for men and women. He proposes that economic equality between the sexes can start from the right to inherit property within the family. This demand for economic rights may now sound commonplace, but in the 1920s one might need to fight more for it than for political rights. Lu Hsün foresees the difficulties. Nevertheless, he prescribes that parental authority can liberate children in the future. Since the structure of the Chinese family is very solid, and parental authority is almost absolute, female children can get economic rights peacefully if the parents are willing to share the family property evenly among their children. Then women can have the economic foundation to do what they like to do without being dependent on their husbands.

It may sound ironic that a woman's liberation should start with her leaving the family, and yet the key to the success of her departure still depends on the economic support of her family. However, if victimization comes from family, it is natural that liberation and reformation should start with the family too. After all, women need to get away from the traditional mentality in the family system, not from the affection of the family members. So before the society can provide women with proper education and proper jobs, and before family ethics can

change drastically, women need the sympathy and financial support of family members in order to undertake her journey in pursuit of freedom and emancipation.

Lu Hsün strongly emphasizes the need for a woman's economic independence if she is to be liberated from traditional bondage. But that is not all she needs. Economic freedom only means that she can have less interference from others and more control over her destiny. It is only the first but most urgent step. Lu Hsün further states that not only are women men's puppets but that men can be men's puppets too because of economic dependence. The power relationship is related to the economic structure of society. Lu Hsün is not a socialist at this time. Basically he cannot overcome completely his pessimism about the spirit of the Chinese people, who are used to conventional ways and so are reluctant to change. He repeatedly admits that he does not have an exact prescription for reforming the moribund society, and he does not know where to get the power to push society forward. He does believe firmly in the necessity of struggle at both the individual and the collective levels. His humanitarian concern for individual lives mixed with his conviction of the need to reform the socio-economic structure indicates the trend of thought in the May Fourth era, which starts with individualism and advances toward socialism. However cynical his comments and however harsh his criticism about Chinese culture in his essays and stories may be, he still has some hope. The emphasis on economic rights as the key to a person's emancipation shows an inclination toward the materialistic interpretation of human existence. Though Lu Hsün never becomes a communist in his lifetime, it is not hard to imagine that he is moving toward Marxist ideas about the need for a radical economic revolution to solve social problems.

Lu Hsün's speech serves mainly as a warning to young women students in college to prepare themselves practically before pursuing their ideal. Two years later, in 1925, he wrote the short story "Shang-shih" ["Regrets for the Past" 傷逝] to illustrate this point further. The female protagonist Tzu-chün in the story is considered a Chinese version of Nora who is brave enough to elope with her lover. She is inspired by some daring western thinkers whom she knows through her

lover Chüan-sheng:

. . . the shabby room would gradually be filled with the sound of my [Chüan-sheng's] pronouncements on the tyranny of the family, the need to break with tradition, the equality of men and women, Ibsen, Tagore, and Shelley. . . . She [Tzu-chün] would nod her head, smiling, her eyes filled with a childlike look of wonder. (Yang 250)

Although Tzu-chün may be a student who likes to adopt new thoughts and rebel against old customs, she does not really understand the implications of these new thoughts. Her excitement about daring new concepts is mixed with the excitement about her romantic love for Chüan-sheng. In Chüan-sheng's eyes, Tzu-chün's "childlike look of wonder" reveals her excessive hope and also her immaturity. Later in the same paragraph, Chüan-sheng specifically points out that Tzu-chün has not yet completely freed herself from the trammels of traditional thoughts when she lowers her head embarrassedly before the picture of Shelley. Obviously, Tzu-chün only half-heartedly accepts western thinkers and ideas and naively believes in them because Chüan-sheng worships these people and loves so much to talk about their ideas.

However, when Tzu-chün is so determined as to exclaim "I am my own mistress. None of them has any right to interfere with me" (Yang 251), Chüan-sheng's disappointment about her embarrassment turns into great admiration and even ecstasy. With this daring statement, as Meng Yüeh and Tai Chin-hua put it, the "daddy's girls" of the May Fourth era hereby turn away from their families and start their growing process from the subordinating position of the object or "the other" to the self-relying position of the subject (35). Apparently, Tzu-chün is inspired by Ibsen's Nora and emulates her courageous statement that she is an individual before she is a wife and a mother. However, the reality of Tzu-chün's action is not so daring as her statement indicates. The strength behind Tzu-chün's determination is her love for Chüan-sheng. She is actually more motivated by her belief in the myth of romantic love than by her aspiration for self-realization.

