

ISCKMC 2022**International Scientific Congress «KNOWLEDGE, MAN AND CIVILIZATION»****WOMEN, LOVE AND MARRIAGE IN ZHANG AILING'S WORKS**

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Abstract

The paper examines female characters in the novels of the Chinese writer Zhang Ailing and their attitude to love and marriage, analyzes the value of a woman's life and her position in society. The heroines of Zhang Ailing's works have received a certain Western education, they are familiar with Western culture, and they are people of the new time who strive to survive in accordance with the trends of the times. They struggle to adapt to social change, to the times, and change their own survival behavior as much as possible. Under the strong pressure of modernity, they look for a relatively stable way of life. Even as a storyteller, Zhang Ailing can only silently observe these weaknesses of people in the era of new life, when their lives are full of suffering and struggle. Here the writer shows the sad state of confrontation between man and society. For the most part, the time of events depicted in the works of Zhang Ailing, begins with the fall of the Qing dynasty until the early 1940s, just in the period of transformation of Chinese society, in a period of great unrest, stratification, the era of the replacement of the old regime by a new one. Old and new concepts of marriage and love, which experienced a change of eras, merged together. The works of Zhang Ailing present a true, vivid historical view of marriage and love, as well as an assessment of this picture from the perspective of morality.

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1. Introduction

According to a literary critic Fu Lei, evaluating Zhang Ailing's novels,

Love and marriage are the central theme of the author ... conservatives and the petty bourgeoisie; they all suffer from a nightmare being the problems in the relationship between a man and a woman. In this nightmare it is always damp, muddy, grey, suffocating autumn smelling of rot and with prolonged rains, reminiscent of the atmosphere of the room where a sick person lives before death. There is always dejected state, anxiety, struggle with the last bit of strength, hopelessness. The nightmare has no boundaries; you can't run away from it, nothing to do but endure the torment and difficulties of life. Youth, dreams, hopes are so vulnerable, they are easy to lose (Fu, 1944, p. 62).

Zhang Ailing also said that Love, marriage, birth, old age, illness, death are common phenomena, you can write about them from countless variety of viewpoints and you will never be able to complete them" (Chang, 2015a). She also believed that people in love are simpler, more unsophisticated, and cheeky than if they are at war or participate in a revolution (Chang, 2015b). Without a doubt, Zhang Ailing hoped to reflect an ordinary, real life, a real person, real feelings through the description of marriage, the phenomena of everyday life.

2. Problem Statement

In the history of modern Chinese literature, Zhang Ailing can be named the only writer who has perceived and appreciated the problem of love and marriage in China so broadly and deeply. Being a modern Chinese writer of her time, she gave all her spiritual and physical strength to revealing this topic. She had a certain view of love and marriage. Zhang Ailing's works express the author's view of marriage and love: the unity of sexual relations and love. In the essay "Love" 爱, the writer expressed the ideal of love and the desire for it in even more poetic language:

When you meet the person you wanted to meet for many years among a thousand people in this endless waste of time, neither early nor late, you have no words to say and you just ask quietly: "Oh, are you here too?" (Chang, 2015c).

The writer, having individual understanding of marriage and love, having individual judgment, tells us the tragedy of love of the sad world built by her.

Zhen Bao from the novel "Red Rose and White Rose" 红玫瑰与白玫瑰 is the ideal modern hero of China, who experiences a difficult relationship with four women in his life. The second woman he meets is a mixed-blood rose-girl from England. He truly loves her, but parts with her when thinking that his return to China together with her requires a lot of effort and money and it is not worth it. However, this separation sows a seed of depression in Zhen Bao's soul. After returning to his homeland, he falls in love with the wife of his friend, Wang Shihong's Jiao Rui. Zhen Bao realizes that he is doing wrong, but, in the end, he cannot restrain himself, and they enter into relations. Jiao Rui confesses her sincere love to him, wants to reveal their relationship, but Zhen Bao does not hesitate to part with Jiao Rui being afraid

that his reputation, his job and position in society can suffer. Afterwards, he hastily marries the educated Wang Yanli, who is a good girl, but Zhen Bao considers her to be not womanly enough, he does not love her. Then Zhen Bao starts visiting brothels and beating his wife. Outwardly, Zhen Bao looks cheerful, joyful, but in reality he is endlessly lonely, he suffers. Then when he accidentally sees Jiao Rui, he barely holds back his tears. At the very beginning of the novel, the author ingeniously tells that there are two women in Zhen Bao's life. He says that one is a white rose, the other is a red rose, one is his immaculate wife, and another one is a passionate lover. In fact, a red rose and a white rose are modernity and tradition, dream and reality, feelings and desire, selfishness and altruism. Zhen Bao tosses between these concepts, wants to pay attention to one and not miss the other, weighs the benefits and harms, and still chooses a white rose. The hero, who is born in an ordinary family and is educated abroad, gets acquainted with a new culture, still has an ingrained traditional outlook on life. Having acted traditionally, Zhen Bao thus cripples himself, harms the women who loved him; in return he begins to experience severe torment, which it is impossible to get free from. This story showed that the true nature of a person was shackled by traditional culture, manners and customs of society.

