The Tragic Features in My Memories of Old Beijing

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Abstract. My Memories of Old Beijing tells the story of Yingzi's family and friends in the south of Beijing and expresses the author's nostalgia and perseverance for her childhood. In combination with the author's personal and historical background, this paper analyzes the human tragedy of women and the people at the bottom depicted in the book, explores the tragic tone in the story language of young and adult Yingzi, explores the inevitable and accidental causes of human tragedy, feels the author's thoughts and emotions, and summarizes the tragic characteristics in My Memories of Old Beijing. The tragic characteristics are the tragic ending of the characters, the sad tone of the story language and the cause of the tragedy. The tragic features discussed in My Memories of Old Beijing do not only stay in the perspective of female fate and tragic implication of common studies but through different perspectives of analysis and comprehensive sorting, it is concluded that the tragic features are one of the most prominent features in My Memories of Old Beijing and deserve attention and research.

Keywords: My Memories of Old Beijing, Tragic characteristics, Character role, Story language.

1. Introduction

Lin Haiyin is a female writer from Taiwan, the founder of Pure Literature Publishing House. Her representative work is *My Memories of Old Beijing*, which won the "Literary Contribution Award" of the second May Fourth Award. Lin Haiyin moved to Beijing with her parents in 1923 and settled in the south of the city. The book is based on her life in the south of Beijing from the age of 7 to 13. It tells the story of her getting along with her parents, relatives and friends. She missed the scenery and characters of his childhood living in the south of Beijing and wrote them down so that the actual childhood passed and the spiritual childhood remained forever. This is Lin Haiyin's original intention in writing this novel.

Since its publication, *My Memories of Old Beijing* has attracted the attention of many readers. Then, a series of studies on *My Memories of Old Beijing* burst out. Based on the background of Lin Haiyin's life, self-preface, other works, historical background, the analysis and study of Lin Haiyin's *My Memories of Old Beijing*, scholars concluded that Lin Haiyin's loves and misses of her childhood life pay attention to the fate of women and the tragic implication in the book. However, the above studies have not been summarized such as the fate of women has been paid attention to, but there is no further consideration of the tragic outcome behind them. Therefore, it can be believed that the tragic features in *My Memories of Old Beijing* have not been studied more deeply.

By analyzing the characteristics of the tragedy, this paper takes the neglected tragic characteristics as the research object and feels the author's longing for the south of Beijing and her childhood. At the same time, it also arouses feelings, pays attention to the tragic fate of the women and the bottom people in the book, analyzes the language features of Lin Haiyin's description and expression, and the emotional tone of the whole novel. This paper analyzes the inevitability and accidental causes of the tragic fate of women and the tone of sad language. In short, the tragic features in *My Memories of Old Beijing* analyzed in this paper are not only in the female level, nor only in the emotional implications, but in the book as a whole.

2. Characters Feature Tragic Endings

2.1. Perspective of Female Characters (Xiu Zhen, Songma, Aunt Lan)

Every character in the world of the novel has achieved a vivid display of their own images, which has a very strong attraction for readers [1]. However, from the perspective of the description of the author's childhood memories, *My Memories of Old Beijing* is a nostalgic work, writing about the author's nostalgia for his childhood and the reluctance of the south of Beijing. The five parting stories are described in the book, but in the actual reading process, it is not enveloped by a very strong atmosphere of sadness. The main reason for this is that the author uses elegant and smooth narrative language in the process of narrating the story, which effectively melts the sad feeling in the story [2]. However, on the whole, the tragic character still runs through the text.

The book has a total of five stories; three stories are about the fate of women, so the analysis of women's fate has become a major feature of the book. Historically, male superiority led to the loss of feminism and the occurrence of female tragedy. Almost all works about women in feudal society ended in tragedy [3]. Lin Haiyin's *My Memories of Old Beijing* also reflects the concern about the fate of women and the pursuit of liberation.

