

Lu Hsun'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 : Henrik Ibsen; A Doll House; Nora; Women's emancipation; Feminist studies; Lu Hsun; Regrets for the Past; May Fourth Movement; Modern Chinese literature; Chinese women