It can be said that Wang Yanli's character is a typical image of a woman who is ready to become dependent on a man and who does not know what to fight for. Even though she is an educated modern woman, she is still influenced by the old ideas of the traditional feudal system. "For improper treatment of a husband, insulting or harming a father-in-law/mother-in-law, for killing a husband by mistake, the wife was severely punished" (Tsypilova, 2015, p. 25). Yanli possesses the standard female virtues defended by traditional feudal-patriarchal society: weakness, stupidity, silence, and submissiveness; she is isolated from all the evil and good in the world. Therefore, despite the fact that the heroine is studying at the university, she still has an inner emptiness. As for her husband Zhen Bao, she loves him for nothing, but simply because the family has chosen him from many men to become her husband. She marries to be married because her husband is her god. Zhen Bao doesn't love her. Initial dissatisfaction with her gradually pushes him to a brothel, where no one requires money to support a family. Yanli does not know what to do to endure Zhen Bao's debauchery and irresponsibility and live her life in solitude and emptiness in vain. Yanli does not know the value of her own existence, and she has no self-awareness at all. She has only a conscious sense of affection, which prevents her from feeling her sadness, numbness and stupidity.

The novel "Blockade" 封锁 is a work with a vivid use of symbols. Due to the fact that the road is blocked, Liu Zongzhen and Wu Cuiyuan, who have never met before, meet in a locked tram and suddenly fall in love with each other. In his youth, Liu Zongzhen, at the behest of his parents and with the help of a matchmaker, marries a beautiful girl who has not even finished elementary school. After the wedding, they are not interested in communicating, they are thinking of a divorce, but a child is born, he wants to take a concubine, but cannot afford it. Liu Zongzhen has never experienced the happiness of love. Wu Cuiyuan is an English teacher; she feels that this world keeps her from breathing. It is amazing that these two people meet by chance in a temporarily locked tram, in a place isolated from the rest of the world, they tell each other the innermost and fall in love with each other. However, this was a short-lived paradise, the road is opened, Liu Zongzhen immediately leaves Wu Cuiyuan and takes his sit. Wu Cuiyuan does not say a word either. The locked tram is a real space specially created by the author for the

characters to cut them off from reality. Here, Liu Zongzhen tells the truth, reveals his feelings, becomes a real person. As soon as the tram continues on its way, they return to the dirty reality of a decaying culture. They need to play the roles of a good husband and a good daughter, which are in accordance with traditional views, and put on a mask that covers their inner nature. Real society starts rotting and forces people to wear masks. The value of Liu Zongzhen's and Zhen Bao's lives is not only destroyed by the power of the ignorant, backward, conservative society, but is also stifled by their own traditional moral views.

In this rich and luxurious world, people revolve around desires and money; they openly covet and worship wealth. It is impossible to resist the attractive power of money, they spoil human nature. In the novel "The Indulgence" 留情, the heroine Chunyu Dun, after the death of her husband, marries the capitalist Mr. Zhu, who is several years older. She does not love him, sometimes even hates him. The heroine Cao Qiqiao from the novel "Golden Castle" 金锁记 is the wife of a man who looks like a corpse, so she directs her unused love to her brother-in-law Ji Ze, who is educated and free from stiff politeness. However, Ji Ze prefers not to have any relations with relatives. Ten years later, Cao Qiqiao begins to live separately, Ji Ze comes to her and tells her about his feelings, Cao Qiqiao is delighted, but as soon as money is mentioned, she immediately thinks that he wants her money. All her thoughts switch to this idea, she becomes furious, screams hysterically, and as a result, she finally loses a haven for her feelings. "For the sake of money, she waits in deep anguish, envies the wives of her brothers, quarrels with her elder brother and his wife. Because of money, she shouts to her brother-in-law, "Why am I worse than others, what is wrong with me?" For the sake of money, ten years later, she voluntarily makes her last hope of finding love burst like a bubble" (Fu, 1944, p. 58).

The heroines from the novel "Waiting" 等 also have sad fates: they continue to complain about the insensitivity of their husbands, but worry about them all day, waiting, being afraid that their husbands might abandon them, because their husbands are their only support in their life. Thus, the lives destroy and die one after another in this numb and hopeless waiting. However, this expectation still cannot replace the slightest manifestation of love on the part of the husband. This is the sad fate of those women who are deprived of self-consciousness and are ready to be subordinate to their husband. "If she is called, she must immediately come to the call; if she is ordered to leave, she must leave immediately" (Kupriyanova, 2016, p. 126).

