

A Comparative Study of Heroines' Love View in *Pride and Prejudice* and *Story of Stone* from the Perspective of Feminism

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Abstract: Love and marriage is the eternal theme of literary works among which *Pride and Prejudice* and *Story of Stone* are two of the most famous ones. In recent years, it is a hot topic to understand the concept of love and marriage. Although created in different cultural contexts, *Pride and Prejudice* and *Story of Stone* have revealed love views which have a strong relevance. Under the theoretical framework of feminism, this study aims to find the common and different characteristics of the love view of the heroines in *Pride and Prejudice* and *Story of Stone* and analyzes the reasons to help people have a better interpretation of love.

Keywords: *Pride and Prejudice*, *Story of Stone*, love view.

INTRODUCTION

Love and marriage is a lifelong pursuit of all people which cannot be touched but felt by heart. *Pride and Prejudice* is a novel written by Jane Austen [1], a British writer in the 18th century. This novel was finished with a happy ending that Jane married Bingley and Elizabeth married Darcy. Finally pride is humbled and prejudice dissolved. *Story of Stone* is created by Cao Xue-qin [2] in Qing Dynasty. It is one of the four great classical masterpieces in China. The writer told a story about the four major families at that time: Jia, Shi, Wang and Xue.

Both the Chinese and western writers use delicate strokes to outline a picture of beautiful love for the people who yearn for love, reflecting their deep understanding of love with a wonderful narration and displaying a variety of interpretation of love and marriage in a unique way in the literary works.

As the most famous works about love and marriage, *Pride and Prejudice* and *Story of Stone* have been widely received attention from scholars. Previous studies on them can be classified into the following groups: the first group includes the studies of the writing techniques and artistic features. Both authors use the rhetorical device of irony which has a positive effect on the shaping and construction of character image [3]. The second group falls into the category of studies on the translation of these two famous literary works, especially the dialogues among the characters. Though different versions are analyzed under different theoretical frameworks, one common conclusion can be drawn that the different language features and cultural contexts should be taken into consideration during translation [4]. The third group aims to analyze certain

characters in the works. According to Chinese culture, bamboo is the symbol of noble and tenacious character. Therefore, some scholars use the image bamboo as an analogy with Lin Daiyu to show Lin's personality. Furthermore, the image bamboo implied the love tragedy between Jia and Lin [5]. The last group puts emphasis on the love views from the perspective of feminism. During the 18th century, both China and Britain experienced drastic changes from social politics, economic system to ordinary people's daily life. For marriage, the voices of equality between men and women and the freedom of love have become louder. Both countries have undergone a major shift from conservatism to openness, from ignoring human nature to respecting individuals. Feminism provides a new perspective to analyze the literary works. Some scholars as Zhao Shuping analyzed the awakening of female consciousness and the love views of the heroines which are displayed in two independent parts but there is neither comparison of the love views of them nor the cause analysis of the different endings of the love of the heroines [6]. Under the theoretical framework of feminism, this study will analyze and compare the love

views of the heroines with specific examples and then explore the reasons of the similarities and differences.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Feminism is the product of specific historical situation and has different cognition and concept in different social and cultural contexts. The definition of feminism has been complicated and controversial. The term "feminism" was first introduced in English in the 1880s and aimed to support the legal equality and political rights of men and women. According to Simone de Beauvoir [7], women are not born to be women but formed so. The position of a woman in society cannot be decided by psychology, physiology or economics, but the whole human culture decides the so-called "woman". Feminism advocates women's equal rights in the politics, economy and society with men and brings revolutionary change in women's social roles. There are two layers of meanings: one is that feminists recognize the unequal and unjust treatment of women in society and their helplessness and disadvantages. The fundamental purpose of feminism is to eliminate such inequalities, and women should take political action. The other is that feminism affirms women's own values, dignity and their contribution to culture. As a famous British novelist and a master of stream of consciousness, Virginia Woolf plays an important role in the feminist movement and is also an outstanding representative. Woolf's feminism is not changeless but has undergone a continuous exploration and deepening process from the beginning to the highest peak. Woolf's claim is to free women from patriarchal constraint and pursue the equality of men and women. What's more, she thinks that men and women could peacefully live on the basis of differences and has proposed the concept of "Androgyny" [8].

