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# Revisiting the “Chinese Nora”

*An Intertextual and Narratological Comparison  
Between A Doll’s House and “Regret for the Past”*

By Liu, Zirui

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## Abstract

This thesis, “Revisiting the ‘Chinese Nora’: An Intertextual and Narratological Comparison between *A Doll’s House* and ‘Regret for the Past’”, is the very first master-thesis-long work on the comparison between *A Doll’s House* and “Regret for the Past” in both academic fields of Ibsen Studies and Lu Xun Studies. It starts with an inspection of the intertextuality between the texts and between the texts’ context and moves to analysis, interpretation, and comparison of the structures of the texts from the theoretical lens of narratology. Besides the theory of intertextuality and narrative theory, the thesis conducts a detailed close reading of the texts by which the texts are compared. And the analysis and comparison land on the statement that the two texts, and their female protagonists Nora and the “Chinese Nora” are semantically similar but syntactically much different. And finally, by managing to perform an academic dialogue with both theoretical and analytical works in literary studies, this thesis fills a research gap where a thorough intertextual and structural comparison of *A Doll’s House* and “Regret for the Past” has never been made before.

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## 0 Introduction

### 0.1 Introduction

Who is the Chinese Nora? Why is she the Chinese Nora? And how can she be both Chinese and Nora? The writer of “Regret for the Past”<sup>1</sup>, Lu Xun, gave a speech on “What Happens after Nora’s Leaving” 7 months and 21 days after the first Ibsen performance in China<sup>2</sup>, in the Peking Normal College for Women (PNCW). The first Chinese Ibsen performance was *Nuola* (Nora), based on a translation of *A Doll’s House* by Pan Jiayun and the actresses of the performance were from PNCW.<sup>3</sup> Two years later, Lu Xun wrote a short story titled “Regret for the Past”.

The short story depicts a young couple’s romantic relationship from its seemingly promising beginning to its tragic end, during the May Fourth Movement. Their relationship starts with the male protagonist Juan Sheng’s preaching of women’s emancipation by introducing *A Doll’s House* and Nora where the female protagonist Zi Jun decides to leave her family to love freely but ends up with a break-up and the death of the female protagonist. As put by He Chengzhou, “the story is concerned with the fate of a Chinese Nora” in the social, historical, and cultural context of China in the Republican Era.<sup>4</sup>

The two texts *A Doll’s House* and “Regret for the Past” is deeply connected, so as the two female protagonists Nora and Zi Jun the so-called “Chinese Nora”. This thesis intends to answer the research question of how *A Doll’s House* and “Regret for the Past” connect with and probably more importantly differentiate from each other, by reflecting on the notion of “Chinese Nora”.

### 0.2 Literature Review

He is not the only scholar who refers to Zi Jun as the “Chinese Nora”. According to China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI), there are at least 848 Chinese research essays that use the term “Chinese Nora” from the year 1980 until today. And

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<sup>1</sup> The outline of “Regret for the Past” written by me is in the Appendix of this thesis.

<sup>2</sup> See in Xia Liyang’s “The Silent Noras: Women of the First Chinese Performance of *A Doll’s House*”.

<sup>3</sup> Xia, 2021, 220.

<sup>4</sup> He, *Henrik Ibsen and Chinese Modern Drama*, 14.

among them, the quantity of essays that connect Zi Jun with “Chinese Nora” is at least 184. But in most of the essays, the claim that Zi Jun is the “Chinese Nora” is taken for granted and the claim is not being examined thoroughly.<sup>5</sup> This notion that Zi Jun is the “Chinese Nora” is problematic and over-generalized because it neglects the fact that there are much more differences than similarities between Zi Jun and Nora. Nora has a very powerful voice in the text, but Zi Jun’s voice is weak, Nora is psychologically closer to the narrator of *A Doll’s House*, but Zi Jun is more distant from the narrator- Juan Sheng of “Regret for the Past”, Nora and Zi Jun are very much differently focalized in the texts, to name a few differences between them pointed out in this thesis.

Perhaps the only similarity between the two female protagonists is that they both try to fight for their rights. The term “Chinese Nora” conveys more illusion about Zi Jun than gives an accurate summary of her characteristics. However, there are still a lot of Chinese scholars who consider the Ibsen-influenced home-leaving female protagonist of “Regret for the Past” as the “Chinese Nora”. Among all these essays, a selected number of them will be reviewed in this literature review to further elaborate on how “Regret for the Past” relates to *A Doll’s House* in the area of both Ibsen Studies and Lu Xun Studies, and how the notion that Zi Jun is the “Chinese Nora” is presented and discussed without enough reflection, in the Chinese scholarship. The goal of this review is to argue the necessity of a thorough comparison between the two texts, with the stress on an examination of the construct that Zi Jun is the “Chinese Nora”. Other literature will be reviewed in the rest part of the thesis where and when it is relevant.

Liu Huan claims that “Regret for the Past” was written under the influence of *A Doll’s House*<sup>6</sup> while Liu Yu claims that the reflection of Nora is everywhere in “Regret for the Past”.<sup>7</sup> Wang Yanwei argues that Lu Xun was deeply influenced by Ibsen because *A Doll’s House* was popular in the country when Lu Xun studied abroad in Japan, and he mentioned Ibsen in several of his essays.<sup>8</sup> Liu Yao argues that compared to the Nora-like Zi Jun, the female protagonist Juan Sheng demonstrates more

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<sup>5</sup> This point of mine would be further elaborated in the literature review part of this introduction.

<sup>6</sup> Liu Huan, “Nuola yu Zi Jun baituo wanou diwei de kangzheng”, 31.

<sup>7</sup> Liu Yu, “Nuola Zou Hou Zenyang”, 213.

<sup>8</sup> Wang, “Wanou Zhi Jia yu Shangshi zhi bijiao yanjiu”, 142.

“Noranness” in his characteristic because he, like Nora, gives up the gender-based romantic relationship for his existence.<sup>9</sup> Those claims demonstrate the profound connection and similarity between the two texts and their protagonist while the differences, which is as vital as similarity if not more, between them are not being paid enough attention to.

Liu Jing argues that even though Zi Jun and Juan Sheng both are intellectuals influenced by the May Fourth Movement, Zi Jun still lacks modernity essentially.<sup>10</sup> Peng Haiyan argues that the freedom Zi Jun pursuits is merely the freedom of love and marriage, she has no idea what an independent human is like at all.<sup>11</sup> Guo Qingjie also argues that “deep down Zi Jun doesn’t get rid of traditional morality. [...] She is still deeply trapped by tradition”.<sup>12</sup> One difference between Nora and Zi Jun is that Zi Jun fights the tradition that traps her only to love freely while Nora leaves her family, which is the symbol of 19-century Bourgeois values, to fulfill her ability to train herself into an independent human being. However, because the image of Zi Jun is characterized by and only by Juan Sheng’s narration, the question that to what extent the image is consistent with the authentic Zi Jun is worth asking.

Ren Youqin and Ma Min argue in their essays separately that the relationship of Juan Sheng and Zi Jun conforms to the pattern of instructor/instructed. Ren claims that Juan Sheng “constantly extends the problems of women liberation to the discourse of nation [revolution]”,<sup>13</sup> and in his narration, Zi Jun is either “docile and compliant”<sup>14</sup> or totally “in silence”.<sup>15</sup> Ma argues that the pattern of instructor/instructed in “Regret for the Past” is the reflection of the “modern Chinese women liberation movement”.<sup>16</sup> Juan Sheng as the instructor and Zi Jun as the instructed, are both “confused about the signified of the word ‘new woman’”.<sup>17</sup>

Ren Youqin, Jia Zhenyong, Guo Qingjie, and Wang Yanwei point out that Zi Jun

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<sup>9</sup> Liu Yao, “Xianshi zhuyi de bianjie”.

<sup>10</sup> Liu Jing, “Wanou Zhi Jia he Shangshi de bijiao”, 49.

<sup>11</sup> Peng, “Nvxing zhuyi xia de funv mingyun guanzhao”, 81.

<sup>12</sup> Guo Qingjie, “Nvxing beiju zhihou de jueze”, 117.

<sup>13</sup> Ren, “Minzu xushi yu yiwang de zhengzhi”, 213.

<sup>14</sup> Ren, 214.

<sup>15</sup> Ren, 217.

<sup>16</sup> Ma, “Lu Xun Shangshi de xin jiedu”, 123.

<sup>17</sup> Ma, 120.

is silent in the story. Ren argues that “Zi Jun’s silence is the consequence of the way the writer constructed the text, i.e., male-centered”.<sup>18</sup> Jia also argues that Juan Sheng demonstrates the “hegemony of male-centered culture”<sup>19</sup> and the female seen as the vulnerable is characterized as “the Other without its essence” whose characteristic is covered by the value of universalism.<sup>20</sup> Wang argues that Zi Jun “is deprived of the right of speech, [...], readers are only able to construct the character by Juan Sheng’s narration”.<sup>21</sup> As claimed by Wang, the reason why Zi Jun is silent throughout the whole story is that the character is merely is constructed by Juan Sheng’s narration. In other words, the authentic Zi Jun is lost from Juan Sheng’s narration, the Zi Jun we can study is and only is the Zi Jun constructed, if not distorted, by Juan Sheng’s narration.

### 0.3 Methodology

The preceding literature review demonstrates the necessity for a thorough comparison between the two texts because the claim that Zi Jun is “Chinese Nora” is too simple to cover the complex relationship between Zi Jun and Nora, “Regret for the Past” and *A Doll’s House*. But this is not enough to start the textual analysis, one important theoretical question is still not answered. Can *A Doll’s House* and “Regret for the Past” even be compared? Above all, *A Doll’s House* is a drama, and “Regret for the Past” is a short story. Are these two genres even comparable? The answer is yes. And I propose two reasons that the drama *A Doll’s House* is comparable to the short story “Regret for the Past”. First are the apparent textual and contextual connections between the two texts, the interrelationship between *A Doll’s House* and “Regret for the Past”, and their social, cultural, and historical background, which I refer to as *intertextuality*<sup>22</sup>. Second is the shared narrativity of the two texts.

It is correct that the two texts have different genres. But they are both narratives. And the play *A Doll’s House* is read as a dramatic text while being aware of the potential

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<sup>18</sup> Ren, “Minzu xushi yu yiwang de zhengzhi”, 217.

<sup>19</sup> Jia, “Nuola chuzou: xiandaixing de nvxing Shenhua”, 25.

<sup>20</sup> Jia, 26.

<sup>21</sup> Wang, “Wanou Zhi Jia yu Shangshi zhi bijiao yanjiu”, 143.

<sup>22</sup> The definition of intertextuality, and the justification of the intertextuality theory will be presented in the introduction of Part One: Intertextuality in this thesis.



performances suggested by the text, so the problem if the mimetic<sup>23</sup> elements of the drama can be interpreted as narrative elements is not concerned in my study. Rather, what is researched in this thesis are the diegetic elements of the dramatic text, dialogues, stage directions, etc.

Roy Sommer claims in Section “Drama and Narrative” in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory* that key terms and core concepts such as character, protagonist, closure, etc. are used in the analysis of both dramas and novels, and this suggests apparently that overlaps exist among different modes of storytelling.<sup>24</sup> And besides this to an extent vague statement, narratologist Seymour Chatman lays a foundation of a narratological study of drama in his canonical work *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film*, and later *Coming to Terms: The Rhetoric of Narrative in Fiction and Film*. Chatman argues that “genres are constructs or composites of features”,<sup>25</sup> novel and dramas may not always utilize the same features of storytelling, but all fictional works share some generic features.<sup>26</sup> He later claims more explicitly that dramas and novels are fundamentally narratives that share narrative features like temporal structures, a set of characters, and a setting.<sup>27</sup> The structural similarities between novels and dramas and other genres of fictional works are more important than the varieties of how the works are mediated, no matter whether the work is mediated by performance or written text.<sup>28</sup>

To Conclude, drama and novels, and of course, short stories are all narratives that share narrativity, and the shared narrativity provides the foundation of a narratological comparison between dramas and other text types, in this case, between the drama *A Doll's House* and the short story “Regret for the Past”.

The thesis in general is a close reading of the texts *A Doll's House* and “Regret

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<sup>23</sup> Mimesis in the sense of narratological terminology, the performing/showing of an action.

<sup>24</sup> Sommer, “Drama and Narrative” in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory*, ed. David Herman, Manfred Jahn, and Marie-Laure Ryan, 122.

<sup>25</sup> Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 18.

<sup>26</sup> Chatman, 18.

<sup>27</sup> Chatman, *Coming to Terms*, 117.

<sup>28</sup> Chatman, 117. Narratologist Manfred Jahn develops Chatman’s theory of the narrativity of drama in his essay “Narrative Voice and Agency in Drama: Aspects of a Narratology of Drama” and argues the existence of the narrating agency, i.e., the narrator in drama which provides the theoretical grounding of my analysis of the narrator of *A Doll's House*. Jahn’s contribution to the narratology of drama will be further elaborated in the Part Narrative, especially the Chapter Narrator.

for the Past” and the reading is conducted by a comparative method. The close reading is to an extent in a deconstruction sense<sup>29</sup>. As claimed by Barbara Johnson, a deconstruction reading is not a reading proceeded by “random doubt or arbitrary subversion, but by the careful teasing out of warring forces of signification within the text itself”.<sup>30</sup> Nevertheless, while Johnson stresses the deconstruction analysis is refined to the signification within the text, her method is adopted and adapted in my reading without neglecting the contexts and the intertextual relationship of the texts. And as a comparative study, my research is not refined either in the paradigm of the so-called “French School” or “American School”<sup>31</sup>. In Part Intertextuality, I claim that the motif of woman emancipation and the motif of the model instructor/instructed of “Regret for the Past” are from Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House*, which is like comparatist Paul Van Tieghem’s work in *La littérature comparée*<sup>32</sup> but without the nationalistic prejudice. And in Part Narrative, my method is to an extent closer to the method of “American School” comparatists where I focus more on the textual analysis of the texts *A Doll’s House* and “Regret for the Past”.

#### 0.4 Overview

To answer my research question about how *A Doll’s House* and “Regret for the Past” connect with and differentiate from each other, I look at both semantic(intertextual) and syntactic(narrative) connections and differences between the two texts and claim that the two texts are semantically deeply connected but syntactically much different. By “semantics” I mean the textual and contextual connections of the two texts, the intertextuality. And by “syntactics”, I mean the narrative structures of the texts, from the perspective of narratology. The thesis is thus structured in two parts. The first part is Intertextuality, and the second part is Narrative.

The first part of the thesis provides an analysis of the intertextuality between the

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<sup>29</sup> It is then not the same as the close reading methods promoted by either I. A. Richards or New Criticism scholars.

<sup>30</sup> John, *The Critical Difference*, 5.

<sup>31</sup> For the introduction of the schools, see in Oindri Roy’s “Bridging the Gaps: Towards a New Paradigmatic Interface of Translation Studies and Comparative Literature”, in *Journal of Comparative Literature and Aesthetics*, Vol. 44, Issue 1, page 45.

<sup>32</sup> See in F. G. Healey’s review to the book in *The Modern Language Review*, Vol. 54, No. 4, page 609-10.

two texts *A Doll's House* and “Regret for the Past” and their contexts, demonstrating and analyzing how the two texts are connected, how they communicate with each other, and apart from which, how the social, cultural, historical contexts of the texts are related and how their dialogue with each other is performed. In the first part, I claim that the intertextuality analyzed can be framed in a module which I call the “instructor/instructed”. And the module has multiple levels. Juan Sheng is the instructor while Zi Jun is the instructed in “Regret for the Past”, and Thorvald is the instructor while Nora is the instructed in *A Doll's House*. And the allusions in “Regret for the Past” that signify Ibsen and his *A Doll's House*, among other works, also reveal that there is a relationship of instructor/instructed between Ibsen and the couple of Zi Jun and Juan Sheng, and between the West and China. Plus, from the perspective of the contexts, the relationship of the instructing West and the instructed China is also a crucial part of the contexts.

The instructed/instructor module is a crucial part of the intertextuality between *A Doll's House* and “Regret for the Past”, and a vital characteristic of the instructed/instructor module is its inequality. The inequality is multi-layered. It is between the genders, between the male characters who are the instructors and the female characters who are the instructed. And it is also between the nations, the cultures, the colonizer, and the semi-colonized China. My analysis in the first part is therefore conducted from the theoretical length of both gender theory and post-colonial theory.

In short, the first part of my thesis gives an intertextual analysis of the genealogy of the complex connection between *A Doll's House* and “Regret for the Past”. And by such analysis, I conclude that Zi Jun is semantically the “Chinese Nora”. The conclusion is simple enough though, the purpose of my analysis is not simply reaching the statement but to reveal and inspect the complicated intertextuality which has been long neglected by the Chinese scholars, where they merely presuppose that there is intertextuality by claiming that Zi Jun is the Chinese Nora.

Similarly, the second part of the thesis claims that syntactically the two texts *A Doll's House* and “Regret for the Past”, and the two female protagonists of the text, Nora and Zi Jun, though deeply and complexly connected, are much different to each

other. The significance of the second part is more the analysis of the differences, from the perspective of narratology than the plain conclusion. The analysis focuses on the structures of the narrative and narrator of the two texts, the second part of the thesis, therefore, consists of two chapters respectively, the Narrative, and the Narrator. And each chapter is constituted of two sections. There are Section Conflict and Closure and Section Causation and Constituent Events in Chapter Narrative. And in Chapter Narrator, there are Section Voice and Focalisation and Section Distance and Reliability. The analysis is conducted accordingly.

In Section Conflict and Closure, I analyze the conflicts and closures of the two texts. The major conflict of *A Doll's House* only involves the male and female protagonists, but the two major conflicts of "Regret for the Past" involve varied agencies. In the first one, the conflict is between the norms of the community and the couple of Juan Sheng and Zi Jun, but in the second one, it is between Juan Sheng and Zi Jun, which is like the conflict structure of *A Doll's House*. The similarity is that in the closures between the male and female protagonists in both texts, the male protagonists both act as spokesmen of the norms while the female protagonists insist on novel ethics of gender and love. And the endings of the female protagonists in the closures of the two texts are almost opposite. Nora ends with a bright hope that she would probably integrate into the society, in the closure of her story. But in the two closures of "Regret for the Past", corresponding to the two conflicts, the plot of Zi Jun starts with a trajectory of ascent but then a drastic descent. And in the section on causations and constituent events, on the one hand, the analysis of causations of the two narratives reveals that "Regret for the Past" can be interpreted as the after story of *A Doll's House* because the causal chain of the latter logically precedes the causal chain of the former. But the constituent events of the two narratives on the other hand vary a lot. By a semiotic analysis of the events, I claim that Nora's story starts with a process of degradation which is later intervened by an ally, and it ends with an obtained melioration; but the Zi Jun's story, however, starts with an obtained amelioration where the ally later turns into an adversary, and it ends with a received degradation.

In the first section of Chapter Narrator, the Section Voice and Focalisation, my

analysis is conducted through a quantitative approach. The quantity of a character's voice is defined as the number of times that the character speaks. And the quantity of focalizations on a character is defined by the times the character is perceived. The definitions allow me to undertake quantitative research on the numbers of voices and focalizations in the two narratives, and thus to compare the narratives in visualized and more importantly, explicit, and accurate way. My quantitative study on the numbers of voice and focalizations of the narratives demonstrates clearly that Nora's voice takes up 45% of all the voice in *A Doll's House*, while Zi Jun's voice occupies only 4% in "Regret for the Past". The difference is distinct. And the quantitative difference of the focalizations in the narratives is similar. The number of narrator's focalizations on Nora is almost two times the number of focalizations on the "Chinese Nora". The obvious difference reveals the varied powerfulness of the two female protagonists, Nora is powerful and Zi Jun is powerless. And what is more, it leads to demonstrates the different characteristics of the narrator, from the perspective of distance and reliability.

The Section Distance and (Un)reliability claims that the lack of focalizations on Zi Jun and the lack of the female protagonist's voice represents that in "Regret for the Past" the narrator is psychologically distant from Zi Jun. But the psychological distance between the narrator of *A Doll's House* and Nora is rather close. And because the narrator-Juan Sheng is distant from the "Chinese Nora" narrated by him, his narration, especially his narration of Zi Jun, is thus unreliable.

With all the differences covered by the intertextuality being uncovered by the structural analysis on voice, focalization, distance, and reliability in the second part of my thesis, the claim that the Zi Jun the so-called "Chinese Nora", "Regret for the Past" and *A Doll's House* are syntactically much varied is almost self-evident. On the one hand, the differences in their voice and focalizations show that Nora is powerful in the narrative and the "Chinese Nora" is not. And on the other hand, the narrator of "Regret for the Past" is unreliable and distant from his female protagonist while the narrator of *A Doll's House* is reliable and close to its female protagonist.

## 1 Part One: Intertextuality

### 1.1 Introduction

Despite that *Zijun* is not simply a Chinese version of *Nora* and that there are lots of differences between “Regret for the Past” and *A Doll’s House*, the connection, or *intertextuality* between the two works is obvious and worth studying. This part will demonstrate and dissect the intertextuality based on an analyze mainly to the pattern of instructor/instructed as shared motif of both texts and relationship between the two texts and the contexts behind the texts.

As claimed by Marta Kaźmierczak and William Irwin, the terminology of intertextuality is applied differently by varied scholars<sup>33</sup> and among the users of the term intertextuality, some scholars are faithful to Kristeva’s original definition while at the same time some simply use it as a vogueish way to talk about influence and allusion.<sup>34</sup> Therefore, to define the term intertextuality used in this article and to clarify my methodological framework is opportune and prerequisite.

Julia Kristeva coined the term intertextuality and derived it from Mikhail Bakhtin’s dialogism and claimed that a literary text is both a dialogue between the writer and the reader and a dialogue with the whole culture of the previous, the contemporary and the future.<sup>35</sup> After her invention of the term, American scholar Michael Riffaterre developed her theory of intertextuality<sup>36</sup> and claims that literary texts rely on ad hoc linkages, which is defined by intertextuality – a structured network of text-generated constraints on the reader's perception, from sign-system to sign-system to carry meaning.<sup>37</sup>

In this thesis, the term *intertextuality* emphasizes two levels of the complex relationship of the two texts and their contexts, *A Doll’s House*, and “Regret for the Past”. Firstly, in the level of textual interrelationship, the term intertextuality suggests both the apparent connections between the texts both in the level of discourse and the

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<sup>33</sup>Kaźmierczak, "Intertextuality as Translation Problem: Explicitness, Recognisability and the Case of “Literatures of Smaller Nations””, 364.