The example of Ibsen's Nora gives her a strong impetus to pursue love rather than individuality and independence. This self-deception leads her to adjust poorly to the life of cohabitation, and eventually to her tragic death.

Chüan-sheng is also deceived by his own enthusiasm for the rebellious temperament which he attributes to those western thinkers he knows about. He likes to talk about their ideas to Tzu-chün because he wants to convince himself that the love between them is justified and should be applauded. He finally overcomes his fear and uncertainty when Tzu-chün makes her bold statement as an independent person who can decide her own affairs regardless of her parents' opposition. He is deeply touched by her courage and even becomes ecstatic about the hopeful future of Chinese women as a whole. Tzu-chün's statement is obviously taken as a symbolic gesture of women's breakthrough from traditional culture and a decisive step toward emancipation. This may be the perception of Chüan-sheng or of Lu Hsün himself, but it is certainly too wishful and naive a viewpoint to show the true understanding of Tzu-chün's statement which is in essence a declaration of her decision to sacrifice her reputation and family support for love.

Tzu-chün is basically a traditional woman. Although she follows Nora's decision and leaves her family, she actually counts on Chüan-sheng instead of becoming independent herself. She indulges in romantic love with Chüan-sheng to the extent that she remembers every detail of his proposal of cohabitation and makes him repeat it again and again. Chüan-sheng, on the contrary, does not remember how he proposed and feels very embarrassed to recall what he did. This episode shows how deeply she loves him and how whole-heartedly she depends on him. His decision to cohabit with Tzu-chün against social morality depends on Tzu-chün's emotional strength as well as on his own belief in western individualistic ideas. Therefore, when he thinks that Tzu-chün has become weak and trivial, he is disillusioned and withdraws his love.

In contrast to his timidity, she is as proud as she can be, especially when they walk together side by side instead of one behind the other as on previous occasions. She is always stronger than he is in terms of her

belief in their love and in their life together. Their different personalities overshadow their incompatibility when they have to face financial difficulties together. Love and marriage are not the same if economic conditions become the major concern, especially when they live isolated from others because of the illicit nature of their love. Although Chüan-sheng knows that love should be "renewed, growing, and creative," the practical aspect of life makes their love short-lived after all.

After they build a home of their own, Tzu-chün seems satisfied with her role as a traditional housewife. But she is not used to managing all the housework, which consumes so much of her energy that she is no longer a woman in love but a petty housewife busy with meals. Chüan-sheng is not well prepared for a family life, either. He becomes bored with ceaseless anxieties about cooking and other housework. Life is not the same as before when they could talk freely and hopefully about the daring new ideas of the western thinkers. The reality is different from the dream. If they were rich enough to hire a maid, they might be happy a little longer. Without economic worries, Tzu-chün could keep up with her reading instead of throwing herself totally into housework, and Chüan-sheng could expect a beaming face when he comes home after work.

While they are adjusting poorly to their boring new life together, Chüan-sheng loses his job. Things are destined to go from bad to worse since they have no support from either family or society. The oppression of practical life makes Tzu-chün worried and scared. Chüan-sheng is disappointed with her when she turns weak and is no longer able to support him emotionally. He thinks that she has changed. But he forgets that she has come to count on him. She can only continue her life as a housewife.

Chüan-sheng begins to vacillate in his love. Tzu-chün's dependence on him becomes a burden, and even her love for him becomes an obstacle to his freedom and he feels the need to get rid of her. When the situation gets worse, and he has to make a living by translating books, Tzu-chün's mere existence becomes a nuisance to him. He feels deeply bothered by her, her pets, and her business of cooking:

Unfortunately, there was no room where I could be undisturbed, and Zijun [Tzu-chün] was not as quiet or considerate as she had been. Our place was so cluttered up with dishes and bowls, so filled with smoke, that it was impossible to work steadily there. But of course I had only myself to blame for not being able to afford a study. On top of this there were Asui and the chicks. . . . (Yang 258)

He knows that their financial difficulty is the root of the problem, but the frustrations of life make him transfer his responsibility and the sense of guilt to Tzu-chün. He begins to find fault with her for being merely a traditional housewife—interrupting his work at meal time, not having enough food to eat, stupid quarrels with the landlady, and even her increasing despondence. He never realizes that she did not expect such a poor life, and his frustration and the gradual withdrawal of his love for her must have scared her, too. Nevertheless, he continues to feel trapped by this situation which was formerly considered an ideal utopia outside of the practical world. He misses his life as a single person and blames her for all these painful life situations. He considers her shallow when she does not realize that he has been driven to this predicament for her sake. Although the story is narrated from his point of view, his selfishness and irresponsibility are subtly revealed.