Xiu Zhen in the story is crazy; in addition to Yingzi, other people's impressions are like this. Everyone is very tacit understanding to take this topic for fun; no one has ever cared about Xiu Zhen, until Yingzi appeared. Yingzi has her own opinion; she thinks Xiu Zhen is not crazy and is her friend. Looking back at the background at that time in that turbulent era, the people had no livelihood, the clan etiquette could not be challenged, and the choice of love and marriage was not entirely up to their own choice. Xiu Zhen and her daughter were regarded as aliens. They become the lost women, but Yingzi thinks they are freedom. She interprets her profound understanding of women's substantive marriage and puts forward her own new views on the quality of marriage. It points out a marriage path for the women in the novel [4]. This is also the emotional implication reflected in the tragic characteristics of *My Memories of Old Beijing*, which is worth pondering.

Songma is unable to raise two children because of poverty; her husband is incompetent, and she is forced to do other children's wet nurse. An unhappy marriage and a poor life have blighted Songma's life, trapping her as well. In the face of Yingzi's help, Songma refused many times and pessimistically accepted his fate. It can be seen that there was a serious lack of female thought and rights at that time, and women like Songma were destined to become the victims of the feudal era. When faced with new hopes, they would not believe it and they would accept everything numb. Tragic female figures like Songma were the epitome of many women in society at that time. They represent the typical women who are not able to jump to the side. Through the description of the female group represented by Songma, the author conveys her concern for the fate of women and her expectation for the individual liberation of women [5].

Moreover, Aunt Lan can be said to be both an ordinary and extraordinary woman; her extraordinary quality is that she is brave in pursuing love and freedom, daring to walk hand in hand with Uncle Dexian. However, more than that, she was an ordinary woman. At the age of 20, she was married to a man who was 48 years her senior. Many women cannot enjoy their own freedom, joy, and happiness; her end is tragic.

With the female writers' empathy for women's lives, Lin Haiyin's strong feeling in their hometown is "the tragedy of being born a woman" [6]. From the tragic experiences of Xiu Zhen, Songma, and Aunt Lan, it reflects the social reality of extreme injustice and also witnesses the hardship and tragic fate of women in that era.

2.2. The Perspective of the Poor Characters (The Thief, Songma's Husband)

In the 1920s, people experiencing poverty were also neglected. The thief in "Let's Go to the Sea" became a thief at the age of 22. At 22, he should be in his prime, but in order to support his younger brother's education and care for his mother, he is forced to become a thief to sustain the family. This is not just an individual tragedy but also a reflection of the sorrow of that time. In the social

background of that era, Yingzi and his conversation also reveal his helplessness. The thief's life has been forsaken; a life of poverty was not his choice. Despite resorting to theft, he possesses a sense of right and wrong, understanding that he will inevitably be caught. When the thief asks Yingzi whether he is a good or bad person, it is an instinctive expression of his deep introspection and remorse. Songma's husband is not extensively discussed in the article, but it can be inferred from Songma's words that her husband adheres to a feudal mindset, favoring sons over daughters. He sold his daughter and relied on his wife to support the family, and his son died due to his negligence. Such husbands were representative figures of that time; their existence was tragic, living at the bottom of society. Despite this, he became a carrier of sadness, oppressing Songma. Songma's husband finally appeared, which added sadness to the full text. He lived on Songma, who fled her husband by going out to make money. However, after the children died and lost, they continued to live together. The sadness of those at the bottom is often a trivial emotion, unnoticed and unattended. In their sorrow, they cannot save themselves. People at the bottom, like the thief and Songma's husband, are accompanied by sadness. They cannot resist; they can only live in sadness.

Whether it is the female or lower-class characters, the story always ends with sadness. Readers, whether immersed in the story or observing from outside, can comprehend the tragic fate of each character.

3. The Sad Tone of the Story Language

My Memories of Old Beijing takes the perspective of children, that is, "to see the world from the perspective of children, and to reveal the survival landscape that is difficult to observe or ignore in the adult world through the observation and perspective of children with a different perspective" [7]. The book uses the simplest story language, implicitly but powerfully portrays the characters, tells a story full of regret and tragedy, and sets a sad tone. In the work, Yingzi often sings the Li Song, which is very memorable for the young Lin Haiyin and also sets the melancholy tone for the parting scenes in the work [8].