Wang Yanli considers hopeless waiting to be the only goal in life and never thinks of resistance, while Feng Biluo from the novel "Fragrance of Jasmine" 茉莉香片 faces resistance for the sake of her own happiness. Before her marriage, Biluo falls in love with Yang Zie. Faced with family pressure, she does not obey at first, and even makes a bold move: she takes the initiative to meet Yan Ziye, hoping that their love and courage can change fate. But when the young and energetic Yan Zie wants to leave with her, Biluo backs down and locks herself in the secular cage of feudal society. Faced with a loveless marriage, Biluo eventually perishes. "She is not a bird in a cage. The caged bird will fly out as soon as the cage is opened. She is a bird embroidered on a screen, a white bird woven in the clouds on a musty purple satin screen. Years and months pass, the feathers on the screen become dark, moldy, musty, dead" (Chang, 2015d). Zhang Ailing uses the bird embroidered on the screen as a metaphor for the suffocation

of life force, revealing the inner cause of her tragedy being the lack of sufficient self-awareness and the spirit of resistance.

Zhang Ailing's works also show another sadness of women's lives, from struggle to destruction. Ge Weilong from the novel "The First Flavor" 沉香屑——第一炉香 is first introduced to a reader as a student who comes to Hong Kong from Shanghai for two years to study and does not lose her innocence and kindness. She comes to the house of her aunt, a wealthy widow, just to get a little financial support to complete her studies. She stubbornly clings to the opportunity to find true love for herself, but it is this stubbornness that pushes her into a sad plight when she loses her self-esteem falling in love with a roué. From that moment on, she is doomed to her inevitable sad fate. For the sake of this desperate love, Weilong voluntarily enters the abyss of destruction: "I sold my whole personality to my aunt and Qiao Qi, and was busy all day earning money for Lady Liang" (Chang, 2015d).

Bai Lusu from "Love in Fallen City" 倾城之恋 is another typical character who puts up short-term resistance but is forced to succumb to the traditional feudal patriarchy. Bai Lusu is a modern woman influenced by Western education. Despite being born in a corrupt and declining feudal family, Lusu is filled with the fresh and vibrant vitality of modern women. As for her failed marriage, she fights bravely against patriarchal society: she divorces her husband and never gives up a free choice of a spouse and remarriage. The purpose of marriage is only one: to seek stable and reliable financial protection. Fan Liuyuan loves her, but the question is whether she loves him. As Zhang Ailing once said, for most women love means to be loved. Although Luce has a deep desire to return to the true nature of a woman, she still needs to give up the pursuit of her own worth and seek a livelihood by "being loved". Bai Liu's resistance is also weak and incomplete. Her obedience is the result of her submission to the external environment, and of being a conscious, but not voluntary vassal of Fan Liuyuan depending on him not only economically, but also psychologically. Whether it is a wife or a lover, gain or loss, Luce's fate is sad, and it is the deep sadness of a woman after losing the value of an independent life.

On the one hand, the positive outcome in the novel "Love in a Fallen City" suggests that the writer may have been influenced by a happy ending, often found in the tragedies of Chinese novels, and that the author, intentionally or not, reveal her inability to break away from the psychology of national culture. On the other hand, there is a hidden meaning, an allegory in the work of Zhang Ailing. The love of a man and a woman is a complex, multifaceted, diverse phenomenon. Love and marriage connect the natural essence of man and the nature of society, they are a complex of relations of all living things and social relations, physiological and psychological factors, love and marriage are a measure of the culture of society and the level of moral education. Zhang Ailing's novels show a sad world in kinship, marriage and love relationships, love turns into a desert where truth, kindness and beauty are lost and only lies, anger and meanness remain.

3. Research Questions

In this paper, we analyse Zhang Ailing's attitude to love and marriage through the lens of her works.

4. Purpose of the Study

This work examines the main female images in the works of Zhang Ailing, and the author's attitude to love and marriage through these images.

5. Research Methods

This work uses descriptive and cultural-historical methods.

6. Findings

Zhang Ailing's judgments about the value of human life are mainly devoted to women and represent an understanding of their tragic fate and the loss of women's lives value. Depicting the sad fate of women, Zhang Ailing not only shows the various tragic circumstances of life when a woman loses self-esteem, but also reveals the external conditions and internal causes of losing women's self-esteem. A sad and despondent style permeates Zhang Ailing's works about the tragic fate of women, when women are full of desire to return to themselves and become real women in order to live freely. In the works of Zhang Ailing, we find images of traditional Chinese women, in contrast to Wang Anya, a writer describing a modern Chinese woman, the exact opposite of the traditional type of Chinese woman *xian qi liang mu* 贤妻良母 (a virtuous wife and good mother) (Kupriyanova, 2015, p. 129).

7. Conclusion

Zhang Ailing presents a grotesque and absurd social view of contemporary China. In her novels, the writer, firstly, expresses her desire for truth, kindness and beauty through the description of hypocritical, vile, low kinship, family, love relationships, and, secondly, tries to find the value of her novels by freeing her characters of basic internal moral values. "In Chinese traditional aesthetics, it is said that "technique and skill are close to truth, morality, and ethics", in fact, there is a border. It can transcend time and space, as well as the limits of objectivity, and enhance the holistic observation of human life" (Min & Dang, 1997). This enables to raise the sad world of Zhang Ailing to the highest philosophical level.

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