Because of the oppression of life, Chüan-sheng decides to get rid of the dog Asui and eat the chicks. This is no doubt the first sign of the disruption of the family they have built. When winter comes, Chüan-sheng finds a place in the free public library and enjoys the warmth all by himself during the daytime. The transference from home to a public place both mentally and physically crystallizes his desire to escape Tzu-chün. There is no more competition between his translation work and Tzu-chün's cooking business and no more cold confrontation between his insecurity and her despondency, at least during the daytime. The physical comfort and leisure in the library allow him to reflect over the past and regret even more the decision to begin cohabitation with Tzu-chün:

... I realized that during the last half year, for love—blind love—I had neglected all the other important things in life. First and foremost, livelihood. A man must make a living before there can be any place for love. There must be a way out for those who struggle, and I hadn't yet forgotten how to flap my wings, although I was much weaker than before. . . .  
(Yang 261)

When Chüan-sheng is discharged from his job, he compares himself to a caged bird<sup>2</sup> released from captivity. He has been kept alive with just enough bird seeds by the captor but is never going to thrive within the cage. He should be happy that he regains his freedom to soar anew through the boundless sky before he forgets how to flap his wings. Now he refers to himself as a caged bird again, meaning that the tedious life of cohabitation is equivalent to his tedious job, which serves as a cage depriving him of his freedom. The irony is that he and Tzu-chün have worked so hard to be together for the sake of freedom but that their togetherness has become another trap to escape from. But the bigger irony is that Tzu-chün is more trapped by their life together than he is: for his sake she has cut off all her connections with her family; she has sacrificed everything, including her reputation, her chastity, a future marriage, a life with dignity in her family. She is more like a caged bird than he is and has lost her capacity to fly altogether. He blames her for trapping him in a cage just because he lost his job and faces financial problems. In fact, he still has the whole world to explore with or without her. But, losing him, Tzu-chün would have nowhere to go. In the narrative of Chüan-sheng's reflection and in his concern over his own frustrations, he fails to consider how irretrievable the situation is for her.

In fact, Chüan-sheng's proposal stems originally from a liberal idea, which fails to consider Tzu-chün and the reality around her. Now in his frustrations, he is led by his intellect again rather than by emotion and feels that he should be liberated from the present predicament of which Tzu-chün is the cause. So Chüan-sheng begins to think that their love which they cherished so much before is only "blind love," because

it has no economic foundation. If one cannot even survive, what is the use of love? Without the means to make a living, love could deteriorate and freedom degenerate. When subjective wish confronts objective situation, practical reality defeats ideal and becomes ideal itself. To him, staying together is hypocrisy, and separation is liberation now. His love for her becomes a lie and his scorn is the truth. All the passionate love and fearless statements are empty after all. He becomes colder and colder, and Tzu-chün is even more scared. She tries to overcome her worry about their situation and to please him by recalling the sweet memories they had. But this only makes Chüan-sheng more distressed because he has to pretend to enjoy them while he has lost his love for her because of the difficult circumstances. He blames her for being totally dependent on him and being too weak to speak courageously any more. What Chüan-sheng longs for now is only separation or even her death:

Hypocrisy became branded on my heart, so filling it with falseness that it was hard to breathe. I often felt, in my depression, that really great courage was needed to tell the truth; for a man who lacked courage and reconciled himself to hypocrisy could never open up a new path in life. . . . I felt that our only hope lay in parting. She ought to make a clean break. The thought of her death occurred to me abruptly, but at once I reproached myself and felt remorse. (Yang 262-63)