In China, feminism is based on the bourgeois freedom and ideology of equality and called "equality between men and women". It calls for an end to the subordinate status of women and advocates gender equity, which is the main theoretical foundation of the bourgeois women's movement. Feminism has been developing over time, and it is the essence of a social movement for women's liberation. Besides, it is noteworthy that at present, most of the researches on feminism has been done in the field of literature, which mainly explores its influence on feminist literary criticism or the study of feminism itself. More specially, these researches include criticism on the traditional concept of gender, the existing social theory and the convention.

THE SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES OF THE LOVE VIEW OF THE TWO HEROINES **Similarities of Their Love View**

Both Elizabeth and Lin Dai-yu fights against the restriction to the women. At that time, women are

not encouraged to express love directly and they are only thought to be the goods for the man to select. Their only role is to deal with the housework and cultivate the next generation. However, different from the ordinary women, Elizabeth and Lin hold different opinion of love. They are both brave and pursue equality in love.

Most people had the idea that if girls wanted to live better, they should marry a good man with a good fortune. Elizabeth's mother, Mrs. Bennet, thinks that the goal in her life is to get her daughters married. When Mr. Collins, her cousin comes to her family, she wants Elizabeth to marry him otherwise she will not talk to Elizabeth anymore. Collins is the representative of the male role. He comes to inherit the estate of the Bennet family and he will marry one of the daughters on the premise of the Daughters' beauty as an excessively generous compensation for the family. Giving up Jane for her engagement with Mr. Bingley, he chooses Elizabeth and proposes to her with convincing reasons. Elizabeth knows herself well: she is not a very beautiful girl born in noble family with a big fortune. However, she still refuses Collins' proposal without hesitation: "I thank you again and again for the honour you have done me in your proposals, but to accept them is absolutely impossible. My feelings in every respect forbid it." She is not willing to risk her own happiness and dares to speak out her mind and challenge social customs. In love, Elizabeth is neither like Lydia who indulges herself recklessly on a momentary impulse, nor like Charlotte who abandons love for secular marriage and material things. Her different attitudes to Darcy's several proposals reflect her independent personality and pursuit of equal rights. The process of resolving misunderstandings between Elizabeth and Darcy also reveals Elizabeth's braveness in love. Their misunderstanding has been built from their first meeting at the dancing party. Darcy's arrogance and Elizabeth's prejudice result in the failure of Darcy's first proposal. After reflection and practical action, Darcy dissolves Elizabeth's misunderstanding of him. Elizabeth confronts her own mistakes and perceives her love for Darcy and bravely fight against Aunt Catherine's disapproval to defense her love. Elizabeth criticizes Catherine for meddling in other people's affairs and emphasizes her own right to make decisions.

The age in which *Story of Stone* is created advocates that innocence is the virtue for women. This reflects the gender discrimination in China's feudalistic society and reveals the double value standard and moral standard of patriarchal culture for men and women [9]. As Jia Baoyu is burdened with great expectation of the big family of Jia, all of his family members request Jia to carry on the honor of the ancestors and receive education to have an official career. Lin is the only one who stands with Jia and fights against other family members. Sojourned in the the big family of Jia, Lin is

surrounded by the traditional pressure from the supreme authority Jia Mu to the maid Xi Ren. The contrasting strength gap between Lin and the female representative of the big family demonstrates Lin's brave rebellion. As a talented and independent woman, facing sorrow and pressure, she sticks to exploring equal love between Jia and Lin instead of being destroyed or giving up her ideal. Lin, on the one hand, holds deep disdain for the feudal marriage system, ethics and feudal ruling class and society. On the other hand, Lin holds the sincere longing for pure love, sincere friendship, noble ideals and a better life. Therefore, both Lin and Elizabeth dare to rebel against the tradition and put themselves in an equal position with the male.

Differences of Their Love View

Elizabeth's love is based on first impression. The first meeting between Elizabeth and Darcy results in Elizabeth's prejudice on Darcy. Elizabeth thinks that Darcy is very arrogant and has no respect for the female. Darcy's unfriendly comments on Elizabeth make Elizabeth angry and he says that she wouldn't dance with him for all of Derbyshire. By contrast, the officer, Wickham takes the advantage of his handsome appearance to make Elizabeth feel that he is the one to fall in love with. Wickham's defamation on Mr. Darcy deepens it further. Later Darcy's impediment on Jane's engagement deepens its further prejudice on Darcy. Darcy's conceit makes her think that Darcy was the last man in the world she could ever marry. Whereas, there is the myth in which Jia was the waiter of God while Lin was an ancient plant watered by Jia. Therefore, the love of Jia and Lin is doomed from the very beginning. Lin is destined to fall in love with Jia and tears to the last drop of her tears for Jia. Jia's familiarity with Lin in their first meeting is due to their fated marriage [10]. Lin thinks that Jia looks handsome and it seems that they have met each other some time in the past. This also gives her the courage to know more about Jia which is helpful to their relationship.