<sup>34</sup> Irwin, "Against Intertextuality", 227-8.

<sup>35</sup> Kristeva, *Desire in Language*, 64—91.

<sup>36</sup> Kristeva, “'Nous Deux' or a (Hi)Story of Intertextuality”, 7—13.

<sup>37</sup> Riffaterre, "Intertextuality vs. Hypertextuality", 779—88.

level of story, such as the allusions in “Regret for the Past” that directly signify *A Doll’s House* and Henrik Ibsen, and the implicit but shared motifs of both texts such as the important, if not vital, module of instructor and instructed which is revealed and analysed with an emphasize in this thesis, particularly this part. For the allusions, “literary writing has, almost always and almost everywhere, according to diverse fashions and across very diverse ages, lent itself to this transcendent reading”,<sup>38</sup> the signs like “Yi Bo Sheng [Ibsen]”, “Wan Ou Zhi Jia [A Doll’s House]” in “Regret for the Past” not only point to the signifiers of the signs, Lu Xun’s writing of “Regret for the Past” is also to both redefine and transcend the limitation of the signs’ signified. This is the intertextuality I try to reveal and discuss in this thesis, the interrelation where both parties involved relate to each other, limited by each other and trying to transcend each other simultaneously. For the module of instructor and instructed, my thesis focuses on the structural relations between the texts by answering the question how the texts are constructed based on this vital motif.<sup>39</sup>

Secondly, in the level of context relationship, the term intertextuality also implies the connection between the social, historical, and cultural connection between the contexts of the two texts. Concerning the context, my study on the intertextuality explains how Lu Xun engages with Ibsen and Western ideas in the 1920s China when most Chinese intellectuals borrowed Western ideology without thorough inspection on if they fit in the Chinese context. To further elaborate how the borrowed Western ideas were used in Chinese social movement, indicating the difference between directly borrowing and applying with reflections is important, the latter of which is what Lu Xun did when engaging with Ibsen’s feminism ideology in *A Doll’s House*. The intertextuality here is the way that Chinese intellectuals have managed to come to terms with the weight of the Western culture. What is more, reflecting on the instructing West and the instructed China discloses the largely unbalanced power relationship between the West and China in the semicolonial China. Thus, post-colonial study on the

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<sup>38</sup> Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 174.

<sup>39</sup> Norman Fairclough defines the structural intertextuality as constitutive intertextuality, which “signifies the interrelationship of discursive features in a text, such as structure, form, or genre” (117).

intertextual relation is required. My definition and discussion of the semicolonial China in the first half of 19<sup>th</sup> century, especially its literary works, follows the study of Shu-Mei Shih. The term semicolonialism depicts “the cultural and political condition in modern China to foreground the multiple, layered, intensified, as well as incomplete and fragmentary nature of China’s colonial structure”.<sup>40</sup>

From the definition of intertextuality, the application of this theory to the comparative study between *A Doll’s House* and “Regret for the Past” is sufficient and indispensable. And the research of the intertextuality in this first part of the thesis, is refined to the intertextuality between the two texts, and between the two social and historical contexts of the two texts. Firstly, from the previous studies of the texts, which consider the latter’s protagonist as a Chinese version of the previous’, and the latter’s direct and explicit allusion of Ibsen, namely, *A Doll’s House* and *Lady from the Sea*, the linkage or dialogue between the texts is certain. While the dialogue not only contributes largely to the meaning construction of “Regret for the Past” but also heavily influences our reading of *A Doll’s House*, a systemic intertextuality study between the texts surprisingly scant. Secondly, a vital part of Kristeva’s intertextuality theory is the writer’s abstract participation in the history through the practice of one signifying structure to another one. “Society and history are not elements external to textuality, to be brought to bear in interpretation. Rather, society and history are themselves text, and so are already and unavoidably inside the textual system [where all texts are connected]”.<sup>41</sup> On the one hand, even though Ibsen denied that he had written the play consciously for the women’s right movement, *A Doll’s House*’s engagement to the Norwegian campaign for the liberation of women is without question.<sup>42</sup> On the other hand, “Regret for the Past”, as Lu Xun’s only piece of love story among his plenty of literary works, is considered to have a motif of reflection to the Chinese women liberation campaign during the New Culture Revolution which was portrayed to be led by the male writer among others. In general, the two crucial perspectives of

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<sup>40</sup> Shih, *The Lure of the Modern*, 34.

<sup>41</sup> Irwin, "Against Intertextuality", 229.

<sup>42</sup> Templeton, “the Doll House Backlash” in *Ibsen’s Women*, 110-27.



intertextuality theory—its concern to the meaning-generating relevancies between texts and the model for political and social action and change provided by the reading of intertextuality—are employed in my detailed comparative study of the two texts in question.

However, there are concerns to the potential excessive interest in intertextuality. For example, while agrees that intertextuality, or “parody” (her term), to some extent “is indeed in the eye of beholder”,<sup>43</sup> Linda Hutcheon argues that excessive interest in intertextuality — especially in the theories of Genette and Kristeva – rejects the role of the writer, or in her words, “the addresser of the utterance”.<sup>44</sup> While I concede the general truth of this objection, my decision to stay with the admittedly abused "intertextuality" is to demonstrate my stance of the article: to deconstruct the authorship of the writer and to reconstruct the meaning of the text analysed in this essay from a critical distance and through the length of the theories of intertextuality.

Some scholars, Irwin for example, query the reasonableness of the theory of intertextuality from the perspective of its ontology. And my application of the theory in this study is therefore queried as well. Before moving to the concluding part of this introduction, I proposed an answer to Irwin’s query. The ontology of intertextuality claims that intertextuality denotes a transposition where one or more signifying systems transposes into another or other signifying systems.<sup>45</sup> But according to Irwin, the claim may go too far and leads to the implication that language cannot capture reality and successful communication in both ordinary discourse and literature become impossible.<sup>46</sup> Irwin’s claim is a slippery slope argument, thus a fallacy. It is then not a sufficient query to the reasonableness of intertextuality theory. Besides, the argument of ontology is of little relevance to the analysis conducted in this thesis. And this paper’s exercise of intertextual interpretation is strictly restricted to the analyses between the two texts and their social and political contexts which is beyond the argument of ontology

To close the introductory part of this part, and to defend my exercise of

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<sup>43</sup> Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody*, xvi.

<sup>44</sup> Hutcheon, 23.

<sup>45</sup> Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, trans. Margaret Waller, 59-60.

<sup>46</sup> Irwin, "Against Intertextuality.", 227—42.

intertextual reading, this paragraph gives a further elaboration of how I use the theory in this part. Firstly, the allusions between “Regret for the Past” and *A Doll’s House* are without question. The playwright Yi Bo Sheng – Ibsen in Chinese pinyin — is mentioned twice in the text and his works *Nuo La (A Doll’s House)* and *Hai De Nv Ren (Lady from the Sea)* are mentioned as well, as a symbol of human, especially women, emancipation from the western world. The connections between the texts are certain, and my intertextual study of the connections based both on their textual and cultural perspectives. Secondly, as Hutcheon points out, intertextuality is in the eye of beholders to some extent.<sup>47</sup> My focus of this essay is indeed to provide an intertextual interpretation by me as a beholder. The intertextual reading in this thesis stresses the creativity of the critical production. The analysis focuses not on what the texts tell but on how my reading of the texts reproduces meaning and expands the space of both texts’ field and space of meaning. To borrow Derrida’s expression, the allusions, thus the intertextuality between Ibsen’s canonical work and the “Regret for the Past” mark the “continued life” of *A Doll’s House*.<sup>48</sup> And both Lu Xun’s engagement with *A Doll’s House* and my interpreting of both texts as what Derrida coins as *différance*<sup>49</sup> stress writing, no matter creative or academic, as a free textual exercise that constantly creates both differences and connections. Thirdly, however, the reading is not some random and unfettered thoughts about the text. My interpretation is based on Derrida’s idea of *tracés*<sup>50</sup> of the texts, and the *tracés* here are the intertextuality in both texts. I am aware of the potential danger of a personal reading based on the *tracés*. It may lead to meaningless monologue which takes no part in the bigger dialogue concerning the texts analysed here. Thus, as Derrida accounts, “our reading must be intrinsic and remain

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<sup>47</sup> Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody*, xvi).

<sup>48</sup> Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, xxiii.

<sup>49</sup> The term *différance* is a French coinage deployed by Jacques Derrida firstly in his 1967 work *De la grammatologie*. It is an important concept in Derrida’s philosophy. Derrida defines *différance* as “an economic concept designating the production of differing/deferring (25).” The term is polysemous, referring both to differing and deferring. On the one hand, differing is the differentiation of signs from each other, and it is by differing we differentiate signs from each other. On the other hand, during the process of deferring, the reference from which the signified is referred by the signifier is deferred, signs rather refer to each other. To conclude in a very simplified way, the term *différance* infers that the meaning of language is constructed by the differences of the signs, and language itself is essentially self-referent.

<sup>50</sup> *Tracés* are traces left by writing that “seems to hint an origin (Derrida, et al., 2016, 357).

within the text”,<sup>51</sup> my reading is exercised and presented in a prudent and restrained way as the following text shows. Finally, the stance I take here in the essay is to reveal and criticize the hierarchy power structure between canonical *A Doll’s House* and “derivative” *Regret for the Past*”, between the instructors Thorvald and Juan Sheng and the instructed Nora and Zi Jun, and finally between the West whose idea of women freedom perceived and accepted by the Chinese intellectuals and China whose women emancipation movement applied the borrowed idea. Therefore, I chose to apply the intertextual theories, which reveal the equal relation between formal and later texts, in this part, and why I chose to convey my own voice based on Derrida’s deconstructive terms and expressions.

## 1.2 The Allusions

In general, *A Doll’s House* has had a great influence on modern Chinese literature, ever since it was introduced to China, “it has been associated with the emancipation of Chinese women and has served as a guide for action in life”,<sup>52</sup> especially in marriage and romance relationship. The overt allusions to Ibsen and his works in Lu Xun’s “*Regret for the Past*” and the story itself are evidence to this broad claim. To be accurate, Ibsen and Nora are mentioned twice respectively, and *A Doll’s House* and *Lady from the Sea* are mentioned one time each. These allusions are the most overt intertextuality between the text and are where our intertextual reading of the text begins.

The signified of the signs of Ibsen, *A Doll’s House*, *Lady from the Sea* and Nora are not merely the Norwegian playwright, his works and character in his work. To readers who are familiar with Ibsen and his works, the signs combined reveal themselves as a symbol of the concepts of women liberation and equality between sexes from the Western world in Lu Xun’s short story. In fact, the very first time when the allusions appear in “*Regret for the Past*” is when Juan Sheng recalls his preaching of Western enlightening ideology to Zi Jun. Ibsen’s name is presented as Western preacher of “equality between men and women” like Tagore and Shirly who are also symbols of

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<sup>51</sup> Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 173.

<sup>52</sup> Tam, *Ibsen in China*, 218.

liberation and mentioned together with Ibsen in the story as well. The ideal reader who can observe the intertextuality would immediately discover the motif of the text and its relation to the canonical works. Through the allusions, Lu Xun adapts and compresses the meanings of signs and realises economic of the words, by which he can imply the enlightenment motif of the short story without directly and explicitly stating it. And structures a connection between both his and Ibsen's texts, and the Western and Chinese ideology.

### 1.3 The Instructor and the Instructed

The reason why I pose the module of the instructor and the instructed here is that some scholars, Tam Kwok-Kan for instance, believe that "Ibsen was not able to answer constructively what Nora was going to do in her future"<sup>53</sup> and interpret "Regret for the Past" as Lu Xun's "practical answer to the question he poses: 'What Happens After Nora Leaves Home?'"<sup>54</sup> This reading is of course not wrong, but it neglects a huge part of the whole picture that "Regret for the Past" is far more beyond just a practical answer. It is a creative intertextual reading to and interacting with *A Doll's House*, and a vital part of that interaction is Lu Xun's borrowing and rewriting of the module of the instructor and the instructed between the male and female characters, even between the enlightening West and the enlightened China.

Thus, elaborating my definition of the term before entering my analysis is also important. My term "instructing" here is particularly chosen. The word "instruct" both implies to direct and to enlighten. In the perspective of directing, the term instructing suggests the male characters' forceful will and actions to force the female characters to think and behave as they want in the texts. In the perspective of enlightening, the term instructing suggests the relationship between the male characters and the female characters, the Western and the semicolonial China, where the former trying to or being used to enlighten while the latter being enlightened both in the texts and in the contexts. Even more, the contrast between the active voice "instructing" and the passive voice

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<sup>53</sup> Tam, *Ibsen in China*, 200.

<sup>54</sup> Tam, 227.

“instructed” hint at the unbalanced power relation between the subject, the ones that instruct, and the object, the ones that are being instructed, which I am exposing and criticising in this thesis.

### 1.3.1 The Texts

There are two aspects of my instructor/instructed module. Firstly, it is the most important aspect of the male and female characters’ relationship in both texts – men as the instructor and women as the instructed. Secondly, Ibsen and the Western ideology are also the instructor of women emancipation while Lu Xun and Chinese women liberation movement are instructed by the formers. Thus, the following intertextual reading of the module is divided into two parts accordingly: the first part is a textual analysis to the relationship between the protagonists, and the second part is a historical and cultural analysis to the dialogism between the writers and the social background.

“I will counsel you, and guide you”, claimed by Helmer to Nora in Act III. There is this instructor/instructed relationship between their male and female protagonists in *A Doll’s House* and “Regret for the Past” as a shared motif.

In *A Doll’s House*, Thorvald sees Nora as a child who need to be taken care of by him even though she is already a mother of his three kids. The appellations of Nora given by Helmer demonstrates his attitude towards his wife. In Joan Templeton’s *Ibsen’s Women*, the author points out that “in scene one, the put-upon breadwinner calls his weaker half a ‘lark’ three times, a ‘squirrel’ three times, a ‘featherbrain’ once, and a ‘spendthrift bird’ three times”.<sup>55</sup> And she claims that the appellations demonstrate that in *A Doll’s House*, which is a “parodic, bourgeois version of the pan-cultural ideal of marriage”, Nora is a creature with less intelligence.<sup>56</sup> Templeton stops here but there is still a lot to be told about the appellations in *A Doll’s House*. Based on my statistics of the appellations used by Thorvald during the whole play, the appellations Thorvald uses to refer to Nora (except “you”) can be divided into two different categories: the equal one like “Nora” and the unequal ones like “my song-lark”, “sweet little thing”, “you

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<sup>55</sup> Templeton, *Ibsen’s Women*, 291.

<sup>56</sup> Templeton, 291.

helpless confused little creature” etc. Before their very first exchange on “serious word about serious things” during their eight-years-long marriage, 35 out of 68 (approximately 51.5%) of the appellations used by Helmer are unequal. On the other hand, during and after their exchange, however, about 83.8% (31 out of 37) of the appellations are in equal manner.

Thorvald treats his adult doll wife as if she is a pet or child that belongs to him, Ibsen whips this quintessential power inequality with the couple’s little fight of macaroons at the very beginning of his play. Stephanie Pocock Boeninger claims that Nora’s furtive consuming of macaroons in the first scenes intrigues an audience that someone apparently instructs her eating, and that the macaroon scene is a hint that the relationship is almost totally dictatorial.<sup>57</sup> Despite that Boeninger’s analyses that Thorvald bans macaroons because “the pretty wife he delights in displaying would be considerably devalued by blackened or missing teeth” may be over-interpreted since there is no direct proof that shows Thorvald thinks that way, her claim that the prohibition against candy is pretty much a parental one for a child while it is actually for an adult woman.<sup>58</sup> To Thorvald, Nora is not only his doll child but also his student. According to Templeton, Thorvald is “Nora’s guardian and consultant on everything, even to the proper dancing of the Neapolitan tarantella”.<sup>59</sup> What the famous tarantella scene reveals is that beside their domestic relationship, Thorvald also instructs her doll wife as if she is a student of her. But we are able to know, from Nora’s conversation with Mrs. Linde in the beginning of Act Two, that Nora learned the dance at Carpi. Not from his best knowing husband of course.<sup>60</sup> The intriguing part of the tarantella scene is that it is Nora who invites Thorvald to instruct her and put her right as he used to, but it is also Nora who resists and rejected the instruction by the desire that she must dance faster than Thorvald asks. Here we see the ambivalent character of Nora, on the one hand she is used to Thorvald’s instruction, on the other hand she is driven by the desire to reject it. The ambivalent Nora here forebodes her final leaving at the end of the play.

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<sup>57</sup> Boeninger, "Teacups and Butter: The Importance of Eating in Ibsen’s A Doll’s House and The Wild Duck", 457.

<sup>58</sup> Boeninger, 457

<sup>59</sup> Templeton, *Ibsen’s Women*, 138.

<sup>60</sup> Templeton, 138.

As Thorvald, he doesn't notice his domestic relationship even his wife's life is right at the edge of destruction at all. His only conclusion is that Nora "do really want teaching". He is not able to see the complete Nora who is both ambivalent and complex, what he can only see is a student that belong to him and demand his instruction. The way Thorvald treats Nora, like a parent to a child and a teacher to a student, demonstrates that in their relationship Thorvald is the subject that instructs, and Nora is the object being instructed, i.e., the instructor and the instructed. This is their relationship that I am trying to reveal and criticise here in this part.

Lu Xun's engagement with the instructor/instructed motif focus more on the aspect of teacher and student, and he puts it one step forward in his "Regret for the Past". The teacher Thorvald in *A Doll's House* only teaches his student wife how to perform the Neapolitan tarantella dance while Nora develops her idea of her freedom by her own. But the male protagonist Juan Sheng in "Regret for the Past" teaches, if not indoctrinates, Zi Jun, the so called "Chinese Nora", the idea of women emancipation according to the former's narration. The irony here is more than evident, a man instructs a woman in her own freedom. In Juan Sheng's narrative, Zi Jun is childish and curious when their relationship starts. She is still fettered by the traditional Chinese morals then, according to Juan Sheng. The underlined meaning is that he, the "New Youth" educated by the progressive western ideas, is supposed to educate, instruct, and even rescue the trapped Zi Jun from the unenlightened Chinese culture. Like Thorvald but Juan Sheng goes one step forward, he moves beyond Thorvald's paternalistic instruction and is trying to be enlighten the silent female protagonist. Juan's moving forward is Lu Xun's engagement with the instructor/instructed motif of *A Doll's House* and structure an intertextual dialogism between the texts.

With the same motif, the instructed female characters' reactions to the male characters' instructions are different. As mentioned, Nora on the one hand invites Thorvald's instruction, but on the other hand she also resists the instruction all the time from the beginning to the ending of the play. The very first scene of the play where Nora secretly consumes the macaroons against her husband instruction reveals more

than the existence of an almost dictatorial instructor as claimed by Boeninger,<sup>61</sup> more importantly it reveals Nora's revolt against her husband's control and the instruction.<sup>62</sup> Nora's revolt continues in the tarantella scene in Act Two and ends with the slamming of the door at the end of the play. The two Noras espoused by Marvin Rosenberg and others and already criticised by Templeton don't veritably exist in the play. There is only one Nora throughout *A Doll's House*, with her continues and consistent opposition to her instructors' instruction. Even before the play takes place, claimed by Nora herself, she didn't always agree with her father's "opinions". She only hid her objection and pretended to be obedient. As Nora accounts, she has been her father's doll-child and her husband's doll-wife, but rather a resistant one. "Buried in Nora are an intelligence, a courage and a pride in accomplishment that make her doll-identity absurd and demeaning."<sup>63</sup>

But Zi Jun is all the opposite to Nora. Nora states that there is not serious conversation between her and her husband during their eight-year-long marriage, but Zi Jun and Juan Sheng's relationship starts with their serious talks on serious topics, particularly women liberation. While Nora points out that Thorvald is not the man to teach her to be a fit wife, the well-educated intellectual Juan Sheng seems like a qualified instructor to the innocent Zi Jun. But how and why the so called "Chinese Nora" with a qualified teacher ends up dead while Ibsen's authentic Nora, who insists to teach herself all by herself, survives? The question raised by me here is also the question raised by Lu Xun in "Regret for the Past", where he tries to answer it. To answer to question by his own short story is Lu Xun's way to establish an intertextual dialogism with Ibsen's canonical work. In the story, which is essentially Juan Sheng's narration, Zi Jun, unlike Nora, totally accepts her partner's education. In Juan Sheng's recall, Zi Jun stoutly claims that she is of her own half a year after their relationship, or rather his education, begins. By her line that "I'm my own mistress. None of them has any right to interfere with me", Zi Jun declares against the traditional Chinese norm of

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<sup>61</sup> Boeninger, "Teacups and Butter: The Importance of Eating in Ibsen's *A Doll's House* and *The Wild Duck*", 457.

<sup>62</sup> Northam, *Ibsen's Dramatic Method*, 17.

<sup>63</sup> Templeton, *Ibsen's Women*, 139.



arranged marriage and asks for freedom in romantic relationship which is a deny of traditional Confucian values. The shock this line gives is as strong as Nora's final door slamming in the historical and social context of "Regret for the Past". Juan Sheng's reception of this claim is intriguing and has nothing to do with Zi Jun. He is so pleased by her statement that he now believes that Chinese women are not as incorrigible as some other people describe. To the male protagonist, the female protagonist is nothing special compared to the other Chinese women that, he believes, is waiting to be saved by male intellectuals like him. There is no love in this so called "the only love story of Lu Xun". The whole story of "Regret for the Past" is a metaphor of a failed attempt of a hypocritic Chinese male intellectual to enlighten his female "students". Even though based on Juan Sheng's story telling Zi Jun seems has developed her own idea of women emancipation, the instructed female character's acceptance is still sceptical. The shocking line of Zi Jun, which is one of only few direct speeches of the female character in Juan Sheng's narrative note, is only a *supplement*<sup>64</sup> to the main narrator, Juan Sheng's, voice. Zi Jun is not only an object waiting to be direct, educate and instruct by the male subject, but also a demonstrate that the male subject's revolutionary ideals are not merely fantasies. No matter how, as Nora's agency is deprived by her roles as daughter, wife, and mother, Zi Jun is entrapped in a same situation where she is alienated as an object waiting to be saved but not a breathing woman. "But the supplement supplements", claimed by Derrida, "It adds only to replace".<sup>65</sup> Zi Jun as the instructed supplement is still able to replace Juan Sheng's voice of instruction if "Regret for the Past" is a story of her own rather than his recalling note.