Chüan-sheng's selfishness and cowardice are apparent. When faced with a test, he denies his love and accuses Tzu-chün of bringing him to his predicament, thinking that he will be fine if only he can get rid of her just as he gets rid of the chicks and the dog. He talks about Ibsen's Nora again and praises Nora's determination, hoping that Tzu-chün will make her own decision to leave. But she reacts indifferently and only asks what bothers him and why he has obviously changed. Her reaction proves to him that she is no longer a Nora but a traditional wife clinging to him and making it hard for even a fighter to struggle, bringing ruin on them both. In this exchange, Tzu-chün is still the forthright

and courageous one, and Chüan-sheng is dodging the issue by bringing up Nora. He is again using Nora as an excuse, but this time, for abandoning her instead of seducing her. Desperate to justify himself on all counts, he finally bursts out that he does not love her any more, knowing all the while that it is love which has given her the power to rebel against her background and to leave everything behind to live with him. Therefore, the only way for Chüan-sheng to get rid of her is to withdraw his love. He cannot bear to see the sad looks of Tzu-chün but he is secretly waiting for her departure or even her death. However, the picture of a bird flapping its wings and soaring in the sky appears before his eyes. He imagines that Tzu-chün will bravely face the facts and boldly leave without any sense of grievance. He knows her so well that he actually predicts that all this will happen soon.

Tzu-chün knows him well, too. She will do what he expects her to do just as when she made the decision to live with him. So she sends for her father to take her back when Chüan-sheng is away. Imagining the broad world he is going to explore, Chüan-sheng feels relieved. His love is so fragile that it is easily defeated by economic difficulties, whereas Tzu-chün's love is actually strengthened by sacrificing herself again to leave him as he wishes. She leaves without a word of complaint but only with signs of caring for his life. She feels that she has to give him back the freedom he wants. Nevertheless, as a woman, she is not granted the chance to begin a new life. She has to face alone the severe criticism of all her family, relatives and friends, and even the scorn of by-standers. Losing Chüan-sheng's love, and lacking the determination and courage of Nora, she is in no position to fight. Despondence and death are thus inevitable.

Chan-sheng should have expected all these things but he regrets it only when Tzu-chün is gone. Trying to lessen the feeling of guilt, he rationalizes:

I had imagined that if I told Zijun [Tzu-chün] the truth she could go forward boldly without scruples, just as when we started living together. But I must have been wrong. Her courage and fearlessness then were owing to love.

Lacking the courage to shoulder the heavy burden of hypocrisy, I thrust the burden of the truth on to her. Because she had loved me she would have to bear this heavy burden amid cold looks and blazing fury to the end of her days.  
(Yang 267)

He admits his cowardice and irresponsibility now. The bold decision to rebel against the traditional norm and live together originated from a mutual dependence: she depends on his love and he depends on her will power. Both prove to be illusions. Their life together only proves their incompatibility; tragedy is thus inevitable. In the solitude and silence of his room, he expects Tzu-chün to visit him some day. Then he learns of her death. He grieves deeply and becomes remorseful. The new hope he had counted on by getting rid of Tzu-chün is now transformed into "a grey serpent, writhing and darting" at him and disappearing again in the darkness. In distress, he goes back to the place where he used to wait for Tzu-chün's visit before they lived together. The very objects which had given him the feelings of love, life, hope, and happiness are now experienced as emptiness and piercing pain. All the self-reproach is of no use now. He can only start a new life by burying the past:

Since I am living, I must make a fresh start. And the first step is just to record my remorse and grief, for Zijun's [Tzu-chün's] sake as well as for my own. All I have is weeping like singing as I mourn for Zijun [Tzu-chün], burying her in oblivion. I want to forget. For my own sake, I do not want to remember the oblivion I gave Zijun [Tzu-chün] for her burial. I must make a fresh start in life. Hiding the truth deep in my wounded heart, I must advance silently, taking oblivion and falsehood as my guide . . . (Yang 271)

His first step toward the future is to record the past and his feelings for it in order to forget. This is another contradiction in his personality. The whole story reflects Chüan-sheng's point of view. The purpose of his writing is actually to relive his remorse and to grieve again. He tries to

rebuild the integrity of his self and re-articulate the dignity within his ego by focusing on the agony of which Tzu-chün is apparently the cause. It serves as a memorial to Tzu-chün as well as a catharsis for his own guilt. Then he will bury all the memories, good or bad, happy or sad, in order to have a fresh start. The writing has more of a selfish motive than to remember Tzu-chün or their life together. After all, he has denied his love and considers it hypocritical to pretend. If the truth hurts, he will continue to tell lies. This is the conclusion of the narrative and also the lesson he learns from the painful experience. But actually, it only shows that he always lives in self-deception and cannot tell truth from lies.