Elizabeth prefers free love which means that male and female choose their mate according to their own will without the parent's will, while Lin prefers pure love which requires the male's faithfulness and loyalty. If Elizabeth married Mr. Collins who will inherit the heritage of the Bennet's family, her sisters would have a guarantee to life. Disliking him and facing the threat from her mother, Elizabeth remains unwilling to sacrifice her marriage and happiness for a living. However, for Lin, it is impossible to get pure love. For one thing, in ancient China, it is common that men have more than one wife and people think this is the symbol of rights and ranks. It is obvious that Jia, as the darling child in the big family, cannot have one wife. For example, Xi Ren, the pretty maid of Jia, is thought to be one concubine for Jia by his mother. For another, Jia prefers to stay with the girls and has many female

companions in the big family. In his opinion, the female have all the virtues and are all clean and clever, while the male are dirty and dumb. What's more, the saying that gold and jade make perfect couple always makes Lin jealous of Xue. Jia cannot make Lin feel secured in their love.

THE REASONS FOR THE SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES

Both *Pride and Prejudice* and *Story of Stone* express the traditional love view: marriage is built on wealth and social status. *Pride and Prejudice* shows it from the beginning: "It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife". Marriage is the only way for girls to obtain respect and stable life. *Story of Stone* presents love in a typical patriarchy society in which women have no status and right of speech and they are the male's accessories [11]. Elizabeth and Lin are created to be the representative of feminism. They think independently, pursue the equality between women and men and fight against the traditional concepts.

The differences of their love view are mainly caused by the following reasons. Firstly, the two heroines have different personalities. Elizabeth is confident, cheerful and she dares to defend her personality and fight against the feudal etiquette directly. In contrast, Lin is gentle, sensitive and suspicious. In her fighting against the tradition, she lacks self-confidence. Secondly, Elizabeth gets the support from the older generation but Lin does not. Elizabeth is fortunate because her father stands on her side till the end. Regardless of Elizabeth's mother's wish of asking Elizabeth to marry Mr. Collins and her threat, Elizabeth's father is in favor of Elizabeth. On the contrary, Lin has no supporter but many opponents. Jia Mu, grandmother of Jia and Jia Yuanchun, sister of Jia are the most powerful women in the big family. They hold the same opinion on the choice of Jia's wife. Xue meets all the criteria for a good wife in ancient China which is strong background and the ability to deal with cases flexibly. Mrs. Jia, mother of Jia who has the right to make decision on the choice of Jia's wife and arrange his marriage also prefers Xue to Lin. Thirdly, the two writers: Jane Austen and Cao Xue-qin are two independent individuals and there are differences between them. The two heroines created by the writers reflect the mind of the writers. As a female, Jane was well educated and brought up in a well-off family in rural area. Unmarried in her whole life, she still holds a positive view on love and longs for pure and perfect love. What's more, affected by feminism, she is against the male literature in which the female are described as devils. She takes the advantage of a typical female view to create Elizabeth and let Elizabeth to pursue what she wants to pursue. Compared with Jane Austen, Cao is

brought up in the feudal patriarchal family but he witnesses and experiences vicissitude of the family. He sympathizes women and describes females as beautiful and clever images with all the good features, but his experience makes him hold passive view on love and his deeply rooted traditional concepts lead to tragic end for the love of all the females in the book [12].

CONCLUSION

Marriage is the eternal topic of human, and it is of great value to explore love and marriage from the perspective of feminism. In the male-dominated age, women become victims of marriage in order to survive. Jane Austen has created an epoch-making woman image Elizabeth who struggles for love and marriage equality. Lin also has historical significance in women's pursuit of equal love. The conclusion can be drawn that in love and marriage, women should have independent personality and wisdom and be treated with respect, equality and dignity.

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