Lu Xun's intertextual dialogism with Ibsen and *A Doll's House* is not only simple repetition but also a repetition with critical distance. By creatively reproducing and revising the motif of instructor and instructed module in his "Regret for the Past", the writer gives Ibsen's canonical work, whose context is limited in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Norwegian bourgeois family, a new context of Chinese women liberation movement and the Chinese New Culture Movement in the first decades of 20<sup>th</sup> century.

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<sup>64</sup> Supplement is "a surplus, a plenitude enriching another plenitude (Derrida et al., 2016, 157)".

<sup>65</sup> Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, Trans. by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 157.

### 1.3.2 The Context

- The Social and Historical Background

Within the two texts, the two male protagonists are the instructors, and the two female protagonists are the ones being instructed by them while Juan Sheng is also the one instructed by Western ideologists, especially Ibsen. This is the intertextuality within the texts. Beyond the texts, considering the intertextual texts' entire situation in the world, i.e., their social and historical background, is important.<sup>66</sup> Also, the ambivalence of the intertextual text "implies the insertion of history (society) into a text and of this text into history" and a text cannot be grasped alone without fully inspecting its context.<sup>67</sup> Hence the study of the context of the intertextual texts analysed above is also important. Moreover, within the social and historical context where "Ibsen's works have played a significant role in the modernization process in China",<sup>68</sup> there is the intertextual motif of instructor and instructed as well. In this case, the writer Lu Xun is the one being instructed while Ibsen is the one instructing.

In Tam Kwok-Kan's *Ibsen in China: Reception and Influence*, he gives a thorough demonstration of the social and historical background of New Culture Movement focusing on the role Ibsen and his works played in this special period of Chinese modernization. In 1917 and the following years when the Literary Revolution began and Modern Chinese literature started to develop, more than one hundred literary organizations were established to fight in the campaign of introducing Western culture and ideology to China.<sup>69</sup> Ibsen was introduced and treated as "one of several writers of revolt literature" who gave traditional Chinese revolt literature new impetus<sup>70</sup> and as one of the "advocates of the Literary Revolution as a social reformer" against traditional value and social injustice.<sup>71</sup> *A Doll's House* among all of Ibsen's works is especially a play against traditional value (of women) and social injustice (between sexes). This

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<sup>66</sup> Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody*, xiii

<sup>67</sup> Kristeva, *Desire in Language*, 68.

<sup>68</sup> Xia, *Heart Higher than the Sky*, 1.

<sup>69</sup> Tam, *Ibsen in China*, 191.

<sup>70</sup> Tam, 207.

<sup>71</sup> Tam, 213.

explains why Lu Xun chose to engage with *A Doll's House* in his “Regret for the Past” even though the former is relatively simple and straightforward in its artistic characteristic and why his very first engagement with Ibsen were in his “Wen Hua Pian Zhi Lun” and “Mo Luo Shi Li Shuo” discussing *An Enemy of the People*.

As a reaction to the introduction of Ibsen’s revolt literature, a group of feminism literature whose motif were female emancipation and revolt against the tyranny of the bigoted and old-fashioned family head, and a group of female writers whose works focused on promoting individual freedom both emerged in 1920’s and 30’s.<sup>72</sup> Among Ibsen’s feminism works, *A Doll's House* generally had a greater effect on modern Chinese literature, and it has been linked with the emancipation of Chinese women and has been considered as a life guidance. More than plenty of feminism works have been produced with their female protagonists leaving her home like Nora does.<sup>73</sup>

According to Tam, “Ibsen was idolized by the Chinese intelligentsia”<sup>74</sup> and the feminism works were “echoes of Ibsen’s call for individual rights and freedom”<sup>75</sup>. But Lu Xun’s “Regret for the Past” is not just echo but also reflection and inspection of Ibsen’s ideas as shown by earlier analysis in this part. Buried in the relationship of the instructor and the instructed is the hierarchy and unequal power relationship. Between the male and female characters, the females are the subversive; and between the Western and China, China is the one losing its agency build upon her five-thousand-year long history and tradition. Even more, what happens after Nora slams the door and finally grasp the freedom she longs when she is alone in the society? Ibsen didn’t give an answer to this question while Lu Xun tries to answer it in his speech “What Happens after Nora Leaves Home?” considering the Chinese social context where and when the Chinese Nora was probably not able to feed herself.

- Ibsen as the Remedy to the Diseased China

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<sup>72</sup> Tam, *Ibsen in China*, 212.

<sup>73</sup> Tam, 218.

<sup>74</sup> Tam, 213.

<sup>75</sup> Tam, 213.

On the one hand, Ibsen's ideology, especially the individualism promoted in his works, was considered as the remedy to the diseased China.<sup>76</sup> Tam claims that the modern Chinese discovery of individualism was greatly due to Hu Shi's essay "Ibsenism" written in 1918. This could be true, but as early as in 1908<sup>77</sup>, two years after Ibsen's death, Lu Xun had introduced Ibsen and his work *An Enemy of the People* in his essays published in magazine *He Nan*.<sup>78</sup> The two essays were "Mo Luo Shi Li Shuo" and "Wen Hua Pian Zhi Lun", whose subjects were the reveal of individual presence in the community and promotion of individualism.

In "Mo Luo Shi Li Shuo", where the writer introduces and analysis eight romantic poets, Lu Xun praises the independent individuality and their adhering to truth of both Ibsen and Doctor Stockmann. Similarly, in "Wen Hua Pian Zhi Lun", where he also eulogizes the individuality of several Western writers and philosophers, Ibsen is stressed as a symbol of not only individualism but also opposition against the unenlightened public masses and even revolution to the backward culture. In both essays, the complexity of the literary work *An Enemy of People* is reduced and simplified to antagonism between most of the community and individual. As claimed by Tam, it was the idea of daring to fight against the opinion of the majority that attracted the literary revolutionist like Lu Xun, rather than the artistic and aesthetic value of the complex literary work.<sup>79</sup> The naiveness of Dr. Stockmann and his blindness to the complexity of the community are intentionally or unwittingly neglected in the two essays. Lu Xun never gave an answer to what would happen if one tried to fight against the powerful majority in these two essays, like Ibsen concluded his play at the point where Dr. Stockmann decides to stay and fight without demonstrating the possible consequences of it. The protagonist of *An Enemy of People* is symbolised to a fighter against the unenlightened majority in both texts as the writer of it was symbolised to an instructor giving remedy to the unenlightened sick China. In his later essay, "Editor's Note" of magazine *Running Currents* written in August 1928, Lu Xun recalls that the

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<sup>76</sup> Tam, *Ibsen in China*, 192.

<sup>77</sup> According to Peng, the essays were published in 1907. This is a mistake caused by the confusion of the year the essays were written and the year the essays were published. The essays were written in 1907

<sup>78</sup> Peng, "Nvxing zhuyi xia de funv mingyun guanzhao", 79.

<sup>79</sup> Tam, *Ibsen in China*, 217.

reasons of introducing Ibsen and his works earlier in the end of 1910s was more because of the writer's daring to challenge most of the society rather than to promote the literary value of the prose play written in vernacular style.

The essays of “Wen Hua Pian Zhi Lun(On Cultural Extremism)” and “Muo Luo Shi Li Shuo(On the Power of Mara Poetry)” underlines “a fundamentally evolutionary mode of thinking” of Lu Xun’s thought and literary practice until the late 1920s.<sup>80</sup> And Shih argues that this evolutionary mode of thinking of the writer signifies Lu Xun’s “particular kind of humanism articulated through what appears to be elitist individualism”.<sup>81</sup> But Lu Xun’s idea was not just “appeared to be” elitism and individualism. In his “Wen Hua Pian Zhi Lun”, Lu Xun quotes Nietzsche’s words in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* to claim that the contemporary masses would not enlighten and modernise themselves and the only hope of enlightenment and modernisation of China is on a future pioneer who is an Nietzschean superman. Lu Xun surprisingly quotes and implicitly supports Nietzsche’s claim that the with “the sacrifice of the mediocre collective”, a few geniuses will be born, and they will propel the evolution of the society. And in “Muo Luo Shi Li Shuo”, the Nietzschean individualism is posed even more explicitly.<sup>82</sup> In both texts, the Nietzschean individual of great will—Lu Xun poses Dr. Stockmann of *An Enemy of the People* as an example—is rendered as a lonely but modern and enlightened hero against the primitive and unenlightened mass of people. And “the writer [Lu Xun] is then naturally the person responsible for the enlightenment of the masses”.<sup>83</sup>

However, firstly in both essays the “individualism hero” is the one who has the prioritised power to be delineated in detail and praised in length while the mass of people is faceless and simply generalised as the “mediocre collective” or only “the people”. Lu Xun’s depiction of both the hero, who he wishes to instruct, and the people, who he believe only need to be passively instructed, are both so oversimplified that they are just ideals who only exist in his texts. But considering the aim of Lu Xun’s writing

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<sup>80</sup> Shih, *The Lure of the Modern*, 74.

<sup>81</sup> Shih, 80.

<sup>82</sup> Shih, 79.

<sup>83</sup> Shih, 80.

of the texts was to solve realistic problems which is to enlighten and modernised the early 20<sup>th</sup> century China, his oversimplified percept of the complex people and even the here was clearly not good enough. Secondly, in both texts where the writer consider himself the enlightening hero, Lu Xun shows no understanding of the double and layered identity of the instructing hero that he was both the instructor and the instructed. Educated in already modernised Japan, Lu Xun was able to learn the Nietzschean elitist individualism and introduce it to his Chinese compatriots. In this process, he is the one being instructed by the Western instructors. As I already pointed out, there is the hierarchy relationship between the instructor and the instructed, but the idea that the Chinese culture has stopped from developing itself<sup>84</sup> was so internalised in Lu Xun's mind that he gave up his agency and willingly became the object who is objectified by the instructor. After his "modern" education has completed, he started to treat himself as the hero who is instructing his vulgar Chinese compatriots, such as what he does in the two texts being analysed here. His neglect of the complexity of the masses, who in his mind are not able to enlighten themselves but need to be instructed, reveals the imperialism arrogance and ignorance have already been deeply imposed in his so-called "evolutionary mode of thinking".<sup>85</sup> And such arrogance and ignorance apparently cannot be described as some "particular kind of humanism".<sup>86</sup>

What's more, to ignore the complexity of the Chinese people and culture would beyond all doubt lead to a failure of his dream evolution. The fact that the two texts were written in traditional literary Chinese and in a particularly implicit Chinese manner, which are both common in traditional Chinese texts, in a degree demonstrates that Lu Xun was not able to completely throw away the culture and tradition in which he was grown and suddenly and completely become a Western hero like Zarathustra. And certainly, neither were the Chinese people and the Chinese society able to be modernised suddenly in a completely Western manner without considering the Chinese context. Fortunately, the writer realised this problem in his later works.

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<sup>84</sup> See in Muo Luo Shi Li Shuo.

<sup>85</sup> Shih, *The Lure of the Modern*, 79)

<sup>86</sup> Shih, 80.

An oversimplified reading of Ibsen's complex play may not hurt much in a literary debate, but it was completely different when passionate youngsters were directed by the oversimplified reading and got hurt in the society which was much more intricate and harmful. Among the young women who were influenced and inspired by the misunderstanding and misrepresenting of Ibsen's work, especially *A Doll's House*, and fled from their families to pursue enlightening education in Beijing was the notable new woman, Li Chao. She committed suicide in 1919 out of frustration and pressure from her father that she would lose his financial support.<sup>87</sup> Like Nora she left her family, but unlike Laura Kieler the model of Nora, she died alone in the 1910s Chinese society.

The suicide of Li Chao "aroused a nationwide outrage among the intellectuals".<sup>88</sup> But to Lu Xun, it was not only indignation was aroused, but also reflection. In his lecture "What Happens after Nora Leaves Home" in Peking Normal College for Women (PNCW) where Ibsen's play was first performed in China<sup>89</sup> by a group of amateur student performers from that college, Lu Xun gave his famous statement that Nora would either come back home or end up as prostitute after her leaving. And he concluded the reason as she would not be able to support herself financially.

The speech "What Happens after Nora Leaves Home" was given 26<sup>th</sup> December 1923 to the students in PNCW, four years after Li Chao's suicide. The statement of his speech that "there is no need to elaborate the plot in detail" suggests that even if they might not be mostly influenced and encouraged by Nora and *A Doll's house* to leave their homes to pursue the right of education and the freedom to love, they were still familiar with the women emancipation motif of *A Doll's House* and were well aware of the relatedness between the motif of the play and them, the female students who also left their home to be freely educated.

The difference between Nora who claims that she can find a job in her hometown the recently awakened Chinese women was that after the latter's slamming of the door, they stepped into "a society in which there was no security of any kind".<sup>90</sup> What Lu

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<sup>87</sup> Tam, *Ibsen in China*, 213.

<sup>88</sup> Tam, 218.

<sup>89</sup> Xia Liyang, "A myth that glorifies: Rethinking Ibsen's early reception in China".

<sup>90</sup> Tam, *Ibsen in China*, 219.

Xun specifically asserts in his speech is the lack of economic security. And because of the lack of economic security, the Chinese Noras wouldn't be able to feed themselves so that they would have no choice but to go back home or "fall" into prostitution. What Lu Xun asserts is that the need for and the right of living are the most fundamental human need and right which are more fundamental than the need for and the right of education and free romance. At the same time, since the need for and the right of living cannot be obtained unless economic independence is acquired first, fighting for economic independence was first and foremost step to get complete freedom for Chinese women in that age of China. Lu Xun keenly points out that if the need for living cannot be fulfilled, the once obtained freedom will at last be sold just to live on.

Lu Xun's call for economic independence "implies a social revolution", and he divides the revolution into two aspects.<sup>91</sup> "First to get equal economic distribution in families between sexes and second to get equal power in society between sexes". He further elaborates that to get equal economic distributions requires parents to allocate their properties equally to their sons and daughters. This can be realised by the "paramount parent power in China" according to Lu Xun. Unlike Mao Dun who "sees the future optimistically in terms of spectacular revolution", Lu Xun stresses dedication to practical and persistent little actions in women's fight for economic rights.<sup>92</sup>

However, there is an apparent paradox in Lu Xun's solution: the Chinese parents cannot on the one hand be enlightened enough to distribute their properties equally while on the other hand be paramount enough to make such dictating decision all by their own. I point out the paradox here to illustrate that Lu Xun's 1923 speech "What Happens after Nora Leaves Her Home" is not a text sophisticated enough like his literary works and its structure is scattered while the logic of the text is not coherent enough neither. All those defects lead to the writer's writing of "Regret for the Past" two years later, which "can be seen as Lu Xun's practical answer to the question he poses" by his speech and which also is the research object of this thesis.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Tam, *Ibsen in China*, 221.

<sup>92</sup> Tam, 240.

<sup>93</sup> Tam, 227.



In 1933, Lu Xun amends his views on the issue of women emancipation in his essay entitled “On Women’s Liberation”.<sup>94</sup> In the essay, Lu Xun enumerates a few improvements of female social statuses after New Culture Movement: wealthy women were allowed to stand together with wealthy man to take pictures in meetings; and women were allowed to take some certain occupations as well. But at the same time, he also points out that the new women who left their traditional and conservative families for the society were frequently criticised even ridiculed by critics. Even the new women themselves also felt the misery caused by working. Lu Xun claims that it is because their livings still depend on other people, mostly men. And the dependency won’t be eliminated unless by political struggle which now he thinks is as important as economic demands. Finally, Lu Xun concludes this short essay by a statement that people should fight unceasingly until the realising of true liberation which is not only between sexes but also between all human beings. According to Tam, Lu Xun’s change of view from 1923 to 1933 “represents the change in Chinese society over these ten years”.<sup>95</sup> During and after the New Culture Movement but before 1930s, the Chinese family system was still mainly traditional as ever, but in 1930’s “signs of change began to surface” and they led to the change of women’s liberation which now focused more on social, political, and economic participation.<sup>96</sup> But what “signs” exactly? They were the shadow of the fall of the country caused by the Japanese Empire’s invading and the rapidly growing power of Chinese Communist Party.

In the semicolonial China being discussed here, the Western enlightening ideology such as feminism in Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House* on the one hand was considered as Western manipulations to Chinese traditions including literary tradition.<sup>97</sup> In the perspective of language for example, Lu Xun’s writing of modern fictions written in modern vernacular Chinese such as “Regret for the Past” was clearly a revolt to Chinese literary tradition where most fictions were written in ancient vernacular Chinese even classical literary Chinese. Also, the theme of women emancipation of “Regret for the

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<sup>94</sup> Tam, *Ibsen in China*, 248.

<sup>95</sup> Tam, 248.

<sup>96</sup> Tam, 248.

<sup>97</sup> Shih, *The Lure of Modern*, 8.

Past” was never a part of traditional Chinese literature. Even if Lu Xun and “Regret for the Past” might not be manipulated by Ibsen and *A Doll’s House* directly, the fact that they were heavily influenced by the latter ones are true.

And on the other hand, Ibsen and his works were also ones of the most important and recognizing references to the *modern* Western culture in Chinese New Culture Movement, whose ultimate purpose was to realize the modernisation of China by importing Western ideology. According to Shih, “the quintessential embodiment of the May Fourth zeitgeist was the desire to leap into the time of the modern”<sup>98</sup> and the Chinese May Fourth intellectuals’ understanding of modernity was the “linear, developmental conception of history and culture”.<sup>99</sup> Nevertheless, Lu Xun and his “Regret for the Past” were not exactly like this. In his early essays like “Wen Hua Pian Zhi Lun” and “Mo Luo Shi Li Shuo” which I have already analysed in the preceding part of this thesis, Lu Xun may demonstrate Dr. Stockman’s individualism’s and Nietzsche’s superman elitism’s attraction to him and his desire to reform Chinese society by such ideology. But it is rather different in “Regret for the Past”. Mentioned earlier, the negative even bloody results of the enlightenment of May Fourth Movement such as female student Li Chao’s death struck his irrational confidence on simply borrowing Western ideology to China as remedy to the “corrupt” Chinese society and impelled Lu Xun to reconsider if the borrowed Western “modern” ideology really fitted in Chinese culture. In his “Regret for the Past”, Lu Xun put asides the seemingly urgent need of Chinese modernisation and pays close attention to the mental and social dilemma of the fighters who were involved in the ideology struggle.

Above all the contexts no matter they are the general context of China and the context of Lu Xun and his works, there is another layer of context which is the semicolonial China in the Republican era. I have already claimed in the introductory part of this part that my definition and analysis of the semicolonialism follows the definition and analysis of Shu-Mei Shih in her seminal *The Lure of the Modern: Writing Modernism in semicolonial China, 1917-1937* concerning Chinese modern fictions

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<sup>98</sup> Shih, *The Lure of Modern*, 54.

<sup>99</sup> Shih, 54.

from the lens of postcolonialism. But the terms and concepts still need further elaboration before moving into my postcolonialism analysis.

As pointed out, the “semi” in semicolonial China suggests not “half” but the complex, hierarchy, incomplete, fragmentary, and indirect characteristic of China’s semicolonial structure.<sup>100</sup> One of the complex, hierarchy and indirect characteristic which is pertinent to our understanding of Lu Xun and his texts is the triangle structure of the West, the Japanese Empire, and the semicolonial China of China’s semicolonial structure. “Chinese modernism departs from the usual binary models of the non-West’s confrontation with the West”,<sup>101</sup> and Japan mediated between West and China as both an Eastern companion claimed by itself as well as an imperial intruder and forerunner of modernism who was eager to take advantage of and enlighten the premodern China simultaneously. “Most of the writers who negotiated with Western modernism were educated in the West or in Japan”<sup>102</sup> and Lu Xun was educated in Japan for almost 8 years from 1902 to 1909. According to the Writer himself in his essay “Ji Ye Xian Sheng” recalling his education experience in Japan, Lu Xun admits that it is indeed the education experience in Japan that determines his mind to enlighten the Chinese people and realise modernisation in the republic China by writing. And it is this determination that lay a foundation to his essays that advocate modernism and finally to the reflective “Regret for the Past”.

To conclude, to most Chinese intellectuals including the early Lu Xun, enlightenment was perceived as antifeudal and pro-western, so the immediate need of criticising feudalism and forwarding modernisation, or more likely Westernization, displaced the need to reflect upon both the destination and the method.<sup>103</sup> Unlike them, “Regret for the Past” is a reflection upon the enlightening New Culture Movement a part of whom was self-imposed and unexamined cultural colonization. Hence, “Regret for the Past” as an examination of the colonization is worth being inspected through the lens of post-colonialism.

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<sup>100</sup> Shih, *The Lure of Modern*, 34.

<sup>101</sup> Shih, 4.

<sup>102</sup> Shih, 13.

<sup>103</sup> Shih, 35—6.

- The Instructing West and the Instructed China

In his *Culture and Imperialism*, Edward Said points out that the East, both Eastern culture and Eastern people, is presented in the Western literature in both romantic and exotic manner.<sup>104</sup> Western writers demonstrate East as both a romantic imagination and an exotic image. The imagination is far away from the authentic East but nearer to an East that is constructed in a shared Western fantasy. And the exotic image ignores the complex reality of the East, especially the part of reality that is similar to the West and choose to demonstrate the East as different but peculiarly intriguing. Created by the West, both the romantic imagination and exotic view of the East eliminate the agency of the East and turns it into of subjecting whose only valuable functions are being viewed and entertaining its West masters.

Similarly, as Shu-mei Shih has showed, Japanese writers shows similar tendency of constructing an inauthentic China in their literature such as Ryūnosuke Akutagawa's *Zhong Guo You Ji*.<sup>105</sup> In his essay, Akutagawa describes the Republican China as a dirty and dusty place where its people were dumb, impolite, and unenlightened. Even though the Imperial Japan was both culturally and geographically much closer to China than the Western countries, they both viewed East and China in a distant, arrogant, and ignorant way. And by this way, they formed an intercultural relationship between the West/Japan and the East/China, where the former are the viewers, and the latter are the view. The relationship is certainly estranged.

Nonetheless, Chinese May Fourth intellectuals contextualised the borrowed Western ideology into Chinese historical and social context of the New Culture Movement, such as what Lu Xun does in his "Regret for the Past" – puts the "Chinese Nora" in the Chinese society where she ends drastically different to Ibsen's Nora. The reason why they borrowed and contextualised the Western ideology was that they anchored their simple and naïve hope on the imagination that Western ideology would be a remedy to the diseased China. The credulity and naiveness of them aside, their

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<sup>104</sup> Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, xi-xxviii.