Tzu-chün as a May Fourth new woman is brave enough to leave her father's and uncle's home in the first place and to redefine the conventional conduct of submissive daughterhood. She crosses the borderline between the private domain where women have been kept captive for thousands of years and the outside world where is totally alien to them. She has no model to follow except the western example of Ibsen's Nora whom she learns of indirectly from her boyfriend Chüan-sheng.

However, Ibsen ends his play with Nora's determination to leave home and never suggests what will happen to her afterwards. Without any concrete ideas about the future, Tzu-chün retreats to her previous status as a traditional woman. Tzu-chün makes her own decision to leave home and stay with a person she loves regardless of her parents' disapproval and public criticism. She violates the code of filial piety and chastity and she feels proud of doing so, although she is actually breaking out of one entrapment for the purpose of getting into another.

When Chüan-sheng declares that he does not love her any more, she is not able to be as determined and brave as when she first left her father's home. It proves that she never really takes responsibility for her own life as she proclaimed that she would. She just transfers her own responsibility to Chüan-sheng, who takes it as a burden because of financial pressure. But what leads to the failure of the cohabitation is not only the financial problem which is considered crucial in Lu Hsün's speech. Tzu-chün's attitude toward the housework disappoints

Chüan-sheng because he does not expect her to be a traditional housewife but a daring new woman. She cannot go beyond the myth of the difference in sex roles after she builds a home with Chüan-sheng. She stops reading and learning new thoughts but only devotes herself to housework. When the belief in romantic love fails her she is not strong enough to pull herself up and shake off the stereotypical thought of traditional womanhood as Nora did. With neither economic nor emotional independence, Tzu-chün has no choice but to return to her father's home with a broken heart.

However, Lu Hsün probably does not mean to discourage women from taking their first steps toward independence or continuing their personal struggles even though Tzu-chün fails. Both economic independence and emotional independence are considered to be indispensable for a woman to be autonomous, and the true self-discovery or self-realization has to be achieved through a total understanding of the subjugation of women in its various forms. Although Tzu-chün is brave enough to step out of her father's home in the first place, she just transfers her dependence from her father to her lover because of her faith in the myth of romantic love. To defy her own parents and the norm of conventional female behavior was a great breakthrough for women in the May Fourth era. But she acts first as a daring new kind of woman in order to pursue her ideal regardless of any obstacles; then she returns to old conventions and becomes a "housewife."

This inconsistency in her behavior and attitudes toward life is apparently due to the fact that she only half understands her own situation and what Nora means. She emulates Nora's rebellious spirit and makes the bold statement that she is her "own mistress." But actually she becomes Chüan-sheng's mistress and gets trapped into total dependence again. This is the most crucial mistake she makes. Her departure on the journey of self-discovery is interrupted by the building of another home which she mistakes as her destination. In other words, Tzu-chün's total devotion and commitment to Chüan-sheng interferes with her own pursuit for freedom and eventually breaks her heart and causes her death. Nora awakens from this position of slavery of love and departs on her journey of self-becoming. Tzu-chün needs to take

one further step—not only exit from her father's home but also from her lover's home—to continue her heroic journey to real self-reliance and self-confidence. Although Chüan-sheng should be responsible for the whole tragedy since he leads her out of the family and pushes her back again, the tragedy could have been avoided if she had confronted the terrible situation by taking the responsibility on herself and refusing to die as a failure.

Therefore, she is not completely a Nora figure because she is still tightly bound by the traditional code of women's role within the family. If Chüan-sheng cannot make a living just because he violates conventional social morality, there will be even less of a chance for a female like Tzu-chün to have any social career outside of family. Social conditions in China at that time prevented the success of a real Nora. Instead of discovering a new world through struggles in suffering as Florence Nightingale suggests, Tzu-chün struggles to death because she wakes up to a world which offers no place for the woman she wishes to become (398). The loneliness of being awake first drives her to total despair and failure in achieving real independence and personal freedom, and moreover returns her to the starting point. This retreat causes not only her frustration and destruction but also endless feelings of guilt and remorse on Chüan-sheng's part.

Tzu-chün's tragedy results not only from social oppression but also from linguistic repression. She is deprived of the opportunity both to make her own living and to tell her own story. As Chien Ying-ying points out, since she is silenced in the narrative, she is represented only by Chüan-sheng's subjective viewpoint (56-57). It is hard to say just how true her self-realization is. The real image of her is distorted and screened from the reader. We can only see her and hear her through Chüan-sheng's reflection. The author's choice of the first person male point of view and the form of personal notes highlights the problem of language in feminist criticism. Just as Nelly Furman explains, the language we use to define and categorize areas of similarity and difference and to comprehend the world around us is essentially male-centered. It subtly shapes women's understanding and perception of reality so that women cannot avoid being suppressed and oppressed by it (268).