3.1. Language Analysis of Young Yingzi

Every person in the book is having a parting with Eiko again and again. Each separation makes Yingzi sad and makes Yingzi grow up gradually. As mentioned above, Xiu Zhen, Songma, Aunt Lan, and even Yingzi's father their parting will add to the sad tone. In the article, the words of the people in the neighborhood are repeatedly used to render the tragic atmosphere, highlighting how the young Yingzi grew up witnessing the sadness of the world. Moreover, Yingzi some casual words, invisibly fixed the tone of the novel in the sadness.

Although Lin Haiyin was no longer a child at that time, she mastered the narrative characteristics and language habits of children and expressed Yingzi's feelings in a lifestyle expression, which was in line with Yingzi's age characteristics and presented the natural, cordial, lively and plain expression style of the novel Old Things in South of the City [9]. In the book, Yingzi, as a 10-year-old girl, is simple and simple. When she encounters things, she expresses her feelings, raises questions when she encounters problems, and questions when she encounters injustice. All of these are the purest and most simple reactions of a child. When Xiao Guizi was asked to sing a paragraph, Yingzi asked, "Why?" which shows she dared to question. In order to find Sikang, Xiu Zhen and Xiao Guizi chase the train, Yingzi cannot catch up with them and feels "I am cold, afraid, and reluctant to give up, I cry." Yingzi dared to express her feelings with a series of cool verbs and negative perspectives and she expressed it directly, without embellishing any gorgeous words, so that readers can directly experience Yingzi's feelings. In "Let's Go to the Sea", after the thief is caught, Yingzi "hides in the gate, and depends on her mother's side, and wants to cry", and she writes that Yingzi feels afraid and needs comfort after seeing her good friend arrested, and she is reluctant to lose the thief as a good friend because, in his mind, the thief is not a bad person. Also, Yingzi personally experienced Aunt Lan and Uncle Dexian leaving home, "want to cry, also want to laugh, I don't know what the taste."

Yingzi used the antonym to express a contrary emotional experience, but it does not appear abrupt from Yingzi; Yingzi is happy because Aunt Lan will not break the relationship between father and mother, and she is sad because Aunt Lan wants to leave herself, a smile and a cry are full of reasons, it is so real. Yingzi's words reveal the invisible sadness, not a word of sadness, but let the reader have sad feelings.

On the surface, although it describes the beauty of childhood and is the author's reminiscence of her childhood, fundamentally, its background is sad, carefree and childlike. Yingzi has to grow into a mature and sensible adult under the breakup of life, and childhood ends so quickly and decisively [10]. The company and departure of Xiu Zhen, Xiao Guizi, the thief, Aunt Lan and Songma make Yingzi get love and then lose love. At ten years old, she cannot understand good people and bad people, but she can express her inner thoughts in language. From the language of young Yingzi in the story, readers can get a complex and sad emotional tone.

3.2. Language Analysis of Adult Yingzi

At the age of seventy-six, Lin Haiyin also wrote that her heart, like the heart of seventy-six years ago, held her family and friends tightly in her heart, to the old unchanged. Most of the five stories are described from the perspective of young Yingzi, all of which are Lin Haiyin's memories. Only the last three paragraphs of the book, after Yingzi grew up, are the monologue of the author, Lin Haiyin.

Yingzi has come of age at this time, and her language has become mature and logical, expressing uncertain and simple words such as "don't know" and "can't distinguish" since she was a child, such as "summer has passed, autumn has passed, winter has come again", and "childhood has gone but not returned", writing about the changes of time and the changes of everything in the time tunnel. This is because she experienced the truth of the impermanence of life after a time of separation. She permeates the truth in the language expression and further places the full text in the established emotional tone of sadness. In texts like "But how much I miss the sights and characters of my childhood in the south of Beijing!" and "Let the actual childhood pass, and the spiritual childhood remain forever," the author wishes to remain a child forever. Therefore, Lin Haiyin can perfectly reproduce his childhood with words. In innocence and happiness, Yingzi harvested his childhood, and in parting and sadness, Yingzi completed his transformation [11].

Young Yingzi's experience in the south of Beijing city is the joy of making friends; in the background of these joy plots, the tragic ending of her friends and the sad emotion of the story are particularly prominent, and after the happiness, she feels more sadness, and people can not forget their tragic ending in the story. Adult Lin Haiying is feeling back to the sad feelings of the time. While reading, an instant pulls the reader back to the story of each tragic character, back to the era, reliving the era, and the sad emotional tone permeates the entire reading process.