<sup>105</sup> Shih, *The Lure of the Modern*, 21-30.

borrowing, contextualising, and applying Western ideology to China surely formed a different (comparing to the viewing and the viewed pointed out earlier), more complex and more intimate intercultural relationship between the West and China, which I term “the instructor and the instructed”. The instructed Chinese intellectuals’ exercise of intercultural communication, especially their reflexion on the instructing Western ideology, constituted a closer and detailed discourse on modern Chinese reality compared to the romantic and exotic imagination of the inauthentic China. And since the instructed Chinese discourse was educated and heavily influenced by their Western instructors, the discourse was also a complex and contradictory hybrid of both nationalism and orientalism. Even though the discourse was mostly set in Chinese context by Chinese intellectuals concerning Chinese problems, the imperial arrogance and ignorance remained in their Chinese discourse which was also based on Western method and Western ideology. For instance, like the internalised imperialism of Lu Xun’s early essays pointed out earlier. At the same time however, their discourse on Chinese reality created a more realistic picture of China depicted by Chinese themselves rather than curious Western viewer, broke the dominance of single and unrealistic Western discourse and even had the potential to replace the Western voice. By the lens of such complexity and contradiction of Modern Chinese intellectuals, discovering the ideology gap and turn between Lu Xun’s early and later works is not difficult. Lu Xun moved from blind belief of Western ideology in essays like “Muou Luo Shi Li Shuo” to a reflexion and wondered to what degree Western ideology helped and hurt the modernisation of Chinese society. This is where “Regret for the Past” comes forward and requires a full examination based on the module of intercultural relationship of the instructor and the instructed.

Earlier text of this part has pointed out that the overt allusions to Ibsen and his works are represented as symbols of modern Western ideology in “Regret for the Past”. And the symbols demonstrate the intertextuality, which is the shared enlightenment motif, between Lu Xun and Ibsen’s texts to ideal readers who recognise the intertextual sign. However, there is more to discover in the light of the instructor and the instructed. The first allusion worth a quote here:

After we had gazed at each other in silence for a moment, the shabby room would gradually be filled with the sound of my pronouncements on the tyranny of the family, the need to break with tradition, the equality of men and women, Ibsen, Tagore, and Shelley...

Beside the instructing Juan Sheng preaching equality to the innocent and naïve instructed Zi Jun, there is a much more complicated and layered structure of the instructor and instructed module buried in the text. Juan Sheng here using Western ideology to enlighten Chinese woman doubles his identity. He is the instructor who is trying to preach equality to another sex, and simultaneously the instructed Eastern intellectual who has already been instructed and accepted the Western speech. The double identity of Juan Sheng in the text is the double identity of Lu Xun outside the text in the context where he wrote essays advocating individualism and Nietzschean elitism to solve Chinese social problems, none of which were Chinese ideology. What happens next is intriguing. From Zi Jun's claim, which is as shocking as Nora's final door slamming, that "I'm my own mistress. None of them has any right to interfere with me", it seems that she has been enlightened "the tyranny of the family" and "the need to break with tradition". She leaves the family that traditionally would arrange marriage for her regardless her own will and lives with Juan Sheng to form their own family. But the enlightening is just a masquerade of speech and soon enough she ends up trapped in another family where Juan Sheng supports the family and what she does is endless domestic works that is exactly what traditional Chinese housewives does. This is nothing like Nora who can work, earn and pay her own debt in her home. Now we can see that the only factual result of Juan Sheng's enlightening instruction to Zi Jun is the latter's startling claim. And the claim of one single Zi Jun is certainly not able to modernize the giant-like Chinese culture.

What is similar in *A Doll's House* and "Regret for the Past" is the instructor's description of the instructed. In *A Doll's House*, instructor Thorvald claims that "serious things" have nothing to do with Nora. And in "Regret for the Past", Zi Jun is described by Juan Sheng as an obedient student whose "eyes filled with childlike look of wonder" when Juan Sheng energetically sermonises modern Western values. The ones being

instructed in the texts are both considered and described as childish, naïve, simple-minded, and thus desperately need the instruction of the instructors. But the male instructors don't real know their "childish student" at all. Thorvald knows nothing from the simple fact that Nora loans a debt and is trying everything including working from home and saving her pocket money for clothes to the buried and disguised truth that Nora now is a powerful woman who desires to take part in serious conversation and stuffs. Even after his desperate attempt to keep Nora from leaving home fails, he still has no idea what lead to and why Nora firmly chooses to leave. Juan Sheng is even more ignorant and self-centred. He forgets how he expresses his love to Zi Jun and how he asks her to be together with him two months after they starts to live together. After Zi Jun's death, he claims that he has no idea neither of Zi Jun's feeling of the animals she feeds nor what she thinks of her heavy domestic works every day. A large part of the clear memories that Juan Sheng has are the memories in which he instructs Zi Jun with his ideas both before and after they start to live together. The contradiction that both the instructors claim that they love their instructed lovers while they in fact seldomly understand the latter (even though they claim they do) demonstrates that they are ignorant, arrogant, and self-centred. Ignorant means that they ignore apparent stuffs about the instructed. For example, Juan Sheng feels no pain of Zi Ju, and Thorvald never notices Nora always saves half of the money given by him and does not buy good clothes for herself during their years long marriage. Arrogant means that they think they understand their lovers while they are indeed not. And self-centred means that what they really care is being the instructor instructing their lover and enjoying being intelligence and power superior. It is the ignorance, arrogance, and self-centredness lead to their destinated failure of instruction. Besides, because Juan Sheng and the Chinese intellectuals are all ignorant, arrogant, and self-centred and have double identities, the instructor Juan Sheng in "Regret for the Past" not only is a simple replica of instructing Thorvald, but also represents the blind Chinses intellectuals including Lu Xun himself. Thus, both inside the texts and outside the texts in the contexts, the identical model of the instructor and the instructed where the instructors are being ignorant, arrogant and self-centred and the instructed are considered and described as childish and

unenlightened, and the identical double identity of the Chinese instructors being the instructed at the same time, demonstrates that “Regret for the Past” is built on the instructor and instructed theme of Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House* to present a new and more complicated Chinese theme of Chinese modernisation pushed by Chinese intellectual in semicolonial China.

And both instruction in the texts fail at the end, no matter Western or Chinese. To fight against Thorvald’s control and to learn the serious stuff by herself, Nora slams the door of her own old home. And Zi Jun, the so-called “New Women” gets back to her old home that she once flees and tragically dies there. The difference here is that *A Doll’s House* stops right at the failure and “Regret for the Past” chronologically departs from the failure. Such narrative structure of the latter enables it to reflex on the failure during narrating of the story. And such reflexion makes the story not only a representation of Chinese modernisation but also a critique to it. Furthermore, Juan Sheng’s double identity determines that his ignorance and arrogance are self-imposed and originate from imperial ignorance and arrogance to China and Chinese people. Thus, the critique to Juan Sheng is indeed the critique to imperialism, no matter self-imposed or not.

The complexity of “Regret for the Past” is that in a delicately structured literary form, which will be fully examined in next part, it constructs the internalised imperialism narrative while inspecting it with a view which is both intimate and critical. Even the internalised imperialism is double-sided. It originates from the Western arrogance to “modernise” the “barbaric” East, Rudyard Kipling’s “the White Man’s Burden” being a typical example:

Take up the White Man's burden—  
Send forth the best ye breed—  
Go bind your sons to exile  
To serve your captives' need;  
To wait in heavy harness,  
On fluttered folk and wild—  
Your new-caught, sullen peoples,



Half-devil and half-child.

The parent-like tongue of him is surprisingly consistent with the voice of the instructors analysed here. Inside the text, Thorvald, and Juan Sheng, outside in the context, Lu Xun and Kipling, they all describe the instructed as childishly unenlightened while refer to instruction like a burden rather than the satisfaction of exercising power to whom they believe are inferior. The imperialism also come from the Confucian tradition of China which Lu Xun claimed that he tried to avoid even escape from. Lu Xun states in his essay “Why I Started to Write Fictions” that the writing of his first fiction *The Diary of a Mad Man* relies only on some “hundred foreign literary works I had read and some knowledge of medicine I had obtained” which means the fiction has nothing to do with traditional Chinese culture. But ironically, the fiction starts with traditional Chinese literary form with traditional written Chinese which can only be written by someone who is well-educated and knows well of traditional Chinese culture. Thus, Wang Ning states that “to Lu Xun, a man of letters with a profound knowledge of both Chinese and Western learning, proposing an overall ‘Westernization’ is nothing but a cultural and intellectual strategy”.<sup>106</sup> This statement is to some extent true, but this “cultural and intellectual strategy” was not purely based on Western ideology according to Lu Xun’s will, it was also unwittingly influenced by traditional Chinese Confucianism. To Chinese intellectuals educated by traditional Chinese ideology, the “burden”, to borrow Kipling’s word, to enlighten the “blind massive people” and to spread the “gospel” of Confucius is the goal of their learning and living (xiuqi zhiping). But this time it is the Western ideology rather than Confucian one by which Chinese intellectuals rely on to enlighten. Lu Xun as well as his instructor character Juan Sheng’s willing to enlighten the “innocent mass” thus also comes unwittingly from the traditional Chinese ideology which they set out to get away from. Zi Jun’s coming to home and final death symbols the failure and destructive consequence of Juan Sheng’s naïve understanding of enlightenment and it indeed points out to the failure and destructive consequences of

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<sup>106</sup> Wang Ning, “Diasporic Writing and the Reconstruction of Chinese National and Cultural Identity or Identities in a Global Postcolonial Context”, 116-7.

Chinese modernisation in the reality which was promoted by Lu Xun and other May Fourth intellectuals. They were probably not directly responsible to Li Chao's death, but the death of the "new woman" is certainly a warning to the modernisation narrative which only promoted the promising future on the modernisation but ignored the complex and sometimes hurtful reality that hampered the process. And the seemingly hypocrite nature of Juan Sheng in fact demonstrates the ambivalence of such narrative, it may finally benefit the mass in the future it promises, but the benefit comes with ignorance of the individuals that constitute the mass and ignorance will almost certainly lead to harm to some of the individuals.

The ethical question that if it is ethical to sacrifice some few for the "greater good" of the majority is both vital to ask and difficult to answer. But it is not my intention to ask and answer the question here. The intention of this thesis is to uncover the complexity as well as ambivalence of such narrative which hopefully would provide profound prerequisite knowledge to offer a satisfying answer to the question. The fundamental desire of the culture imperialism being criticised here is to extend its influence to as much area of the planet as possible. And the desire is covered by a narrative that "enlightening benefits them". We can easily discover from the grammar structure of such narrative where "enlightening" occupies the subject and "them" become subjected. That is to say, the fight between the imperial Western and traditional Chinese culture is really the fight of narration of culture, and the fight of narration of culture is in fact the fight to be subject while objectify the other. To conclude, the essence<sup>107</sup> of cultural imperial "invasion" is the fight to objectify the regional Chinese culture whose aim is to become the powerful subject. And the objectification relies on a set of narrative that modernisation benefits the objectified other and the narrative makes the objectification looks like an ideology fight. "Regret for the Past" discovers the structure of the instructor and the instructed of the narrative from Ibsen's *A Doll's House* and examines it in Chinese social and cultural context and sophisticatedly rebuild it on the narration of the instructor, which is to be analysed in next part.

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<sup>107</sup> I would like to avoid using this term, but it is a suitable one since I am discussing the ontology of cultural imperialism.

## 2 Part Two: Narrative

### 2.1 Introduction

#### 2.1.1 Justification of narratology exercising

Part Two of my thesis applies narratology to my comparison between Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House* and Lu Xun's "Regret for the Past". The part consists of two main chapters: The Narratives and the Narrators. As suggested by the titles of each chapter, my analysis on the texts demonstrates itself from two different though deeply connected perspectives.

Before getting into my analysis, I would like to justify my application of narratology first. Though there are already a considerable number of analyses on movie<sup>108</sup>, performance<sup>109</sup>, photography<sup>110</sup>, even video games<sup>111</sup> based the theory of narratology, there is still a debate on the question if narratology is applicable to play.

To answer the question, there are two aspects of the question require clarification beforehand. Firstly, the answer to the question depends on the definition of narrative. For example, Genette defines narrative as a *verbal* transmission of narrative content,<sup>112</sup> and his exclusive definition determines that dramatic text is not a kind of narrative, so that one cannot apply narratology to dramatic text. However, developed from Abbott inclusive<sup>113</sup> definition that narrative is "the representation of an event or events",<sup>114</sup> I define narrative as a representation of a series of connected and selected events.

This definition requires further explanation to it. Firstly, the term *event* needs to be defined as well. In this essay I adopt Mieke Bal's definition: the transitions from one state to another state, caused or experienced by actors.<sup>115</sup> Secondly, "A series of" and "connected" indicates the underlined relationship between the events which is vital to

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<sup>108</sup> Christian Metz, *Film Language*.

<sup>109</sup> Richard Bauman, *Story, Performance and Event*.

<sup>110</sup> Roland Barthes, *Image, Music, Text*, trans. Stephen Heath, 15-68.

<sup>111</sup> Shira Chess, "The Queer Case of Video Games: Orgasms, Heteronormativity, and Video Game Narrative".

<sup>112</sup> Genette, *Narrative Discourse Revisited*, 16.

<sup>113</sup> "Inclusive" indicates that narrative does not only exist in literary texts, but also concludes other texts such as news, provisions even other "texts" that are based on different sign systems such as illustrations, movies, performance etc. The texts analysed here are certainly literary texts. Still, I choose to adapt this inclusive definition to stress my standpoint that narratology is applicable to analyse the texts mentioned above too.

<sup>114</sup> H. Porter Abbott, *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative*, 193.

<sup>115</sup> Bal, *Narratology*, 5. By "actors", Bal means both actors in performances, and characters in written narratives. Also, Bal's definition of fabula demonstrates that events are constructs which are reconstructed from story and constitute the story.

my analysis to the texts. And finally, the qualifier “selected” points out another fundamental character of narrative: gaps. Since narrative is the result of a selection of events, no matter the selection is conscious or not, there must be gaps between the events where interpretation of the narrative plays an important if not most important role to bridge the discrete but connected events. My definition of narrative provides the foundation of justifying my exercise of narratology to *A Doll's House*, but the justification is not enough until the second aspect is elaborated.

Thus, secondly, the difference between a performance of a play and the dramatic text of it must be distinguished. What is being analysed in this part is the dramatic text of Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, which is as same as Lu Xun's “Regret for the Past”, a narration in print, according to my definition of narrative. In fact, a drama text can be defined as a special type of fiction where dialogues dominate most the space of the text while average fictions also consist of several other elements. The writing hereto should be sufficient to clarify my application of narratology in this part, with my definition to narrative also provided. Before closing the first part of my introduction of Part Two, I would like to stress that reading narrative is to fill gaps,<sup>116</sup> and filling gaps suggests readers' creative reaction to the text, which is what I intent to demonstrate in this thesis -- a creative reading that breaks the hierarchy power structure between the writer and the reader and provides a novel, intriguing and profound understanding of the classic texts.

After the abstract discussion of narrative, justifying my exercise of narratology to the two writers and two texts are also crucial. Lu Xun, as the father of modern Chinese literature, writes experimentally in his works especially short stories. Lu Xun uses different experimental techniques in almost every different text in his first short story collection *Call to Arms*, the one preceding *Wandering*. “Reading Lu Xun's short story is like reading his performance of new narrative techniques”.<sup>117</sup> And among all his short stories writing in an experimental way, “Regret for the Past” is still a unique one, not only in terms of its romance theme which only appears once in Lu Xun's short stories,

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<sup>116</sup> H. Porter Abbott, *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative*, 183.

<sup>117</sup> Shih, *The Lure of the Modern*, 86.

but also in terms of its special technique – the whole text is its male protagonist’s note. Yet there is no efficient narratology study either on this experimentalist writer or on this text. And my thesis is a pathbreaker to this big gap. As for Ibsen, as the “father of modern drama”, his dramaturge, as well as his dramaturge development from melodrama to modern realistic problem drama, have not been paid enough attention to especially not through the lens of narratology. My narratology study of *A Doll’s House* will hopefully lay a foundation to such significant but still lacking field of Ibsen Studies.

### 2.1.2 Method and Terms

My interpretation of *A Doll’s House* and especially “Regret for the Past” can be determined as “symptomatic reading”, which is a specific type of interpretation “that took meaning to be hidden, repressed, deep, and in need of detection and disclosure by an interpreter”.<sup>118</sup> The aim of symptomatic reading is to reveal the meaning buried or tangled with the sophisticated text structure. Thus, to disassemble the structure and analyse the elements and the connection of the elements that constitute the structure becomes the first step of such reading. The feature of symptomatic reading is its denial of the “implied author”. As I already stressed in the introductory part of this thesis, the term “author” implies writer’s authority even ownership to interpret their text which form a hierarchy power system that cripples the power of reader and the text itself. This is indeed what I am trying to criticize in this thesis. And the symptomatic reading of *A Doll’s House* and “Regret for the Past” which stresses the agency of the reader even the text to fill the gaps of their narratives conforms to my criticising intention.

Other terms besides “symptomatic reading” such as conflict, closure, causation, constituent events, voice, focalisation, distance, and reliability will be defined in the coming part of thesis when they come to be used to analyse the texts. There is one distinction that is significant enough to be mentioned here because it is the very foundation of the short story “Regret for the Past” is the distinction between narrator-Juan Sheng, character-Juan Sheng and narratee-Juan Sheng. The past readings of

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<sup>118</sup> Best and Marcus, "Surface Reading: An Introduction", 1.

“Regret for the Past” do not recognise the difference between these three intertwined though still different devices. And because of such neglect, they fail to reveal the complicated mental and textual interconnection and interaction between them. A summary of their interconnection and interaction can be put this way: The whole story is based on and only based on narrator-Juan Sheng’s narration since “Regret for the Past” is “(Narrator) Juan Sheng’s Notes” according to the subtitle of the story. The Juan Sheng mentioned or more precisely constituted by narrator-Juan Sheng in the story is the character-Juan Sheng. And because of the same reason, the only expected reader of the narrator-Juan Sheng’s narration is the narratee Juan Sheng. To compactly conclude the interrelationship, the narrator-Juan Sheng constructs or creates the character-Juan Sheng so that he can exert influence on the narratee-Juan Sheng to enable the latter to move on, or even to forget.<sup>119</sup>

## 2.2 The Narratives

This chapter, the Narratives, inspects the narration structure of *A Doll’s House* and “Regret for the Past” under the theoretical frame of narratology respectively. The inspection includes analyses on four connected elements, namely conflict, closure, causation, and constituent event. Conflicts are the spines of the narrative, causation explains what leads to the conflicts, and when conflicts are resolved, narratives achieve their closures. The chapter thus naturally consists of two main parts and the respective part consists of four elements respectively.

### 2.2.1 Conflict and Closure

Conflict, for some analysts, is “the thwarting of intended actions by unplanned events”,<sup>120</sup> is refined to the ideology and mental clashes between agencies of a certain narrative, in this thesis. And the analysis of conflicts and closures, the resolutions of conflicts,<sup>121</sup> in this section, is also refined to the conflicts (and their closures) which

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<sup>119</sup> To be accurate while avoiding repetition, in the following text, narrator-Juan Sheng is referred as “narrator-Juan Sheng”, character-Juan Sheng as “Juan Sheng”, narratee-Juan Sheng as “narratee”.

<sup>120</sup> Herman, “Conflict” in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory*.

<sup>121</sup> Abbott, *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative*, 56.

both the male and female protagonists are involved simultaneously. However, the conflicts with both protagonists involved are not necessarily the conflicts between the male and protagonists. In “Regret for the Past” for example, the first of the two conflicts being examined in the following part of this section involves both the male protagonist Juan Sheng and female protagonist Zi Jun, but the conflict is not between them, rather between them and the norm. Todorov argues that conflict<sup>122</sup> is indispensable to narratives as a process through which the initial state of equilibrium of a story is disrupted and later regains its equilibrium,<sup>123</sup> but Kafalenos points out that not all narratives conform to this model.<sup>124</sup> No matter a necessary constituent of a narrative or not, conflict and closure are vital units to our understanding of a certain narrative. And my narratological analysis of the *A Doll’s House* and “Regret for the Past” starts here.

- Conflicts

On the one hand, the first difference of the conflicts of *A Doll’s House* and “Regret for the Past” is the quantity difference. There are two ideology and mental conflicts which involve both the male protagonist Juan Sheng and female protagonist Zi Jun in “Regret for the Past”, and only one in *A Doll’s House* where both Nora and Helmer are involved. On the other hand, as put precedingly, conflicts can be characterised by the agencies involved. The conflict of *A Doll’s House* is the conflict between Nora and Helmer. But the first conflict in “Regret for the Past” is between the couple Juan Sheng and Zi Jun and the norm, while the second is between the male and female protagonists. The two conflicts in “Regret for the Past” are logically connected and together play constructive roles in the causation and constituent events of the narrative, which will be furtherly analysed in the respective sections of this chapter.

Confrontation(s), negotiation(s), and closure constitute a certain conflict. My analysis of the conflicts in the narratives follows this structure of conflicts.

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<sup>122</sup> To be noted, the conflict concerned by Todorov is not the same as the conflict concerned in this thesis. Todorov’s discussion of conflict is an extrapolation of Propp’s study of Russian folklore where conflicts are characterised as variants of the function of “act of villainy”.

<sup>123</sup> Todorov, “La Grammaire du Recit”.

<sup>124</sup> Kafalenos, “Lingering along the Narrative Path: Extended Functions in Kafka and Henry James”.