However, if women remain silent, they will forever be outside the process of history. In Tzu-chün's case, maybe Elaine Showalter's idea about language and the female struggle for articulation is more applicable. She thinks that the problem is not that language is insufficient to express women's consciousness but that women have been denied the full resources of language and have been forced into silence, euphemism, or circumlocution (255). If women characters do not have access to language, however phallogocentric it is, it would be impossible for women's stories to emerge from silence and obscurity and hence impossible for women characters to embark on their enlightened, though perhaps tormented, struggle for female identity, self-definition, and self-creation.

Consequently, the story of "Regrets for the Past" is only "his-story," not "her-story." Tzu-chün, in Chüan-sheng's account of the past they shared, is never a real person on her own account but someone playing a role. She is defined in relation to him and even to his changing situation—a daring new woman at first and a traditional petty housewife later. While he needs extraordinary determination to pursue the ideal of romantic love, Tzu-chün is a brave individualist who declares her right to decide her own affairs, including the violation of the code of virginity and filial piety. When his financial condition deteriorates, she becomes a nuisance to him. The inconsistency in Tzu-chün's characterization is only a result of Chüan-sheng's self-wished perception of a female role, be it a liberated and exciting Nora or a conservative and boring housewife. We as readers have no other way to understand the story or the relationship between them than from Chüan-sheng's point of view. Therefore, the interpretation of Tzu-chün, who is first a Nora-like emancipated woman and later metamorphoses into a fragile dependent woman due to economic oppression, is suspicious and unreliable, especially when Chüan-sheng presents himself as oscillating between truth and illusion and finally decides to live by oblivion and lies thereafter. As a result, Tzu-chün's silence, as well as Chüan-sheng's unreliability, makes the whole story and the image of Tzu-chün even more ambiguous.

The use of Chüan-sheng's narrative to tell Tzu-chün's story is

actually to represent Chüan-sheng's "self" through the "other." This technique is similar to the use of the mediating narrator in Lu Hsün's other stories such as "Chu-fu" [Sacrifice on the New Year's Eve] and "Tsai chiu-lou shang 在酒樓上" ["In the Wineshop"]. According to Marston Anderson's analysis, the intellectual narrator's incapacity to speak the language of "the other"—lower class people in most cases, reveals unconsciously the barrier in his writing and hence a sense of discomfort and guilt in the narration. Although in the case of "Regrets for the Past," the narrator Chüan-sheng speaks in the name of his own story and does reveal a lot of himself during the process, he assumes the role of an omniscient narrator and tries to speak the language of the other sex. The dichotomy between self and other is still explicit as in Lu Hsün's other first person narratives.

As a matter of fact, Ching-kiu Stephen Chan sees it as a problem of representation which disrupts the dominant discourse on women in the first place and only ends up undermining the initial attempt at subversion (23). During the post--May Fourth era, the modern male intellectual, facing an identity crisis himself, tried desperately to represent himself via a mutation in the crisis of the "other." Hence, women's sense of solitude and despair can find a channel of expression through a voice of the dominant discourse (19-20). The male intellectual "self" in relation to the female emotional "other" is recognized as an objectifying process of the identity crisis. Tzu-chün's despair is relocated in Chüan-sheng's despair. Bypassing Tzu-chün's despair, Chüan-sheng can find his way to transcend the past, relive the present, and peep into the future. By the end, it is more for the loss of his selfhood than hers that Chüan-sheng regrets the passing of time through remembering. Therefore, Chan concludes that the answer to the question what happens to the Chinese Nora after she leaves home is given in the impossibility of a genuine representation of Tzu-chn by her man, Chüan-sheng (26). Since Tzu-chün is not allowed to intervene and articulate her self in language, the alternative discourse could not posit a concrete historical as well as textual place for the new women of China. Therefore, Chüan-sheng, who attempted to facilitate Tzu-chün's liberation, eventually finds no place for her in his male-centered

universe.