4. Causes of Tragic Characteristics

4.1. The Inevitability of the Tragic Features in My Memories of Old Beijing

The five stories are all tragedies, which is not a pure coincidence, and it is inevitable to deeply analyze the causes of tragedies. Xiu Zhen, Songma and Aunt Lan, in the face of love and the reality of life, cannot have the power to choose and are at the mercy of etiquette, parents, and husband. They are forced to lose their daughters, forced to give birth to men and support their families, are unable to control their own fate, but can only numb to accept their own suffering. This deeply reveals the role of traditional women in the traditional era, which is only limited to good daughters, good mothers, and good wives, blindly following traditional rites and teachings and having no personality. There is no ego. Moreover, the thief in "Let's Go to the Sea", his tragic encounter and fate also have inevitability. The thief is hated by everyone, but in Lin Haiyin's pen, the thief is not hated by people, but let the reader feel that the thief is a kind, sincere and honest person, and will not believe that he is a thief. When the thief is caught, Yingzi is sad and in tears, and the reader will feel pity and

sympathy for him. The pressure of life and the social reality of the poor people at the bottom of society at that time had problems eating and drinking, so he ended up in such a situation.

The author reflects on the poor and desolate appearance of the old times by describing the miserable experience of the people at the bottom. Under the social background of old China at that time, they could do nothing and could not change the society, so they could only be beaten by society and beat the people at the bottom, which was the inevitable cause of their tragic end, which also became the inevitable cause of the tragic features in the book.

4.2. The Accidental Causes of the Tragic Features in My Memories of Old Beijing

The deep analysis of the cause of the tragedy also has a contingency. Yingzi, as the first protagonist in the book, is the main driving force to promote the development of the story and also becomes the guideline for the tragic trend of the story. Xiu Zhen, Songma, Aunt Lan, the thief and father's story, there is Yingzi's participation. Yingzi is pure, kind and has a childlike innocence. She is willing to help others, coincidences under the success to help Xiu Zhen and Xiao Guizi reunion, and willing to answer questions from strangers. Due to her willingness to help others, she inadvertently contributed to the tragedy. Yingzi did not blindly follow the ethics of the adult world but followed the guidance of the heart [12]. It is precisely because of Yingzi's inner guidance that it promotes the development of the story, aggravates the tragic color of these stories, and makes the tragic ending have accidental causes. Yingzi helps Xiu Zhen and Xiao Guizi recognize each other and lets them set foot on the road to continue to find relatives, resulting in their mother and daughter being two people pressed under the wheel of the tragic end; Because she kindly answers a stranger's question, but let her good friend, the thief, be handcuffed; Because found that father and Aunt Lan shared uncommon feelings, Yinzi worries about hurting her mother, she matches Aunt Lan and uncle Dexian. Eventually, they have feelings and leave home, but Aunt Lan may also fall into another love abyss.

These stories would have ended differently if Yingzi had not been involved in them. Yingzi treated people with a sincere virgin heart but unexpectedly hurt his relatives and friends and also deeply hurt his own tender and sensitive heart [13]. Yingzi's kindness promoted the climax of the tragedy and also made each story become an unforgettable memory in her heart, which achieved the tragic characteristics of this novel.

5. Conclusion

Lin Haiyin is Yingzi, and Yingzi experienced things and things that left indelible memories in Lin Haiyin's heart. The tragic features of *My Memories of Old Beijing* are permeated in the tragic ending of the female characters and the characters of the bottom people and in the sad story language of Yingzi. Under the background of feudal backwardness and Yingzi's intentional and unintentional participation, the tragic ending in the book is inevitable and accidental, and the tragic characteristics must exist in *My Memories of Old Beijing*. The discussion of the tragic features in *My Memories of Old Beijing* is a detailed analysis through a comprehensive perspective, which is different from the single-angle concern and analysis of female fate and the analysis of common emotional implications and can become the direction of further research. Due to the limited space, this paper involves less description of the original story fragments in the book, and there may be insufficient analysis, which needs further research in the future.

Author's contribution

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

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