Confrontations, then negotiations and closures at last. And it begins with analysis on the two confrontations and two negotiations of the first conflict of “Regret for the Past. Juan Sheng’s stunning claim that “a man must make a living before there can be any place for love”<sup>125</sup> is more than frequently quoted in the field of Lu Xun Studies by Chinese scholars,<sup>126</sup> and sometimes it is quoted even in the headings of academic essays in the field.<sup>127</sup> Juan Sheng’s statement reveals the second conflict in “Regret for the Past”, the conflict between living and loving. This conflict is not always apparent in narrator-Juan Sheng’s narration of “Regret for the Past” however, but it suggests the constant and chronically first conflict, the conflict between the ideology of the “new youth” represented by the couple Juan Sheng and Zi Jun and the norm of the community.<sup>128</sup>

The continuing ideology conflict between Juan Sheng (and later Zi Jun) the new youth(s) is presented in narrator-Juan Sheng’s narration throughout the text. In the beginning of his storytelling, the narrator recalls Juan Sheng and Zi Jun’s early dates in Juan Sheng’s rented single room when they discuss resistance against the conservative traditional values such as the idea of woman emancipation. And when Zi Jun leaves Juan Sheng’s room, her leaving is always accompanied by the gaze of the old and young “wretch”,<sup>129</sup> where the first confrontation of the first conflict happens. The “old wretch’s” overwatch is vividly described by the narrator: he presses his head so hard to the window to look through and overwatch the couple that his nose becomes flattened by such pressing. His nose pressing is a picturesque metaphor of the pressure from the conservative community, and the nose flattened by the pressure is the physical embodiment of the oppressing power opposed by the social norm to those who dare to

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<sup>125</sup> Note that in Lu Xun’s original Chinese text, he uses the word “人” (ren), which is closer to the English word “person”. But since what Juan Sheng inexplicitly but means is that “I must make a living before ...”, and also because of the double meaning of the English word “man”, the translation is indeed appropriate.

<sup>126</sup> Cao, “Lun Shangshi de jiegou cengci jiqi xushi celue”, 78; Li Ling, “Shengming de chaoyuexing zhuiqiu yu nvxing richang rensheng”, 65; Liu Changhua, “Lun Lu Xun xiaoshuo zhong de zhuyi yu wenti zhi zheng” 13; Liu Jing, “Wanou Zhi Jia he Shangshi de bijiao”, 111; Zhang, “Ren de zaifanxian: Lu Xun xiaoshuo Shangshi chongdu”, 85.

<sup>127</sup> Jin “Ren bi shenghuo zhe, ai cai yousuo fuli: dui Lu Xun Shangshi de jiexi”; Cheng “Ren bi shenghuo zhe, ai cai yousuo fuli: Shangshi Zhong Zijun shenti xushi de duochong jiedu”.

<sup>128</sup> According to the definitions, the secondary and primary conflicts in *Regret for the Past* are apparently the conflict within a character and the conflict between the character and the community respectively.

<sup>129</sup> Lu Xun, *Wandering*, trans. Yang Gladys and Yang Xianyi, 104.



oppose it<sup>130</sup>. Bell hooks maintains that “there is power in looking”,<sup>131</sup> Juan Sheng and Zi Jun are not only being looked by the “wretches”, but also being looked by the social norm. And power is inflicted on them directly by the gesture of looking.

When the young rebellious couple walk out from their room, their free practise of opposing against the oppressive and dominating traditional norms by teaching and learning of Western ideology is no longer limited to their private space. It becomes visible, and “visibility is a trap”.<sup>132</sup> Their little rebellious practice is now seized by the hostile eyes of the powerful norm built on the thousands of years long Confucius tradition which would trap them eventually. In the much larger public area dominated by the norm, their freedom within Juan Sheng’s “shabby room” is deprived of, and they are measured as *abnormal*. And according to Foucault, measuring is not the destination but just a first step.<sup>133</sup> The norm’s goal is to control and then remould the *abnormal* until they become *normal* which means conforming to the social norm. And if remoulding is not possible to accomplish, containing and eliminating become the final measures.

Power is exerted by the looking of the norm upon the protagonists, but since the looking exposes itself in a public area, which is different to the case of prison studied by Foucault in his *Discipline and Punish*, the possibility of resisting through looking back exists. And this possibility leads to the negotiation of the conflicts being inspected here. The couple’s very first encounter to the oppressing looking from the Others in the narrator’s narration is right after Zi Jun’s punchy claim that “I am my own mistress”. The couple’s reactions to the looking varies. Zi Jun doesn’t realise the looking at all but proudly walk out while Juan Sheng does realise them and proudly walk back to his room without looking back. Both of their reactions are intriguing and suggest the different inner characteristic of the characters. Zi Jun’s ignoring of the looking from the Others manifests her naiveness even blindness on the social environment where she will be harshly punished beyond her imagination. Juan Sheng, however, realises the

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<sup>130</sup> By the norm I mean the tradition where the individual agency is restrained, and in this case, the agency of free loving.

<sup>131</sup> Hooks, "The Oppositional Gaze", 207.

<sup>132</sup> Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 200.

<sup>133</sup> Foucault, 199.

harsh environment but he is not brave nor strong enough to look back. Hooks states that the oppositional gaze from the oppressed is a powerful declare that “not only will I stare. I want my look to change the reality”.<sup>134</sup> The oppositional gaze is absent both to Zi Jun and Juan Sheng. Since the oppositional gaze is more of a reaction rather than a spontaneous action, Zi Jun’s neglect result in the cancellation of the foundation of opposing. As for Juan Sheng, being unable to look back demonstrates that his desire and bravery of enlightening is indeed limited to the enlightenment of Zi Jun, an innocent and even naïve young girl, in his private room, where he is safely being in an intellectual and powerful advantage. He dares no challenge to enlighten and even destroy the powerful norm, and his weakness and powerlessness buried in the single absence of oppositional gaze is an early but clear sign that his enlightening practise is doomed to fail and fail with a price.

In their second confrontation to the hostile oppressing gaze in the narration when the couple walk together to find a new place to live together after they officially become together, the narrator-Juan Sheng describes Juan Sheng as “shivering” but still tries to “summon all his pride and deviance” to support himself. And in the third and last time, he just wants to run away from the contemptuous looking without showing any thoughts of opposition.

Juan Sheng’s constantly changing but, in a sense, accordant reactions demonstrate that the new youths, Juan Sheng and Zi Jun’s, shifty negotiations with the ideology conflict against the social norms. There are two negotiations of the ideology conflict between the new youth and norm. But before moving to the analysis of negotiations, the shifty and unstable essence of the first conflict of *A Doll’s House* is where the two narratives separate from each other.

Firstly, in *A Doll’s House*, the conflict is between Nora and Thorvald, the protagonist, and her antagonist, in the sense of its Greek derivation. But in “Regret for the Past”, it is the couple against the norm, or the norm here is the antagonist. Secondly, the conflict between Nora and Thorvald is constant and stable. Even Nora hides it until

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<sup>134</sup> Hooks, "The Oppositional Gaze", 208.

their final confrontation at the last of the play, Nora throughout the whole play holds a different view from Thorvald of the role of women in both the society and families. Nora only reveals here rebellious thought at the end of third act where lies the confrontation, negotiation, and closure of the conflict of the play, but Juan Sheng's belief in women empowerment changes, or rather degrades, during the two negotiations of the first conflict of the short story.

In the couple's first negotiation with the norm, the conflict is resolved by their conversation, or more precisely, Juan Sheng's passionate enlightening speech on Western ideology. Among other Western figures, Ibsen and his texts *A Doll's House* and *Lady from the Sea* are interpreted as a champion of woman emancipation. The noticeable detail of the negotiation is Zi Jun's powerful claim that "I'm my own mistress. None of them has any right to interfere with me." This is apparently a parallel to the voice of Nora where she states that the most sacred duty to a woman is the duty to herself. However, the difference is that Nora asks to leave the oppressing home where she is instructed by her dominating husband and go into the society to enlighten herself by herself. Her desire of self-enlightening is built upon her understanding of the hypocrite essence of her doll husband's instruction, and her embracement to the society as a single woman who is ready to be responded in a less harmful way like the society does to Mrs. Linde. As for Zi Jun, her Nora-like statement is rather a result of Juan Sheng's instruction, whose hypocrite and weak character awaits to be revealed in the later conflict.

Zi Jun's statement is indeed Nora-like. But she is not Nora. In the conflict of *A Doll's House*, during the confrontation and negotiation between the Helmers. Nora claims that Thorvald is not the man to teach her to be a fit wife or human-being. Nora at last denies the unequal instructor-instructed relationship between she and Thorvald, while Zi Jun's stunning claim is a result of it. In the confrontation, Nora claims that both in her father and husband's house, she is told by the male patriarchs of their opinions, and she must suppress of her own. But in the negotiation, she reaches the conclusion that she would not suppress them anymore. This is what Zi Jun never

reaches during the processes of the conflicts in *Regret for the Past*. Despite the difference, connection of the conflicts of the two narratives remains. The first negotiation of Juan Sheng and Zi Jun ideology conflict with the society is resulted by Juan Sheng's introducing of Nora, so as the negotiation of the second conflict of "Regret for the Past" where the couple is against each other.<sup>135</sup>

The second conflict in "Regret for the Past" is the conflict between the couple, between "loving and living". In the negotiation of the Juan Sheng and Zi Jun, the male protagonist also preaches about Nora's home-leaving, but with a completely different purpose. He now believes that his need of living overwhelms the opposition to the social norm, and the Nora-like Zi Jun who leaves his home now becomes merely a burden to his need. Juan Sheng feels like it is because Zi Jun's leaving home that he loses his job thus his income, and it leads to the existential dilemma where continuing their fight to the norm is no longer an option to him. Even Juan Sheng still manipulates the same discourse of women emancipation by giving the example of Nora, Juan Sheng now is not an ally<sup>136</sup> of the home-leaving female anymore, but a spokesman of the norm. And the spokesman of norm is indeed the role of Thorvald in his conflict with Nora in *A Doll's House*.

Thorvald claims that Nora, or a woman, is not a qualified partner to conduct a serious talk. He also believes that a woman's holies duties are those to her husband and kids. The ideology presented by Thorvald characterised him as the speaker of social norm of the role of women in 19<sup>th</sup> century bourgeois society, in which Nora is the female resister who claims that her most sacred duty is to herself. During the confrontation and negotiation of the conflict, the role of the norm is not as powerful as the female protagonist<sup>137</sup>. In the second conflict of "Regret for the Past" and the conflict of *A Doll's House*, both male protagonists appear as the spokesman of the norm, and both female protagonists end up with leaving the male partner, but the role norms play in the two

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<sup>135</sup> To avoid repetition, the demonstrations of second negotiation of the first conflict and the first and only confrontation of the second conflict of "Regret for the Past", are omitted.

<sup>136</sup> The role of ally, from the semantical angle, will be introduced and analysed in the section of causation and constituent evets.

<sup>137</sup> The powerfulness of Nora, and the powerlessness of Zi Jun, will be demonstrated in the following section of voice and focalisation, in the chapter of narrators.

conflicts are different. In *A Doll's House* Nora's leaving is the result of a failed persuasion by the spokesman of the norms, but in "Regret for the Past", it is resulted by a successful one disguised by the discourse which appears to oppose them.

To conclude my analysis of conflicts in the first part of this section, I would highlight Thorvald's line before the closure of the conflict where Nora leaves: you don't consider what the world will say. This is indeed the major difference between the conflicts of the two narratives. Even though Thorvald is the preacher of social norms in the conflict, but the norms only inflict their power to the female protagonist by speaking. In *Regret for the Past*, however, the norms not only talk through the mouth of Juan Sheng in the second conflict, but they also inflict physical and mental pressure upon the resister by looking, and depriving their financial security, as stated earlier. The power of the norm is much more exercised in the conflicts of "Regret for the Past" than in the conflict of *A Doll's House*, and the difference leads to disparate closures of the conflicts.

- Closures

"When a narrative resolves a conflict, it achieves closure".<sup>138</sup> The connotation of the term closure should not be confused with the connotation of the term ending. Ending is where narrative ends, but closure is the where the conflict of narrative resolves. The difference is that ending is always part of a narrative because there is always a last unit of a narrative –a sound, a word, a picture, a movement, a function, an event, etc., but the conflict in narrative do not have to be resolved. And apparently ending only appears at the end of a narrative, but closure may appear at any part of a narrative so long as a closure is resolved there.

Based on Roland Barthes's anatomy of how to read narratives in his *S/Z*, Abbott states that there are two important levels of closure, the level of expectations and the level of questions. The analysis of the closures starts with the level of expectations, where readers of the narrative "recognize, by numerous signals, the kind of action or

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<sup>138</sup> H. Porter Abbott, *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative*, 56.

sequence of events that we are reading”, for instance revenge, falling in love, murder, escape, a bad dream, etc.<sup>139</sup>

There are three conflicts analysed in the previous part of this section, one in *A Doll's House* and two in “Regret for the Past”. There are thus three closures respectively, and they will be examined in the second part of this section. The closure of *A Doll's House*<sup>140</sup> stunningly resolves the conflict of<sup>141</sup> *A Doll's House* by Nora's door-slaming of the patriarchy household, both actually and metaphorically. The closure of the conflict reveals the power of the female protagonist in an explicit way and leaves an overwhelming impression to its audience<sup>142</sup>. To anyone who is familiar with the narrative, a Chinese Nora, if she does exist, is expected to be as powerful as Nora because powerfulness is a vital component of Noraness. And such expectation forms the one level of the readers' expectation to “Regret for the Past”, the story of the “Chinese Nora”.

On the one hand, Zi Jun's successfulness of her self-emancipation is expected in the narrative because of the intertextuality demonstrated in the first part of this essay. And such expectation is fulfilled in the first closure of “Regret for the Past”, by the female protagonist's line that “I am my own mistress”. In this way, the closures of the two narratives are connected. It is also part of the reason why “Regret for the Past” is read by Chinese scholars as the after story of *A Doll's House*<sup>143</sup>. On the other hand, Lu Xun wrote the short story after giving his famous speech “What Happens after Nora's Leaving” where he claims that Nora would either end up going back or becoming a prostitute because she is not financially secured after leaving. And Lu Xun famous speech and claim give the short story another level of expectation, the failure of her

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<sup>139</sup> Abbott, 58.

<sup>140</sup> Precisely, it is the closure of the conflict of *A Doll's House* which, among all other conflicts of the narrative, is being analysed here. The reference to the closure is cut short to “the closure of *A Doll's House*” to avoid repetition. The other two closures will be similarly referred as the (first/second) closure of “Regret for the Past”.

<sup>141</sup> There are more than one conflicts in *A Doll's House*. So precisely, it is the conflict of *A Doll's House* which, among all other conflicts of the narrative, is being analysed in this thesis. This long expression is shortened to “the conflict of *A Doll's House*” from now on in this thesis for the economics of the essay.

<sup>142</sup> Later in the next section of this chapter, I argue that the door-slaming event is a constituent part of the story of Nora.

<sup>143</sup> Next section of causation and constituent events provides another reason of it.

self-empowerment of the “Chinese Nora”. The two levels of expectations are contrary to each other, and the contradiction forms a strong tension of the text in the level of expectation, which is resolved in the two closures contrarily in the two closures.

In the first closure the expectation of Zi Jun’s success is resolved with fulfilment while the expectation of her failure is failed. The fact that the first closure is only at the beginning of the narrative, combined with the opposite result of two different expectations, strengthens the tension of the text even though one important conflict is resolved here. In the second closure where the narrative reaches its end, Zi Jun reaches her death. The expectation that she would fail by either coming back home or “degenerate” is fulfilled both surprisingly and satisfyingly by it. But in the level of the expectation of a succeeded women emancipation, the closure denies fulfilling the expectation in an irretrievable way, the female protagonist’s death. The latter level of expectation to the closures of “Regret for the Past” are closely linked to the closure of narrative *A Doll’s House*, but the connection is destroyed here at the second closure of “Regret for the Past”. The closures of the narratives are constructed so differently that the two female characters reach completely different destinations at the last closure of their narratives.

Before moving to a deeper inspection of the closures from the perspective of the female protagonists, an analysis to the closures from the perspective of the male protagonists would contribute to the comparison of the closures. After the second negotiation, Juan Sheng gets rid of Zi Jun and thus loses his enlightenment achievement but reaps his chance to keep on living. He publishes some of his articles, gets paid, and moves back to his old room, while Zi Jun leaves their home and dies. The closure demonstrates that the norm is still so powerful that the couple’s resistance against it easily leads to pathetic ends. However, to the male protagonist the norm is not powerful enough to deprive his life. Juan Sheng’s punishment from the norms is the loss of financial security, but not his own life. The closure shows that the norms treat the Juan Sheng and Zi Jun differently, even though they are both rebellious to them. And the difference is based on their genders. The male Juan Sheng’s rebellion is forgivable while

female Zi Juns' is not.

In *A Doll's House*, because Nora's future remains unknown at the closure of the play, the norms are less powerful. So as the male protagonist Thorvald. Thorvald has no power<sup>144</sup> over the female protagonist Nora since he cannot stop her from leaving. Compared to Nora's striking door-slaming, Thorvald appears as confused, upset, and helpless at the closure of the narrative. He sinks in a chair, covering his face by his hands, murmuring "Nora. Nora. [...] She is gone." His last hope on what might bring his wife back, what Nora calls "the miracle of the miracles", is interrupted by the loud sound of the closure of both the door, and the narrative. Juan Sheng is also similarly powerless over the female Zi Jun at the second closure of "Regret for the Past". Zi Jun's death on the one hand is contributed by his reckless "empowerment", but on the other hand Zi Jun's leaving is to a greater extent by her own will. Zi Jun leaves the family because there is no love, but not since Juan Sheng asks her to do so. Zi Jun's death is not in the control of Juan Sheng but of the norms. The difference between the two closures is that Juan Sheng manages to struggle to live on and make his own voice by the whole narrative of "Regret for the Past", while Thorvald's wish that Nora would come back remains unclear<sup>145</sup>.

The difference between the closure and *A Doll's House* and the second closure of "Regret for the Past" is more explicit when investigating from the perspective of female protagonists. Lu Xun claims that Nora (in Chinese society) would either go back home or become a prostitute after slamming her own home door in his speech, because she would have no other way to financially support herself, inducting from what happened to Li Chao. But in "Regret for the Past", the short story that he later wrote, the Nora-like female protagonist Zi Jun, not only goes back home, but dies after. Zi Jun's death is irreparable, and the dead female protagonist is voiceless. Zi Jun's voicelessness would be further analysed and compared with Nora in the following chapter of narrator, here another method is introduced to analyse the different characteristics of closures in the two narratives, from the perspective of female protagonists.

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<sup>144</sup> Power in the sense as the ability to control others to fulfil the subject's desire.

<sup>145</sup> The voice differences between characters are analysed later in the Chapter Narrator of this essay.



Nancy K. Miller in her book *The Heroine's Text: Readings in the French and English Novel* categorises the plots of female protagonists into two basic types: the *euphoric* and the *dysphoric*.<sup>146</sup> Miller claims that euphoric narrative ends with the female protagonist's integration into society, which is a trajectory of ascent, and dysphoric narrative ends with the female protagonist's death at an early age, a trajectory of descent.<sup>147</sup> The different closures of *A Doll's House* and "Regret for the Past" confirm to such distinction.

Starting with a pretended cover of being obedient and submissive to her husband, Nora at the closure of *A Doll's House* breaks free from the oppressing household into the greater community with both potential harm and opportunity to educate and develop herself by herself as her friend Ms. Linde. But Zi Jun is killed by the harm at the closure of "Regret for the Past". The narrative of *A Doll's House* is euphoric and the narrative of "Regret for the Past" is dysphoric. Nora and the "Chinese Nora" follow disparate trajectories along the development of their stories. And this difference is revealed by the different closures. What cause the difference at the closures then? One reason is that their different ways of being enlightened concerning the idea of women emancipation. Firstly, Nora is self-enlightened while Zi Jun is enlightened by her male partner. The difference here is that Nora tries to gain the dominance of herself as subject by enlightening herself, while Zi Jun is almost a silent object in Juan Sheng's narration of their instructor/instructed relationship. Nora breaks free from such relationship to gain freedom, while Zi Jun is trapped in such relationship even though Juan Sheng claims it is for the liberation of her, which is not the case. Secondly, Zi Jun's enlightenment is through Juan Sheng's introduction of western theories, including Ibsen's. So, there are several levels of her enlightenment. The first level is that Juan Sheng's idea of women emancipation is borrowed from western theory, and he tries to apply it in Chinese society without critical inspection and adaptation. And the second level is that Zi Jun's idea of women emancipation is borrowed from Juan Sheng, a man. In contrast, Nora

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<sup>146</sup> Miller, *The Heroine's Text*, xi. The terms are adopted and adapted from A. J. Greimas. According to Miller, Greimas claims in his *Structural semantics: an attempt at a method* that "euphorie" vs. "dysphorie", the opposition posited by Greimas, "correspond to positive and negative axiological categories within a given semantic universe". See in Nancy K. Miller's *The Heroine's Text*, page 159.

<sup>147</sup> Miller, xi.

lacks the theoretical knowledge of law, society, or liberation, but she develops the idea of them by herself through her own vivid life experience. Zi Jun's women emancipation idea is already transformed and distorted at first, but Nora develops it from herself and for herself. The huge difference here finally leads to the drastic difference at the closure.

In general, the difference of closure is caused by the difference level of completeness of the female characters' enlightenment. Since Zi Jun is in the object position of her enlightening relationship with Juan Sheng, if the enlightenment of Zi Jun's agency as a woman is to succeed, Juan Sheng must give up his subject position and empower Zi Jun to take over the subject position of him the male. However, Juan Sheng's motivation of enlightening is rather to regain his subject position which is seized by the West in the ideology confliction between China and the West where the latter has won. Juan Sheng's subject position is deprived in the imperialism oppression he faces, and his trying to enlighten Zi Jun is indeed the try to regain his subjectivity, because in such enlightenment activity, he is the one who dominates. Since in Zi Jun's enlightenment, or rather Juan Sheng's enlightenment, Juan Sheng's best interest is really the objective of such "enlightenment", Zi Jun's failure is then not surprising at all. But Nora's self-education does not have such complicated hierarchy, it is because of herself, by herself and for herself from the beginning until the closure of her story.

Anyway, the closures of the two narratives are rather different structured, despite the connections of them. The differences are more apparent when taking consider of the completely varied endings of the two female protagonists. The varied closures demonstrates that the Nora and "Chinese Nora" are involved in two rather different stories, by the distinction between euphoric and the dysphoric narratives. Though demonstrating a major structural difference of the texts, the inspection of the structures upon Nora and the "Chinese Nora" would not stop here but move to a analysis of the causations and constituent events of the narratives.

### 2.2.2 Causations and Constituent Events

- Causations

Brian Richardson defines cause<sup>148</sup> in narrative literature as “an action or event that directly or obliquely produces a transformation” in the entry of “Causality” in *Routledge Encyclopaedia of Narrative Theory* and claims that “Causality is one of the most fundamental aspects of narrative is present at a number of different textual levels”.