Thus, the silence of women is not only a problem of language but also a problem of power. The female sex is not only treated in a manner comparable to that of the downtrodden class as "other" to the intellectual narrator, but also politicized as only a part of more general social or class problems. Thus the gender struggle for power is seemingly pinpointed in appearance but assuaged in reality. This tendency to categorize female subjugation as only one aspect of social oppression shows Lu Hsün's ideological development toward socialist politics which prescribes a female liberation that will be naturally achieved after the liberation of the people in general. Therefore, Lu Hsün's pessimism about women's emancipation is largely explained by inequalities in the basic economic structure in both family and society and revealed by his treatment of Tzu-chün's silence in his story. His concern with the economic basis of social reformation gradually draws him close to the socialist cause, and he becomes more optimistic in later years about the solution of the women's problem through political revolution.

After the mid-1920s, there were signs of change in Lu Hsün's perception of social realities from his early years. As Mills put it, Lu Hsün's attack on Chinese society became less personal and more concerned with general principles, and hence he stopped fiction writing (197). His belief in Nietzschean or Ibsenian individualism began to weaken. He deeply sensed the ineffectiveness of personal struggle and the futility of intellectual revolution. He still kept his theories of his Japan years, but he realized that evolution was a slow process. For him, evolution no longer guaranteed China's national survival, only that of mankind as a whole. China's old order was bound to collapse. Through reform and the acceptance of new ideas, China had a chance to survive. To reveal social realities, he concentrated more on satirical essays than on passionate treatises or lyrical stories. He concealed his skepticism and sense of futility but worried about China's proneness to conceit and compromise and her resistance to change. He still kept aloof from social and political activities, and he had no program for any action whatsoever.

Meanwhile, the continuing political chaos depressed him. The horror of civil war, inflation, floods, and refugees around him and a chilling desperation of the spirit within him became almost unbearable. He gradually transferred his belief in natural evolution to reform by human effort. He came to understand the importance of action and he became more radical. His textual research on traditional literature and other intellectual efforts declined, but his doubts and anguish persisted.

The year 1925 was critical for his change from emotional response to radical proclamation toward social stagnation and corruption. Lu Hsün joined the dispute at the Peking Women's Normal University in May and stood with the radical students in opposition to the conservative principal backed up by the Minister of Education of the Peking government. He bitterly protested the massacre of students on March 18, 1926 and was listed among the dangerous radicals to be arrested. Then he left Peking for Canton, where he experienced the political upheaval in 1927, the failure of the so-called Great Revolution by the Communists. Therefore, soon after he started to take action, he turned to the left because of his sympathy for the oppressed leftists and complaint against the tyranny of the Kuo-ming-tang government 國民黨政府.

He gave up his reserved attitude and commented directly on the Peking Women's Normal University and associated events, and hence became a sort of hero and spokesman for the students. He renewed his interest in Soviet Russian literature and began to study Marxism and proletariat theory. However, he was not very sure about the way out for China. He was torn between his more positive public stance and his private doubts. Once he wrote to Hsü Kuang-p'ing 徐廣平, his wife: "My ideas are really not easy to comprehend all at once because there are many contradictions therein . . . of humanitarianism and individualism . . ." (206).

As Lu Hsün was transferring his attention from the appreciation of Nietzsche's superior man to the suffering masses, his belief in the function of literature was also shaken. One week before the April purges in 1927, he gave a speech on the topic of "Ke-ming shih-tai wen-hsüeh" 革命時代文學 [Literature of a Revolutionary Period].

Applying his readings in Russian sources, he formally addressed himself to the question of the relation between literature and revolution. From his reflection and examination of the current political situation, he argued that literature was weak in affecting revolution; while a major revolution will affect literature. He roughly divided this relationship into three stages. At first, before a major revolution, protest literature can become the voice of fury and resistance. Then, when the revolution occurs, people are too busy changing society to worry about literature. In the final stage, after a successful revolution, there can be true revolutionary literature written only by the revolutionaries (Lee 136). Obviously, Lu Hsiün's faith in literature is superseded by his concern for revolution in terms of national survival and social reform. He recognized the fate of a writer to be superfluous in the revolutionary process.

After the April purge, speech censorship followed. Lu Hsiün was disillusioned by the Kuo-ming-tang led revolution. He was convinced that there had to be a new approach to China's problem. He expanded his readings on Russian literature to the Soviet experiment of the Marxist theory on economics and politics. Now he had a theoretical explanation for oppression and imperialism, and he realized the inadequacy of evolution and the necessity of revolution. He accepted the Marxist interpretation of history as the study of shifting "economic relationships" and culture as derived from these relationships. The consciousness of class conflict reemerged and the conviction of proletarian victory was constructed. However, he did not take Marxism as the absolute or the only way to examine China. He continued to work on Non-Marxist materials and he never became a member of the Chinese Communist Party throughout his life.