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Richardson claims the necessity of causality to narrativity by analysing several narratologists’ definitions of narrative in his 1997 work *Unlikely Stories: Causality and the Nature of Modern Narratives*, which is the first book-length study that concerns the full range of causal issues in narrative. For example, Mieke Bal defines *fabula* as “a series of logically and chronically related events that are caused or experienced by actors”.<sup>150</sup> Jon-K Adams also claims that events in a narrative are linked by the principle of causality is a vital assumption to the reader’s understanding of the narrative,<sup>151</sup> while film theorists David Bordwell, Kristin Thompson and Jeff Smith give the most compelling argument for causal definition of narrative: a narrative is “a chain of events linked by cause and effect and occurring in time and space”.<sup>152</sup>

And there are also definitions of narrative that do not consider causality necessary to narrativity<sup>153</sup>, such as my definition that a narrative is a representation of a series of connected and selected events. No matter causality a necessity to narrativity or not, the discussions demonstrate that causality concerns one of the most vital characteristics of narrative. It is therefore vital to compare the causal relationship between events when comparing two narratives, i.e., to compare the causations. And causation in this section is defined as series of actions and events reconstructed chronically from the story that are connected by causal relationship in a narrative<sup>154</sup>, i.e., a series of connected causes

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<sup>148</sup> Similarly, consequence discussed in this section is defined as an action or event that is directly or obliquely produced by one or more causes. Noted that a consequence can also be a cause of a later consequence, and a cause can also be a consequence of a previous cause.

<sup>149</sup> Brian Richardson, “Causality”, 48, in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory*, ed. David Herman, Manfred Jahn, and Marie-Laure Ryan.

<sup>150</sup> Bal, *Narratology*, 5.

<sup>151</sup> Adam, “Causality and Narrative”, 149.

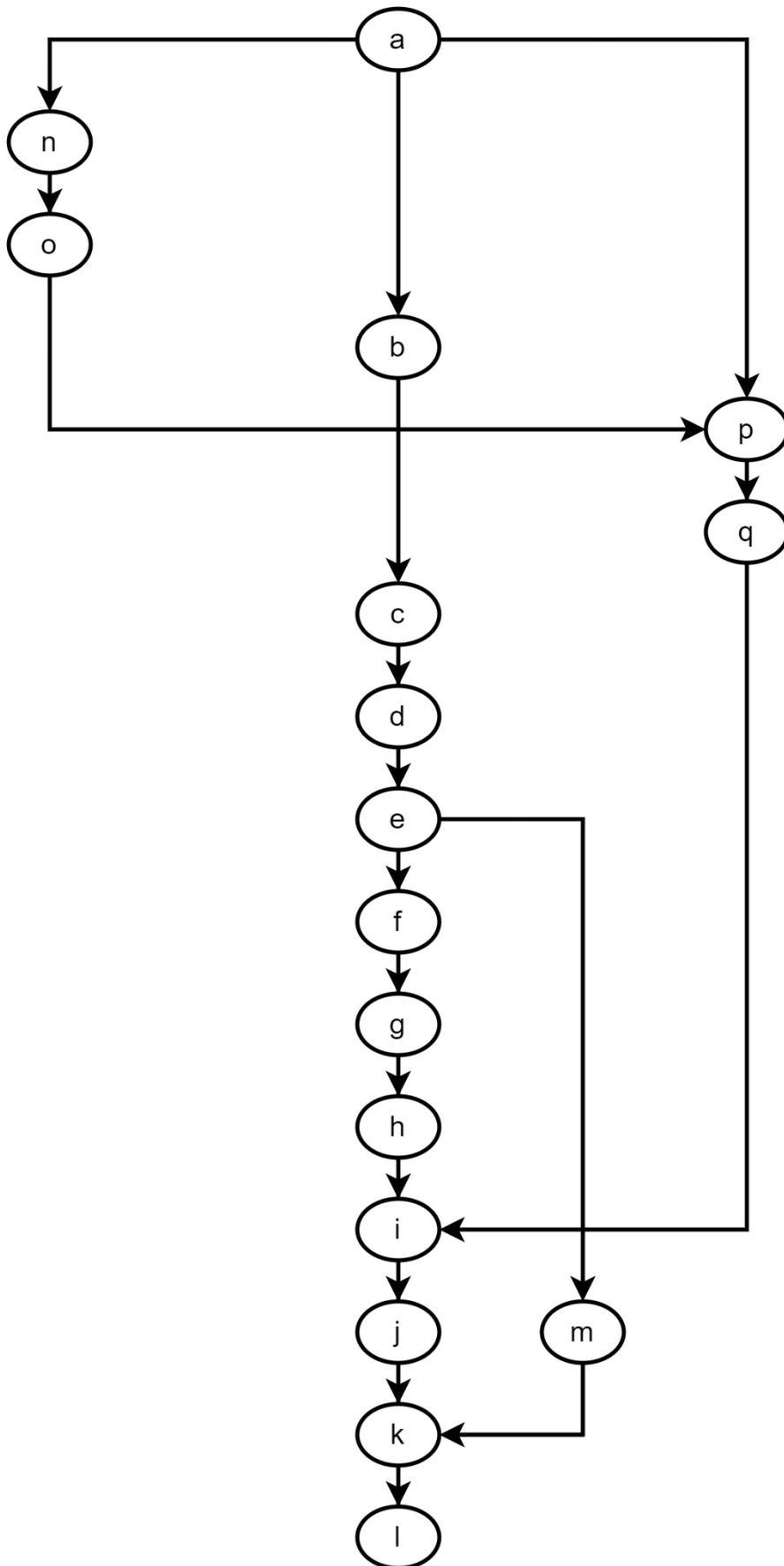
<sup>152</sup> Bordwell, Thompson, and Smith, *Film Art*, 73.

<sup>153</sup> Roland Barthes, for example, claims that any causal attribution in a narrative is intrinsically questionable (1977, 94).

<sup>154</sup> As pointed out by Richardson, causality is present at lots of different textual levels, the discussion of causations of the two narratives *Regret for the Past* and *A Doll’s House* in this section is confined to the level of events, by the definition of causation.

and consequences.

The causation of “Regret for the Past” is as shown in the figure:



The letters in the figure from “a” to “r” represent events and actions that constitute the causation of “Regret for the Past”. These events and actions are positioned by chronological order from up to down, which means that the events and actions represented by higher positioned letters happen first in the story and vice versa. The arrows connect events and actions that are causally connected, and they departures from a cause and land to a consequence. As remarked earlier in this section, an event or action can be a cause and a consequence simultaneously—b, for example, is both the consequence of a and the cause of c.

The events and actions represented by the letters are shown as following:

- a: Zi Jun and Juan Sheng date in Juan Sheng’s place.
- b: Zi Jun and Juan Sheng are seen being together by the “face cream”.
- c: Juan Sheng gets the commissioner’s letter.
- d: Juan Sheng tries to find jobs.
- e: Juan Sheng sells the chickens and gets rid of the dog.
- f: Juan Sheng tries to persuade Zi Jun the necessity of living.
- g: Juan Sheng goes to the library.
- h: Juan Sheng thinks of the “first and foremost” livelihood.
- i: Juan Sheng preaches Nora’s leaving to Zi Jun.
- j: Juan Sheng knows Zi Jun’s leaving.
- k: Juan Sheng knows Zi Jun’s death.
- l: Juan Sheng thinks of Zi Jun, goes back to his old room, and writes the note.
- m: A Sui comes back.
- n: Juan Sheng preaches works such as *A Doll’s House*.
- o: Zi Jun claims that “I am my own mistress”.
- p: Juan Sheng expresses his love to Zi Jun.
- q: Juan Sheng and Zi Jun move to Fortunate Ally.

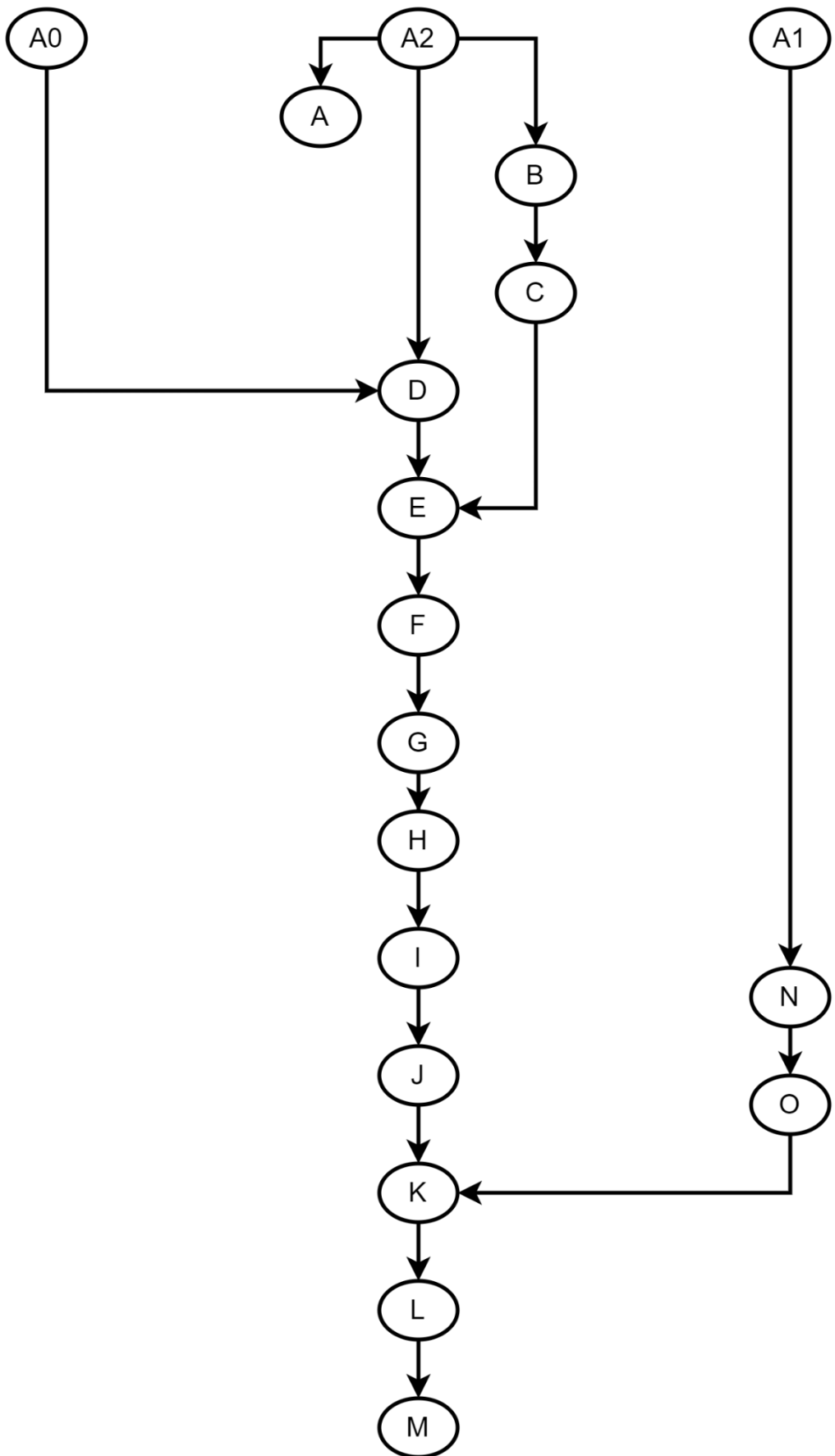
These are not all the events and actions in “Regret for the Past”, but the actions and events that constituent causation of the short story, as my definition resonates. On the one hand, the reading of causation can be difficult and confusing as pointed out by Roland Barthes that confusing consecution with consequence is common when what

comes after in a narrative is read as what is caused by.<sup>155</sup> The outlining of the causation of narratives thus requires prudence. In “Regret for the Past” for example, there are two consecutive events: first, the plants bought by Juan Sheng dies; second, Zi Jun starts to keep animals. They are consecutive in the story, but there is not even oblique evidence from the story that they are casually connected. The reason why events and actions o and p are casually connected in the figure is similar. The causal relationship between them is not as apparent as between b and c. After all, how can Zi Jun’s statement that she is her own mistress be a direct and decisive reason of Juan Sheng’s love expression to her? But my analysing of the mixed motif of love and revolution both in preceding and following parts of this thesis demonstrates that loving and liberating the female protagonist is a complex hybrid to the male protagonist of “Regret for the Past”. So, might being inapparent and indecisive, Zi Jun’s famous and astonishing claim still at least partly motivates Juan Sheng’s love expression to her. On the other hand, the causation analysed here only concerns with the actions and events that departs from the beginning to the ending (closure) of the story (narrative), i.e., the actions and events that are both connected causally to a: Zi Jun and Juan Sheng date in Juan Sheng’s place and l: Juan Sheng thinks of Zi Jun, moves back to his old room, and writes the note.

Similarly, the causation of *A Doll’s House* can be demonstrated by the following figure:

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<sup>155</sup> Barthes, *Image, Music, Text*, 197.





The actions and events represented by the letters are as following:

A0: Nora borrows from Krogstad and forges signature.

A1: Krogstad and Mrs. Linde has an history.

A2: Thorvald gets promotion and fires Krogstad.

A: Nora buys presents for Xmas.

B: Mr. Linde comes and asks for help.

C: Thorvald agrees to help Mrs. Linde.

D: Krogstad tries to get back his job, is rejected and threats to reveal Nora's secret.

E: Nora pleas for Krogstad and is rejected.

F: Thorvald sends the letter that fires Krogstad.

G: Krogstad sends the letter that reveals Nora's secret.

H: Nora reveals her forging to Mrs. Linde.

I: Mrs. Linde leaves to persuade Krogstad to take the letter back and asks Nora to stop Thorvald from reading the letter.

J: Thorvald reads K's letter and blames Nora.

K: Thorvald forgives Nora.

L: Nora confronts Thorvald.

M: Nora leaves.

N: Mrs. Linde persuades Krogstad.

O: K gives back the receipt.

Particularly, events A0, A1, and A2 happen before the beginning of the play, which is event A. But they are vital in the causation to the developing of the story, thus they are demonstrated in the causation of *A Doll's House*. The chronical order of events A0, A1, and A2 is unclear, they are thus placed at the same horizontal level. Plus, event A is the beginning of the story, and event M is both the ending of the story and the closure of the narrative.

The causation of *A Doll's House* demonstrates that how the past heavily influences the present story of the play. If event A0 had never happened, i.e., Nora had never borrowed from Krogstad and forged her father's signature, Krogstad would not

be able to threaten Nora with her debt (event D) and reveal it (event G), and the conflict between the Helmers analysed in previous section would probably never happen. Similarly, Krogstad and Mrs. Linde's history also contributes greatly to the development of the story and the resolution of the conflict. If Krogstad and Mrs. Linde had never had a history (A1), Mrs. Linde would not be able to persuade Krogstad to take back the receipt of Nora's debt (O), and Nora would not find Thorvald's hypocritical and selfish nature—he only cares himself when threatened, while Nora intends to sacrifice herself to protect him, which leads to the “serious talk”, i.e., the final conflict between the couple, and its resolution, the closure of the narrative. Plus, the beginning of the story (A), contributes little to the causation of the narrative as shown in the figure. It is rather event A2 (with A0 and A1) that structures the causation of the narrative and pushes the story to move forward causally.

This characteristic of *A Doll's House* where the “haunted” past of the characters heavily influences the development of the present story and the causation of the narrative, is nothing like “Regret for the Past”, whose female protagonist is considered as the “Chinese Nora”. Event a is the beginning of “Regret for the Past” and the whole causal development of the story depends on the event, as shown in the figure. If Zi Jun and Juan Sheng has never dated in Juan Sheng's place, they would not be seen by the “face cream”, the friend of commissioner's son, and then Juan Sheng would not be dismissed by the commissioner (c). And event c is the direct cause of Juan Sheng's being aware of the conflict of “living and loving”, which leads to the conflict of the two protagonists and the closure of the story. The causations of the stories are structured quite differently at this stage of analysing already. A deeper inspection on the (constituent) events and their relationship of the two narratives will demonstrate more structural difference between them.

- Constituent Events

Julie Holledge discerns that there is “a composite of narrative elements common to all the *Et dukkehjem* adaptations” consulted in her *A Global Doll's House*, such as “a secret lies hidden in the past of a couple”, “a hostile intruder appears and tries to black

mail the guilty partner”, the secret is revealed at last, etc.<sup>156</sup> The events, or “narrative elements”, are by and large the constituent events of the narrative *A Doll’s House*. And the (constituent) events and their relationships to each other are the most concern of this section.

H. Potter Abbott defines constituent events as the events that drives the story forward and are “necessary for the story to be the story it is”.<sup>157</sup> And as a comparison, there are also “supplementary events” in a narrative besides the constituent events. Supplementary events, also according to Abbott, are “events that do not drive the story forward and without which the story would still remain intact”.<sup>158</sup> Roland Barthes and Seymour Chatman also investigate on constituent events and supplementary events but using different terms.

Barthes on the one hand, in his classic study of narrative functions of “Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives”, distinguishes cardinal functions (or nuclei) from catalyses, claiming that the former kind of functions constitutes “veritable hinges of the narrative” and the latter “fill the narrative space separating the hinge-functions”.<sup>159</sup> Barthes’s distinction of nuclei and catalyses in narratives is in the level of functions, and to Roland Barthes, function, as a narrative unit, is not necessarily the same to the event Abbott concerns, or to the event defined in this thesis. But anyway, what Barthes and Abbott both argue is that some narrative units are necessary to constitute the narrative, and some are not.

On the other hand, the terms used by Seymour Chatman are *kernels* and *satellites*. Chatman claims that kernels are the major events of a narrative that one cannot remove them from the narrative without altering the logic structure of it.<sup>160</sup> Unlike Barthes, Chatman’s distinction of kernels and satellite of narratives is in the layer of events, but like what Barthes claims, Chatman also stresses the tight causal, or logic, relationships between constituent events, or kernels, that empower the story<sup>161</sup> of the narrative to

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<sup>156</sup> Holledge, *A Global Doll’s House*, 117.

<sup>157</sup> Abbott, *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative*, 20-1. For example, for an adaptation of *A Doll’s House* to be recognised as an adaptation of it, as Holledge puts in her study of *A Doll’s House* adaptations around the world.

<sup>158</sup> Abbott, 20-1.

<sup>159</sup> Barthes, *Image, Music, Text*, 108.

<sup>160</sup> Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 53.

<sup>161</sup> Be aware of his distinction between story and discourse.

advance.

With the theoretical works done by Abbott, Barthes, and Chatman, especially their stress on the causal connection of the constituent events, I can discern the different sequences of constituent events of the two narratives concerned in this thesis, *A Doll's House* and "Regret for the Past", based on my research of their varied causations studied in the first part of this section.

The constituent events of *A Doll's House* are:

The Secret (A0'): Nora has borrowed from Krogstad and forged signature.

The Blackmail (D'): Krogstad blackmails Nora and reveals her secret.

The Helping Hand (I'): Mrs. Linde persuades Krogstad and catastrophe is averted.

The Slammed Door (M'): Nora confronts with Thorvald and leaves.

And the constituent events of "Regret for the Past" are:

The First Nora Lecture (a'): Juan Sheng gives his first lecture on Nora.

The First Home -Leaving (o'): Zi Jun claims her agency and lives with Juan Sheng.

The Loss of Financial Security (c'): Juan Sheng loses his job.

The Second Nora Lecture (f'): Juan Sheng gives his second lecture on Nora.

The Second Home-Leaving (j'): Zi Jun leaves and dies.

The End as the Beginning (q'): Juan moves back and recounts the story.

These constituent events of the two narratives are summarised abstractions from the events and actions of causations of the two narratives. The events are thus signified by the characters that signify the actions and events in the causations, with quotes, to demonstrate the close relationship between constituent events and causations. Particularly, the titles and descriptions of the constituent events of *A Doll's House* are adopted and adapted from Julie Holledge's study of "plot events" of *A Doll's House* in her *A Global Doll's House*.<sup>162</sup>

Several distinctions and connections can be revealed when the two sequences of

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<sup>162</sup> Holledge, *A Global Doll's House*, 117-24.

events are compared. Firstly, the study of causations in previous part of this section has already discerned that the past or history is a vital part of the story of *A Doll's House*. The constituent events of *A Doll's House* demonstrate that apart from the causation of it, the past is still a constituent part of the story of *A Doll's House*, which is different from “Regret for the Past”. Secondly, there are apparent connections between the two narratives. The construct of the story of “Regret for the Past” relies heavily on the story of *A Doll's House*. The constituent events a’ and f’, the first and second Nora lecture given by Juan Sheng, directly signify *A Doll's House* and the interpretation to it; constituent events o’ and j’, Zi Jun’s twice Nora-like home-leaving, are almost parallel of constituent events M’, Nora’s door-slamming, of *A Doll's House*. And the subject signified by c’, the financial insecurity of the couple, is also a motif of *A Doll's House*. These apparent connections between these constituent events are, at least partly, engendered by the complex historical, social, and cultural context behind the two texts, which has been analysed in the first part of this thesis. Thirdly, the importance difference of the female protagonists is distinctive in the two stories, i.e., Nora is much more important in her story than the “Chineses Nora” Zi Jun is in the story of Juan Sheng. And this will be furtherly analysed both later in this section and next chapter of narrators.

Before moving to the analysis of constituent events from the perspective of the two female protagonists, and to give a conclusion at this phase, these distinctions and relationships between the two texts in the level of the constituent parts of the two different but connected story notably provides answers to the questions of why Zi Jun is considered the Chinese Nora semantically and hermeneutically, and how the two narratives are overtly different syntactically.

Inspired by Vladimir Propp’s semiotic study of Russian folktale in his *Morphology of the Folktale*, Claude Bremond adopts and adapts Propp’s semiotics method to study the common laws governing the narratives in his “The Logic of Narrative Possibilities”, focusing on the general structures of narratives of all genres, rather than focusing merely on folklores. Bremond points out that the same event or a

same sequence of events can fulfil dissimilar functions<sup>163</sup> from the different perspectives of different characters.<sup>164</sup> For example, an aid to be received from the beneficiary of aid can also function as a service to be served from the perspective of an obligating ally.<sup>165</sup> Such distinction is considerably insightful and helpful to our comparison of the relationships of the constituent events of the two narratives from the perspective of the two female protagonist, because the functions of the constituent events can be drastically different when analysed from the perspective of other characters, male protagonists for example.

The structural difference of the two narratives is quite apparent when the events are analysed from the perspective of the change of the female protagonists' agency. The first constituent event of *A Doll's House*, A0', Nora has borrowed from Krogstad and forged signature, is what Bremond refers as the debt, which requires the beneficiary, Nora, to pay her debt, and a debt provoke a degradation.<sup>166</sup> The following event D', the Blackmail, is part of the process of degradation, but the process is avoided by the Helping Hand, event I'. And finally, the degradation turns into an obtained amelioration when Nora leaves the dollhouse after her negotiation<sup>167</sup> with Thorvald. To conclude, from the perspective of Nora and her agency, the story of *A Doll's House* begins with a process of a possibly achieved degradation but interrupted by an ally and ends up with an obtained amelioration after an amelioration.

And it is totally different for the "Chinese Nora" Zi Jun. The story, from her perspective, starts with help from an ally, event a', which is a process of an amelioration, and the possible obtained amelioration is indeed obtained at event o', the First Home - Leaving. From now on the amelioration turns into degradation, and The Loss of Financial Security is the punishment that "is a threat of degradation".<sup>168</sup> The former ally then turns into an adversary and gives his second speech on Nora and the aggression is

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<sup>163</sup> Bremond uses the term *function* as what Barthes defines in his "Introduction to Structural Analysis of Narratives", an elementary unit of a narrative which reveals the relationship between events of a narrative.

<sup>164</sup> Bremond, "The Logic of Narrative Possibilities", 394-6.

<sup>165</sup> Bremond, 395.

<sup>166</sup> Bremond, 402. According to Bremond, any given sequence of events in a narrative can be categorized into either a degradation or an amelioration, the two basic types of event sequence. The terms will be further explained in following part of this section.

<sup>167</sup> Negotiation function as part of amelioration in Bremond's model.

<sup>168</sup> Bremond, "The Logic of Narrative Possibilities", 404.

endured, temporarily, event f'. Finally, the degradation is received at event j' and her story concludes with her death.

Nora's story starts with a process of degradation which is later intervened by an ally, and it ends with an obtained amelioration. The Chinese Nora's story, however, starts with an obtained amelioration where the ally later turns into an adversary, and it ends with a received degradation. The process of the events, the structures of the narratives, are completely opposite.

The distinction between amelioration and degradation, the two basic types of event sequences, are distinguished in the favour of the agents involved in the events. If the agents favour the given sequence of events, it is then an amelioration to her; if she opposes it, it is then a degradation.<sup>169</sup> On the one hand, the connection of the narratives is apparent when the plot structures of them are revealed. Nora's story ends up with an obtained amelioration while Zi Jun's story starts with it. Such structural continuity combined with the apparent parallel subject of female emancipation and the female protagonists' self-claimed agency, and with the historical context where the writer of Zi Jun's narrative world gave a speech entitled "What Happens after Nora's Leaving" before he wrote the short story, claiming that "Regret for the Past" is the after story of *A Doll's House* whose protagonist is the "Chinese Nora" is reasonable.

On the other hand, letting alone the fact that the plot development of the "Chinese Nora" is contrary to it of Nora, the details of the plot structure of Zi Jun deviates from Nora's as well. In *A Doll's House*, the male characters are less important than the female protagonists<sup>170</sup>, especially in the constituent events. The male protagonist Thorvald is only involved as a major character in event M', as an adversary to be eliminated by Nora. So as Krogstad in event D'. Mrs. Linde's role, especially in event I's is both intriguing and important to our understanding of the narrative. Mrs. Linde comes at the beginning of the story to ask for help from her female friend but eventually end up as the ally who supports Nora for her amelioration. The understanding of the "homosocial" world of early modern women, especially "elite women", where they build close

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<sup>169</sup> Bremond, "The Logic of Narrative Possibilities", 390

<sup>170</sup> This will be demonstrated and analysed again in the following chapter of narrators, by a statistical method.

relationship with each other by their same-sex alliances, is crucial but has been long neglected.<sup>171</sup> The representation of Mrs. Linde in *A Doll's House* as an important ally to the female protagonist uncovers the friendliness, positiveness, and supportiveness of the female alliances back in that time. And the elite women in the early modern era, Nora and Mrs. Linde, are bonded together by the powerful social norms, as claimed by Herbert.<sup>172</sup>

The “Chinese Nora” is involved in a contrary plot though. Even if the instructing male protagonist Juan Sheng is her ally in event a’ while giving his Nora lecture, but he soon becomes an adversary like Thorvald after event c’, where the couple loses their financial security. Juan Sheng still tries to play, or rather perform, his role as ally in event f’, the second Nora lecture, but ultimately appears as an adversary who values his own survival more than Zi Jun’s, or the woman emancipation movement he used to preach. Unlike Nora, the “Chinses Nora” does not get the privilege to be accompanied by a female ally in a patriarchy society. Rather, she is enticed by the male protagonist who appears as a friendly and supportive ally at first but soon turns into a selfish and hypocritic adversary. Simone de Beauvoir has already pointed out in her *The Second Sex* that the enticements or temptations surrounding a woman always incite her to live an easier life by being dependant on males.<sup>173</sup> But for Beauvoir, being encouraged or empowered to fight for her own account in her life is what she believes would be a fortune for a woman.<sup>174</sup> Zi Jun is indeed being empowered by Juan Sheng to fight for her own freedom of her life, but the encouragement ends up with Zi Jun’s death. What Beauvoir is not able to be aware of but demonstrated in “Regret for the Past” is that the appearing encouragement, even a successful empowerment or liberation with a good will, sometimes end up with (disguised) sexual exploitation, especially when in a society where the empowerment is not ready to be accept, i.e., where Zi Jun lives). The empowerment from other members in the society is of course important, but the management to educate oneself like Nora, and the attempts to improve the social

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<sup>171</sup> Herbert, *Female Alliances*, 1-2.

<sup>172</sup> Herbert, 2.

<sup>173</sup> Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. Borde and Malovany-Chevallier, 775.

<sup>174</sup> Beauvoir, 776.



environment is at least equally important.

To conclude, the analyse of the constituent events of the two narratives, *A Doll's House* and "Regret for the Past", demonstrates that event though connected semantically, the two narratives are structured quite differently, especially from the perspectives of their female protagonists. For Nora, the story starts with a process of degradation which is interrupted by a helping hand from a female ally and ends up with an obtained amelioration. And Zi Jun's story starts with an obtained amelioration but ends up with a produced degradation, with no female characters plays any important roles in the construct of the story.

## 2.3 The Narrators

### 2.3.1 Introduction

The major and probably biggest differences between the two text *A Doll's House* and “Regret for the Past” are the differences between their narrators, or the narrating agencies<sup>175</sup>. It is the fork where the two texts depart each other. My major claim in the thesis is that the two texts are similar and closely related but their relationship is not as simple as most Chinese scholars state or accept without reflexion that “Regret for the Past” is the after story of *A Doll's House* and Zi Jun is the Chinese Nora. To achieve my claim, the analysis to the major differences, i.e., the differences of the narrators of the two texts are extra important.

The first major difference, which has already been pointed out in the introductory part of this thesis, is the different genres of the two texts. Thus, before moving to narrator analysing without reflecting on the method, it is vital to note the diverse genres of the two texts, namely drama and short story, and to ask is there even a narrator in the dramatic text *A Doll's House*? To partly answer the question, my methodology is to analysis *A Doll's House* as a written text with the awareness that it is also a written script for a play with the potential realization as a performance, which has also been stated in the introduction of the thesis. Such premise determines that the narrator being discussed here is not the narrator of the performance, but the narrator of the dramatic text *A Doll's House*. Then, the question transforms to: are there narrators in dramatic texts?

There are. Manfred Jahn, in his ground-breaking 2001 essay “Narrative Voice and Agency in Drama: Aspects of a Narratology of Drama”, accounts the previous narratology theories on narrators in transmedia texts, especially drama. Jahn's assertions are developed from Seymour Chatman's theory. And Chatman argues that

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<sup>175</sup> Noting that the narrating agency of *A Doll's House* is more of agency that performs as a narrating function than a person with certain personalities, but such impersonal narrating agency in general is still termed as *narrator* by most narratologist. To avoid possible confusion between the two terms narrating agency and narrator, both the narrators of *A Doll's House* and *Regret for the Past* will be both referred as “narrator” in the remaining part of this thesis. The reason why the narrator of *A Doll's House* is referred as “narrating agency” here is that I would like to inform my readers that there is a personality difference between the two narrators of the two texts at the beginning of my analysis to them.

“genres are constructs or composites of features”,<sup>176</sup> novel and drama may not always utilize the same features of storytelling, but all fictional works share some generic features like a temporal structure, a set of characters, and a setting.<sup>177</sup> Chatman proposes a text taxonomy, including both narrative texts and non-narrative texts like argument and description. And he divides narrative texts to diegetic and mimetic. In Chatman’s model, novels, and short stories like “Regret for the Past” are diegetic narratives on the one hand, and movies, cartoons, or performances of *A Doll’s House* are mimetic narratives. But what about the dramatic text being analysed here? Is it diegetic or mimetic? Or none of them? Without asking such questions, Chatman claims that every narrative has at least one narrating agency, a narrator. And since drama is narrative, it then certainly has narrators.<sup>178</sup> After Chatman, Jahn moves one step forward to clarify the position of dramatic texts in the text taxonomy. For him, narrative texts can be divided into two types: text and performance. And different texts are then divided into oral/natural ones, and written ones. Finally in written texts, there are prose like short stories and script like dramatic text, or “playscript” termed by him. Anyway, theorist and narratologist Seymour Chatman’s study lays a foundation to a narratology study to dramas and Manfred Jahn develops his theory and gives an explicit claim that there are narrators in plays and dramatic texts, which provides the theoretical frame to a narrator study of plays and dramatic texts from the lens of narrative theories.

I can proceed to the analysis to them now that I have completed the theoretic preparation and justified the presence of a narrator in drama and in short story. My analyses to the narrators in the two texts in the following part of this chapter are conducted from four dimensions: voice, focalisation, distance, and reliability. Thus, the chapter is also constructed by the four dimensions respectively.

### 2.3.2 Voice and Focalization 179

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<sup>176</sup> Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 18.

<sup>177</sup> Chatman, *Coming to Terms*, 117

<sup>178</sup> Chatman, 116-7.

<sup>179</sup> The term *focalization* is awkwardly coined” (Abbott, 73), but it is more useful and less vague than the term *point of view*. *Point of view* also concerns whom readers see from in the narrative, but the term itself can be confusing. As stated by Chatman, at least three senses can be distinguished in ordinary use of the term: literal, figurative, and transferred (see in *Story and Discourse*, 151-152). To avoid such ambiguity, the term *focalization* here refers and

- Voice

The topic of narrator is closely related to the notion of focalization.<sup>180</sup> So as the notion of voice. They are two vital, if not most vital, characteristics of narrators. Voice determines the question of who it is we “hear” narrating in the story, and similarly focalisation determines the question of through the lens of whom we “see” in the narrative.<sup>181</sup> To be precise, Chatman defines that focalization “is the physical place or ideological situation or practical life-orientation to which narrative events stand in relation”, and voice “refers to the speech or other overt means through which events and existents are communicated to the audience”.<sup>182</sup> To be noted, “focalization does not mean expression; it only means the perspective in terms of which the expression is made. The perspective and the expression need not to be lodged in the same person”.<sup>183</sup>

The characteristics of the voice of the narrator can be analysed by his relationship to the characters in the narrative text. And the grammatical person of a narrative text is one of the perspectives that demonstrates such relationship. Thus, my first question needed to answer in my exploration of the voice of the two narrative texts is: what are the grammatical persons of them? Concerning to “Regret for the Past”, the question is easy to answer. The short story is narrated by Juan Sheng, who is also the main character of the story, and he refers himself as “I” in the story. It engenders the story as first-person. It is an easy question, but the answering of it brings about other questions whose answers reveal the complexity of text. For example, even though the narrator refers “himself” as “I”, is his reliability of his accounting is affirmed by it, and how close the narrator-Juan Sheng is to the character-Juan Sheng in this case? These questions will be answered in the following chapters of reliability and distance.

When it concerns with the grammatical person of the dramatic text *A Doll’s House*, however, the question is rather difficult to answer. And the unequable difficulty of answering the similar question is caused by another characteristic of the narrator that also reveal his relationships with the characters in a narrative text, like grammatical

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only refers the sight perception of the narrator.

<sup>180</sup> Bal, *Narratology*, 12.

<sup>181</sup> Abbott, *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative*, 170-3.

<sup>182</sup> Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 153.

<sup>183</sup> Chatman, 153.

person. The characteristic is the narrator's diegetic-ness. The narrator in Ibsen's dramatic text *A Doll's House* is extradiegetic, or external. And the narrator in Lu Xun's short story "Regret for the Past" is homodiegetic, or character-bound (internal).

The narrator of dramatic text *A Doll's House* has all the characteristics of a third person omniscient narrator of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century novels, Fielding's *Tom Jones* for example. The narrator is not a character of her story, i.e., s/he is extradiegetic; and she is all-knowing. The narrator of *A Doll's House* demonstrates such characteristics of a third person omniscient narrator. The only obstacle between claiming that the narrator of *A Doll's House* is such a narrator is that *A Doll's House* is a drama rather than a novel. Nevertheless, as pointed out in the introduction part of this thesis, Chatman's work on the narrative theory that fictions and dramas are all narratives (with narrators) even with the genre difference between them, has laid a theoretical foundation to such strong claim here. Letting alone that dramatic text of a drama is closer to a fiction rather than its performance from the perspective of genre<sup>184</sup>, thus I claim, the narrator of *A Doll's House* is third person and omniscient.

Noticing the difference of the narrators, I have now unveiled a corner of the huge and fundamental difference between the two texts: the narrator of *A Doll's House* is not as strongly bonded to the characters of its story (at least appearing to be so<sup>185</sup>) as the narrator-Juan Sheng does in "Regret for the Past". The following text will follow this lead here and reveal more of the masked face of the two different narrators.

The typical line of Juan Sheng which has been mentioned by me several times precedingly that "the sound shabby room would gradually be filled with the sound of my pronouncements" is critical to our understanding of the narrator-Juan Sheng. Previously in this thesis, this line is understood as a reveal of the patriarchy background both inside and outside the short story where women's voice is deprived by their male instructors. This analysis is in the level of story. Now, however, I would point out that

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<sup>184</sup> See in Manfred Jahn's "Narrative Voice and Agency in Drama" in *New Literary History*, volume 32, no. 3, page 675. Also in Project PPP: *Poems, Plays, and Prose: A Guide to the Theory of Literary Genres*, <http://www.uni-koeln.de/~ame02/ppp.htm>.

<sup>185</sup> The Section Distance and (Un)Reliability reveals that she is not as impersonal as she appears to be.

this line is also a meta-discourse that signifies the nature of the narrator of this narrative: he concerns and only concerns about himself.

The very first line of the story that “I want, if I can, to record my remorse and grief, for Zijun’s sake as well as for my own” is a partly sincere confession of the narrator-Juan Sheng. His telling of the story is not only for Zi Jun, but also for himself, if the latter is not more important to him. Then the narrator stresses that the consequence of Zi Jun’s death to him, is the “silent and empty” he feels now. He doesn’t mention any regret he feels neither for his lover’s death nor for his imprudent little revolution to his romance life. Then he moves to his recount of what happens during the last year.

What the narrator-Juan Sheng confesses here is rather honest, at least more honest than his characterising of the character-Juan Sheng in his following recounting. It is the honesty he shows here that demonstrates to us readers that the central disposition of this narrator of “Regret for the Past”: he is self-centred and selfish.

This central characteristic of the narrator-Juan Sheng reveals the fundamental feature of his narration that his narration is dominated by his voice and his voice only. Even the shaping of character Zi Jun is dominated by his voice. Typical descriptions of Zi Jun like “she, however, remembered everything”, “she, however, was completely fearless and impervious to all this” etc. are all narrated by the voice of narrator-Juan Sheng. Zi Jun’s own voice is barely heard, let alone her resistance to the domination of the narrator’s voice.

One of the few exceptions of narrator-Juan Sheng’s domination is the naming of their pet dog “A Sui”. Zi Jun names the dog. Juan Sheng doesn’t like the name, but he calls it as Zi Jun names anyway. “It took her five weeks to realize that my work could not be restricted by regular mealtimes. When the realization came, she was probably annoyed, but she said nothing” demonstrates the position of the short story’s female protagonist’s voice, she disagrees, but silently. The lack of her voice in the story prevents readers from hearing her side of the story, which leads to the question of the reliability of such story. Here the third person story is the same as a first-person

narrative, they are both “I”s preaching, as pointed out by Bal.<sup>186</sup> “Regret for the Past” is the male narrator’s narcissistic monologue, even though it conceals itself by a seeming subject of women emancipation.

Besides A Sui’s naming, the female protagonist’s voice only appears in her few direct speeches. Five sentences, in total. The five sentences start with Zi Jun’s powerful and astonishing line that “I am my own mistress” and end as hesitant as “But...Juan Sheng, I fell you’re a different person these days. Is that true? Tell me honestly.” The weakening of her voice during the story is apparent. Finally in the last part of the story, she leaves both her home with Juan Sheng and the story without a word. And Juan Sheng can only know her death news by a nonsignificant character “a family connection whom I had not visited for a long time”. The narrator does not bother to mention his name, but he has 4 direct speeches in the last part of the story, almost as same number as Zi Jun’s ones. How can the second-most-important character of the story have the same quantity of voice as an irrelevant character who has no name and only appears at the ending of the story? There can only be one reasonable answer: she is not important at all, neither her voice, nor her character.

It is the contrary in *A Doll’s House*. The narrator of *A Doll’s House* seldomly reveals herself, only when she<sup>187</sup> refers to the settings of the Helmer house and the actions and facial expressions of the household. The latter is deemed as stage directions when the potential performances of the written dramatic text are considered. The keys to our understanding of the narrator of *A Doll’s House* lie in the setting and “stage directions”<sup>188</sup>, which have not been fully researched from the perspective of their narrating features.

The narrator of *A Doll’s House* never appears beside settings and stage directions

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<sup>186</sup> Bal, *Narratology*, 12.

<sup>187</sup> To be noted, I choose this gender-neutral pronoun to refer to the narrator of *A Doll’s House* to show its impersonal and thus genderless features.

<sup>188</sup> The term *stage direction* stresses the performing feature of the discourses being considered here. By calling those discourses from the narrator as stage directions, the perspective of their narrating functions is partly concealed. The reason why I am still using it is that, as put several times in this thesis, even though my study focuses on the diegetic features of the dramatic text, being aware of the potential performance is also crucial to my analysis, because such awareness partially constitutes the text’s meaning (Jahn, 2001, 662).

in the dramatic text. And most settings and stage directions fall into the category of focalisation. That is to say, the voice of the narrator can only be heard in few examples and those are where my analysis to her lands. One examples of the few is the beginning of the play. And by looking at the very beginning of *A Doll's House* and compare it with the beginning of "Regret for the Past", the different features of the narrators are almost apparent:

A room, comfortably and tastefully, but not expensively, furnished. In the back, on the right, a door leads to the hall; on the left another door leads to HELMER's study. Between the two doors a pianoforte. In the middle of the left wall a door, and nearer the front a window. Near the window a round table with armchairs and a small sofa. In the right wall, somewhat to the back, a door, and against the same wall, further forward, a porcelain stove; in front of it a couple of arm-chairs and a rocking-chair. Between the stove and the side-door a small table. Engravings on the walls. A what-not with china and bric-a-brac. A small bookcase filled with handsomely bound books. Carpet. A` fire in the stove. It is a winter day.

A bell rings in the hall outside. Presently the outer door of the flat is heard to open. Then NORA enters, humming gaily. She is in outdoor dress, and carries several parcels, which she lays on the right-hand table. She leaves the door into the hall open, and a PORTER is seen outside, carrying a Christmas-tree and a basket, which he gives to the MAID-SERVANT who has opened the door.

NORA.

Hide the Christmas-tree carefully, Ellen; the children must on no account see it before this evening, when it's lighted up. [To the PORTER, taking out her purse.] How much?

PORTER.

Fifty öre.<sup>3</sup>

NORA.

There is a crown. No, keep the change. [The PORTER thanks her and goes. NORA shuts the door. She continues smiling in quiet glee as she takes off her outdoor things. Taking from her pocket a bag of macaroons, she eats one or two. Then she goes on tip-toe to her husband's door and listens. ]

NORA.

Yes; he is at home.

[She begins humming again, crossing to the table on the right. ]

HELMER.

[In his room.]

Is that my lark twittering there?



Same as “Regret for the Past”, the narrator reveals her existence to her readers right at the first line of its narration like narrator-Juan Sheng does in “Regret for the Past”: A room, comfortably and tastefully, but not expensively, furnished. She remarks on the furnishing of the Helmers’ living room: comfortable and tasteful, with a certain taste of her. But firstly, such revealing is in a rather veiled way. And narrator-Juan Sheng’s revealing of himself is straightforward and apparent: “I want, if I can, to record my remorse and grief, for Zi Jun’s sake as well as for my own”. He is telling the story by himself, for himself. Secondly, the narrator does not demonstrate much about herself at all. But it is what narrator-Juan Sheng does. Beside the very first line in the beginning of *A Doll’s House* which I quote here, the narrator objectively states what she sees without showing any emotions and judgements of her. It simply narrates what she sees and what she hears. This is what she does in the remaining part of *A Doll’s House*, and it is very much different from what narrator-Juan Sheng does in “Regret for the Past”. In a word, the quoted part here is a typical instance of the features of the narrator of *A Doll’s House*: she presents and narrates the story while she presents in an almost neutral, objective, and impersonal manner.

To be noted, the differences of the narrators here are not mostly contributed by the two texts’ genre difference but by the different ways by which the two texts structured, especially by the way the narrators narrate. Like *A Doll’s House*, the beginning of Tolstoy’s novel *War and Peace*<sup>189</sup> is narrated by a neutral, objective, and impersonal manner. But they are in different genres. This example proves that differences in genres do not necessarily lead to major features differences in narrators and shows that the differences are indeed caused by different narrative structures.

Except the beginning quoted here, other instances where the narrator of *A Doll’s House* only speaks for herself also demonstrates her (appearing) neutrality,

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<sup>189</sup> ‘Well, Prince, Genoa and Lucca are now nothing more than estates taken over by the Buonaparte family. No, I give you fair warning. If you won’t say this mean war, if you will allow yourself to condone all the ghastly atrocities perpetrated by that Antichrist – yes, that’s what I think he is – I shall disown you. You are no friend of mine – not the “faithful slave” you claim to be ... But how are you? How are you keeping? I can see I’m intimidating you. Do sit down and talk to me.’