During the years of searching for a new hope, he emphasized literature's social function and a writer's social responsibility, despite the fact that he no longer believed in the contribution of literature to revolution. When the League of Left-Wing Writers was established in March 1930, Lu Hsiün gave the inaugural address and was openly associated with the left. He played the role of leading symbol of the Communist-led League but was not involved in its practical activities. De-

spite all the theoretical debates or power struggles within the League, he gave sympathetic and intellectual support to the Communist Party against the Kuo-ming-tang regime. He talked more positively about "proletarian literature" and the literature of exposure by bourgeois writers attacking their own class. He never had the chance to confront the issue of whether or not literature was only a part of political struggle because he died in 1936, before Mao Tse-tung's 毛澤東 talk at Yen-an on art and literature in 1942.

In 1933, he published another article "Kuan-yü fu-nü chieh-fang" 關於婦女解放 [About Women's Liberation] to re-explain and somewhat modify his views on the woman question. Along with the political transition from the warlord government in the 1910s to the Kuo-ming-tang government in the 1920s and 1930s, there were some social changes going on during these years. Traditional values were generally under more skeptical examination, and hence new ideas and new ways of life were more acceptable to the public. More and more women emerged from the restriction of family and appeared in public. However, Lu Hsün expressed his dissatisfaction with so-called "progress" by criticizing the treatment of women as either "a flower vase" with a purely decorative function or as low-paid workers to be exploited by the capitalists.

He still insisted on the importance of economic rights because women cannot have real freedom unless they achieve economic independence. Nevertheless, instead of the pessimistic overtones in "What Happens After Nora Leaves Home?" and his story "Regrets for the Past," Lu Hsün emphasized the necessity to fight. He seemed to catch a glimpse of hope in social reform through political struggle years after his depiction of Tzu-chün's despair and destruction. His statement that "when the society is liberated, the individual is liberated too" (Lu 598) was often quoted by the later communist members to prove Lu Hsün's socialist belief. But Lu Hsün did not deny the value of personal struggle before the success of social revolution. He thought that women should fight against all the fetters that a feudal and corrupt society imposed upon them, but he never preached that participation in the social movement was the only way for the individual to pursue self-

fulfillment. He just modified his absolute belief in spiritual revolution, which is so hard to reach, in order to conform to the social circumstances as such that a political revolution may bring some changes. However, his shift from pessimistic warnings to a more hopeful perspective did encourage the left-wing intellectuals and the socialists. The predominance of economic reformation going hand in hand with the need for social struggle paved the way for the later belief in a radical revolution to solve all the national social problems.

Starting with the belief in Nietzschean and Ibsenian individualism which highlights the superiority and solitariness of geniuses over the mediocrity of the masses, Lu Hsün advanced toward the direction of socialism and Marxism owing to the political and social conditions. He had vacillated between literary efforts and political action, pessimistic sarcasm and hidden hopes with regard to the woman question and social problem as a whole. The intellectual narrator in his short stories vindicated the characteristics of his hesitation and wanderings and also overshadowed the conflicts between personal fulfillment and collective struggle in the fiction of later writers.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> In its seven years of publication from 1915 to 1922, spanning 54 issues, *New Youth* offers only two special issues: the "Ibsen" issue of June 1918 and the "Marx" issue of May 1919. These two thinkers may indicate two major trends of the Chinese experience from the May Fourth Movement to post-May Fourth era. Ibsenism provides the spiritual needs of the intellectual revolution while Marxism prescribes political solutions to economic and social reformation. Both schools of thought are liberal and radical to Chinese intellectuals at that time and help to liberate the old conventions imposed upon women.

<sup>2</sup> Usually a woman who is trapped within family is compared to a caged bird. She loses her freedom, but at the same time, she is protected from the danger outside and she does not need to make a living by herself. It is basically Lu Hsün's idea of Ibsen's Nora. However, in this story, Chüan-sheng repeatedly compares himself to a

captor being his job first and Tzu-chün later. He is, in a sense, a male Nora, who longs for freedom in the outside world. Whatever becomes his burden and prevents him from pursuing is referred to as a cage for him. The irony is that Tzu-chün is more of a caged bird than he is because she cannot even survive after leaving the cage she has always depended upon.

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