These words were spoken (in French) one evening in July 1805 by the well-known Anna Pavlovna Scherer, maid of honour and confidante of the Empress Maria Fyodorovna, as she welcomed the first person to arrive at her soirée, Prince Vasily Kuragin, a man of high rank and influence.

objectiveness, and impersonality. Typical examples are like this:

Nora [shrieks]: ...

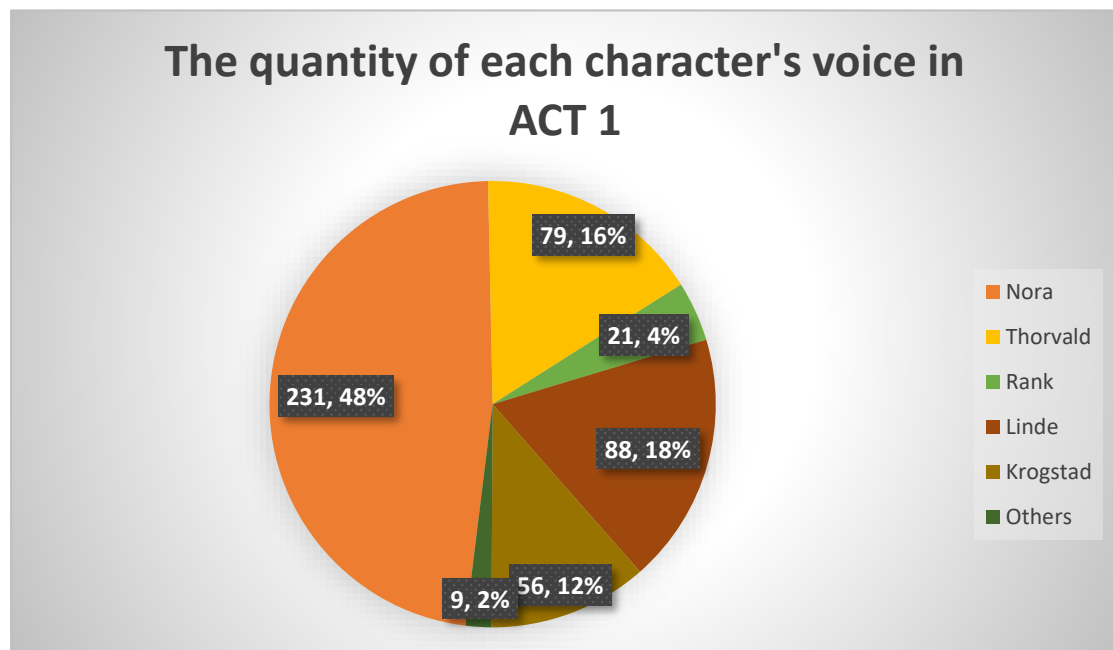
Nora [quickly]: ...

Nora [uncertainly]: ...

Nora [bursting out]: ...

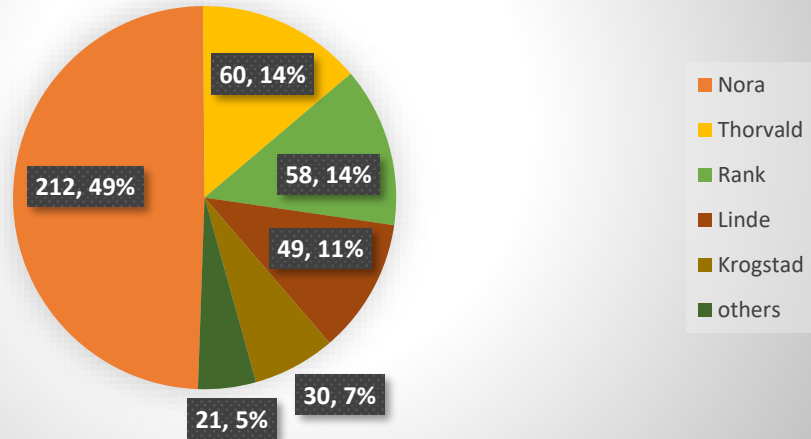
As we can see, the voice of the narrator can only be heard from its descriptions of the manners by which the characters speak. And she describes the manners in a rather neutral and objective way. These descriptions like “quickly”, “uncertainly” tend not to demonstrate any standpoint or preference of the narrator, which is almost the opposite to “Regret for the Past” where the narrator-Juan Sheng always talk about his values and attitudes. In this case, most voice being heard in *A Doll’s House* is the voice of the characters of the play, mediated by the narrator. And among all the voice, Nora’s voice dominates.

To demonstrate Nora’s dominance precisely and explicitly in voice<sup>190</sup>, statistics on the quantities of all characters’ voice would help a lot. And I define the quantity of a character’s voice as the times she speaks directly.

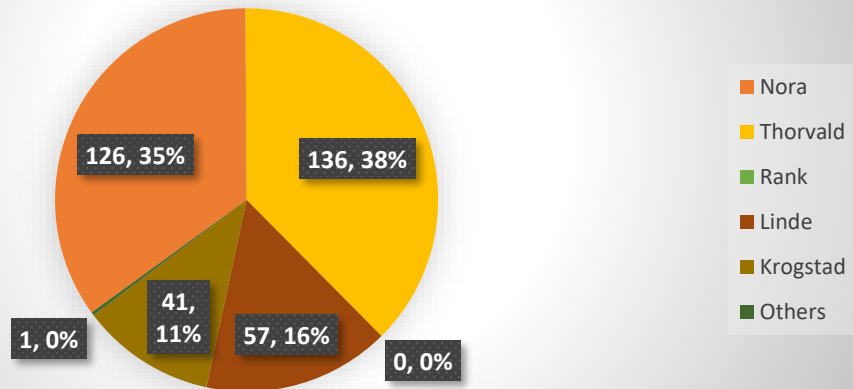


<sup>190</sup> The quantity of a character’s voice is defined and refined as the number of times the character speaks directly, i.e., the number of the character’s direct speeches.

## The quantity of each character's voice in ACT 2



## The quantity of each character's voice in ACT 3



Nora's dominance is evident. She speaks 231 and 212 times respectively in the first two acts, which are almost the total of the amount of all other characters, including the male protagonist Thorvald, who is widely considered as the dominant role of the play.

Since the narrator mostly functions as a truthful megaphone of all characters, Nora's dominance here is her dominance of voice throughout the whole play. Even the times she speaks in the third act is relatively few (but still 35% of all and in the second

place) and Thorvald speaks the most. But where Thorvald speaks most is the final confrontation between the Helmers, in which Nora's voice is in the centre and Thorvald's is only a powerless response to hers. To conclude, Nora speaks 569 out of 1275 times (around 44.6%) totally in the whole play, while the other protagonist, the male Thorvald, only speaks 275 times, less than half of Nora. Long story short, in the play of *A Doll's House*, the voice we here, is mostly the voice of Nora (truthfully relayed by the narrator).

The differences are more than obvious when we compare *A Doll's House* with "Regret for the Past" from this perspective. Nora takes up almost 45% of the voice of all characters in the play and her voice is more than twice of the second loud character, the male protagonist Thorvald (if we loosely define *voice* as the times they speak and *loudness* as the amount of the voice<sup>191</sup>). Zi Jun, on the contrary, has only five lines among the whole short story. If the shabby room of Juan Sheng is filled by the voice of the male protagonist, the so called "dollhouse" of the Helmers is indeed mostly filled by the voice of the female protagonist Nora who is not a doll at all.

To conclude, from the perspective of narrating voice, I can claim the two texts are constructed, or narrated, diversely. And concerning the characters, the popular statement that "Juan Sheng is the Chinese Nora" is untenable because the huge difference in voice.

- Focalisations

In his *Narrative Discourse*, Gérard Genette promotes the already existing word *focalisation* to a theoretical term, to avoid the "too specifically visual connotations" of the former terms like vision and point of view.<sup>192</sup> The term *focalisation* answers the question raised by earlier critics Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren "Who sees the story".<sup>193</sup> In his later work *Narrative Discourse Revisited*, Genette acknowledges the question is too particularly vision-oriented, so he broadens its denotation a bit

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<sup>191</sup> Such loose definition is only to demonstrate how Nora's voice dominates in the play. It is not and I have no intentions to give these terms strict and explicit definitions here.

<sup>192</sup> Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, 189.

<sup>193</sup> Genette, 189.

further to “Who perceives the story?”.<sup>194</sup> By the word “perceive”, the term *focalisation* denotes not only the visual perceptions of the perceiver, but also other perceptions with senses and her standpoints of the story as well.

Before starting the analysis on the focalisations in both texts, for the terms concerning focalisation in this section, regulating the terminology, and refining the border of them are vital, because Mieke Bal, after Genette’s publication of *Narrative Discourse*, criticises Genette’s model of different types of focalisations and introduces a new model with various new terms and definitions in *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*.<sup>195</sup>

The following analysis in this section mainly concerns the focalisations on the two female protagonists, and it starts with the typology of the different categories of the focalisations in the two texts, while the typology is the most concern here. Then it moves to the central point of this section, the big quantity difference of focalisations on the two female protagonists in the two texts, namely Nora and the so-called “Chinese Nora”. The presenting and analysing of the apparent difference of the focalisations on the two female protagonists, combined with the similar difference pointed out in preceding section of voice, would lead to the distance distinction between the two narrators, and concludes the complex disparity of the texts in the perspective of narrator. And finally contributes to my main objective of this thesis, to provide novel knowledge and perspective on the relationship between Nora and the “Chinese Nora” Zi Jun.

As put in the previous introductory paragraphs of this section, my analysis starts with the typology of the different focalisations in the texts. Focalisations can be classified into three major types within the theoretical frame of Genette: *zero-focalisation*, *internal focalisation*, and *external focalisation*. The focalisations on Zi Jun in “Regret for the Past” are all internal focalisations, while the focalisations on Nora in *A Doll’s House* are all external focalisations.

The reason of such difference is mainly the genres difference of the two texts,

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<sup>194</sup> Genette, *Narrative Discourse Revisited*, 64.

<sup>195</sup> Bal, 132-54.

even though they are both written narratives. “Regret for the Past” is a short story which is written in the form of notes of the male protagonist. Such genre restricts the presentations of focalisations come and can only come from Juan Sheng, who is both the narrator and male protagonist of the story. And since in internal focalisation, the “the presentation of events is restricted to the point of view, perception, and cognition of a focal character”,<sup>196</sup> all the focalisations in “Regret for the Past” are internal focalisations, so as the ones on Zi Jun. And Juan Sheng is the focal character. And as external focalisation is “a presentation restricted to behaviourist report and outside view”,<sup>197</sup> all the focalisations in *A Doll’s House* are external focalisations, so as those on Nora.

Two simple but typical instances from the texts would demonstrate the apparent difference of focalisations in the two texts:

However, I seem to remember that her face first turned pale then gradually flushed red, redder than I ever saw it before or after. Sadness and joy mingled with apprehension flashed from her childlike eyes, although she tried to avoid my gaze, looking ready in her confusion to fly out of the window. – “Regret for the Past”

Nora shuts the door. She continues smiling in quiet glee as she takes off her outdoor things. Taking from her pocket a bag of macaroons, she eats one or two. Then she goes on tiptoe to her husband’s door and listens. – *A Doll’s House*

The focalisation in my first instance demonstrates that, even though the focalisation is on Zi Jun, it is not from Zi Jun. The female Zi Jun is the one being viewed, felt, and perceived by the male protagonist Juan Sheng. The power tension between such relationship is obvious, the female is an objective seen by the male eyes, she is not an agent human-being but a view without agency whose only existence is to be perceived by the male. The rather unequal power relationship presented by the focalisation on Zi Jun is not a single and peculiar instance. Indeed, the inequality is a characteristic that belongs to every single focalisation on Zi Jun in “Regret for the Past”.

And there is another level of the unequal power relationship presented by this

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<sup>196</sup> Jahn, “Focalisation”, in *Routledge Encyclopaedia of Narrative Theory*, ed. David Herman, Manfred Jahn, and Marie-Laure Ryan, 173.

<sup>197</sup> Jahn, 174.

focalisation, when this focalisation is compared with another instance of viewing that I raise in early chapter of the conflicts in this part of my thesis:

Each time I saw her out, I kept several paces behind her. And each time the old wretch's face, bewhiskered as if with fish tentacles, would be pressed so hard against the dirty windowpane that the tip of his nose was flattened. –  
“Regret for the Past”

In this instance that vividly describes the “old wretch’s” viewing by focalising on his flattened nose, the couple of Juan Sheng and Zi Jun are the ones being view, by a hostile environment that views and oppresses them. The couple here is view as resisters to the norms especially the cultural tradition of arranged marriage. A resisting objective viewed hatefully by the powerful tradition of the Chinese country. The complex characteristics of the human-beings couple Juan Sheng and Zi Jun are reduced to a gesture, or a symbol of revolt. The couple is simplified by viewing, and this is indeed what happens to Zi Jun when she is viewed by Juan Sheng in his “shabby room” of revolt. Juan Sheng, the resister being viewed by the oppressing norm now becomes the oppressing viewer who sees and only sees the female as a childish and unenlightened symbol who is waiting to be enlightened by him, an intellectual, or rather, a male. Zi Jun, in both cases, is always the one being reduced to a symbol by the viewing norm and patriarchy, but not an agent character.

In *A Doll's House* though, it is another case. External focalisation is different to internal focalisation, as I have already demonstrated. The external focalisations on Nora in *A Doll's House*, i.e., all the focalisations on Nora, are simply reports of the female character, of what she does, the ways she speaks, expresses, and moves. There is also a relationship between the viewer and the viewed linked by the viewer’s viewing, like in “Regret for the Past”. But unlike “Regret for the Past”, there is not apparent and intense power inequality between the viewer the viewed. This is because in the internal focalisations in “Regret for the Past” the female character Zi Jun is viewed by a focal character who has a complex identity based on his gender, belief, personal history, etc. But in *A Doll's House*, on the contrary, there is no focal characters, and Nora is only view by a viewer<sup>198</sup> that is closer to a camera-like narrator with little humane

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<sup>198</sup> In Bal’s terminology, both this viewer and the focal character are determined as *focaliser*. But in *Narrative*

characteristics.

To conclude, the focalisations on the two female protagonists respectively in the two texts are so differently structured and presented that unlike Zi Jun the female who is always viewed, symbolised, and thus oppressed and restricted in the internal focalisations, Nora is free from these oppressions and restrictions, because she is only viewed in external focalisations.

I have examined the typology of the focalisations on the two female protagonist in “Regret for the Past” and *A Doll’s House*, pointed out the distinction of the internal focalisations in “Regret for the Past” and external focalisations in *A Doll’s House*, and analysed the evident difference caused by the two different types of focalisations, so far in this section of focalisation of part two of my thesis. Now I am moving to a quantitative study on the focalisations on Zi Jun and Nora in the two texts to compare and demonstrate the major quantitative differences of the focalisations on them, like what has been done in the section of voice. Combined with the conclusion in the voice section, the conclusion of the comparison here will finally lead to the argument on the distance difference of the narrators in the two texts, which concludes the chapter of narrator of part two of my thesis.

Applying quantitative method to narratology study, especially to the study of voice and focalisation, is rare. But applying the method is necessary and natural, when we are managing to answer the questions like who has the most voice and/or focalisations in a narrative, and when we are comparing the quantitative difference of voice and focalisations of different characters in different narratives. The latter is indeed what I am working on in this chapter, to demonstrate the distance – to be noted, the term *distance* denotes a quantity that can be measured – difference between narrators and female protagonists in the two texts.

One of the difficulties to apply quantitative method to voice and focalisation study is the method to count voice and focalisations. In previous section of voice, my

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*Discourse Revisited* Genette argues that if there are focalisers and the focalised (characters) in a narrative, the focaliser can only be the narrator and the focalised be the narrative space.



definition of the quantity of one character's voice is the times the character speaks, given it directly or indirectly. Defining the quantity of all focalisations in a narrative is similar but at the same time a little more complicated than the case of voice because a character can perceive<sup>199</sup>, be perceived, and perceive while being perceived. Thus, I define the quantity of focalisations *from* a character by the times the character perceives, and the quantity of focalisations *on* a character by the times the character is perceived. If the character is both being perceived and perceiving, it counts on both the focalisation from and on the character.

All the focalisations in *A Doll's House* are external focalisations. And because of the definition of external focalisation, all characters in *A Doll's House* are and only are perceived (by the narrator). And all focalisations in "Regret for the Past" are internal focalisations, thus, similarly all characters besides Juan Sheng—who is also the narrator—are and only are perceived by him, while Juan Sheng sometimes perceives. This means that in my following statistics of the focalisations in the two texts, all focalisations in *A Doll's House* are focalisations *on* (different characters). But in "Regret for the Past", there are both focalisations *on* (different characters), and focalisations *from* (Juan Sheng)<sup>200</sup>.

In "Regret for the Past", there are totally 34 focalisations on Zi Jun, the female protagonist. In *A Doll's House*, however, there are 91 focalisations on Nora only in the first act. The total amount of focalisations on Nora in *A Doll's House* 203, more than 6 times of the ones on Zi Jun. This simple but distinct amount difference demonstrates at least partly the vast importance difference of the two female characters. Nora is much more focalised because she is much more important in the narrative. But this simple statistics comparison is not good enough because the length of the two text varies greatly. A simple comparison based on the sheer numbers of focalisations is not fair for

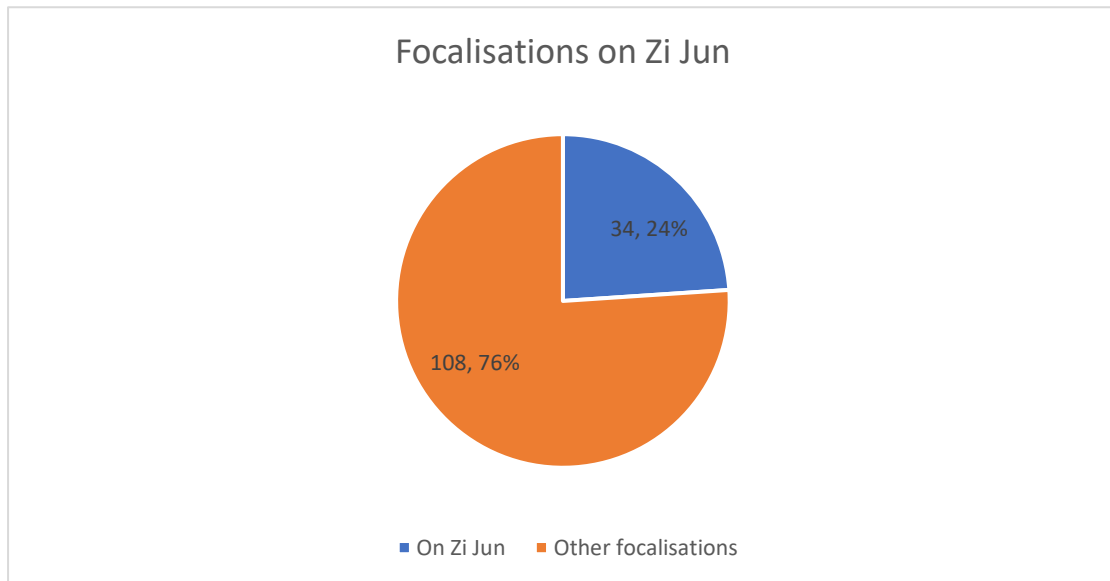
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<sup>199</sup> According to Nelles, the perception of (and on) a character can be categorized into five modes: ocularisation, auricularisation, gustativisation, olfactivisation, tactivilisation, which respectively represent the sight, sound, taste, smell, touch, perceived by the character. Such typology of focalisation is not my primary concern here (1997, ch3), but it helps clarifying the word "perceive" used by me. By stating a character is perceived—so she has a focalisation on her from other character (or narrator)—I mean that she is seen, heard, tasted, smelled, touched, thought of, etc. by the character (or narrator) who focalises,

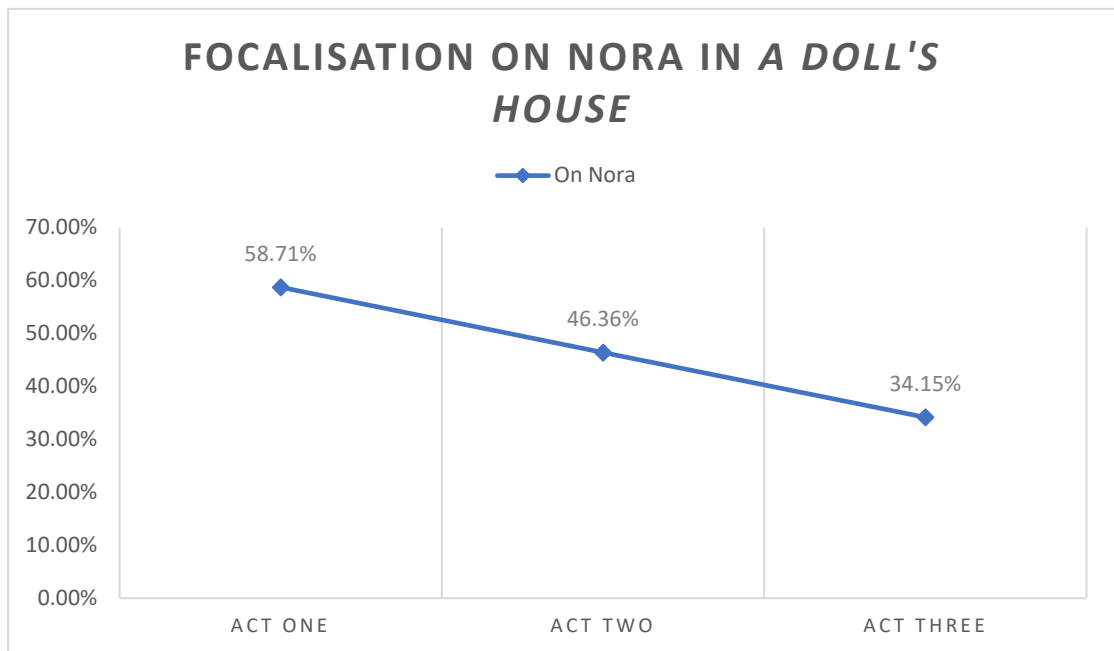
<sup>200</sup> This distinction between focalisation on and focalisation from is the preparation work for following statistics of the percentage of focalisations on Zi Jun and Nora among all focalisations in each text.

the relatively shorter text of “Regret for the Past”. My comparison requires a deeper look.

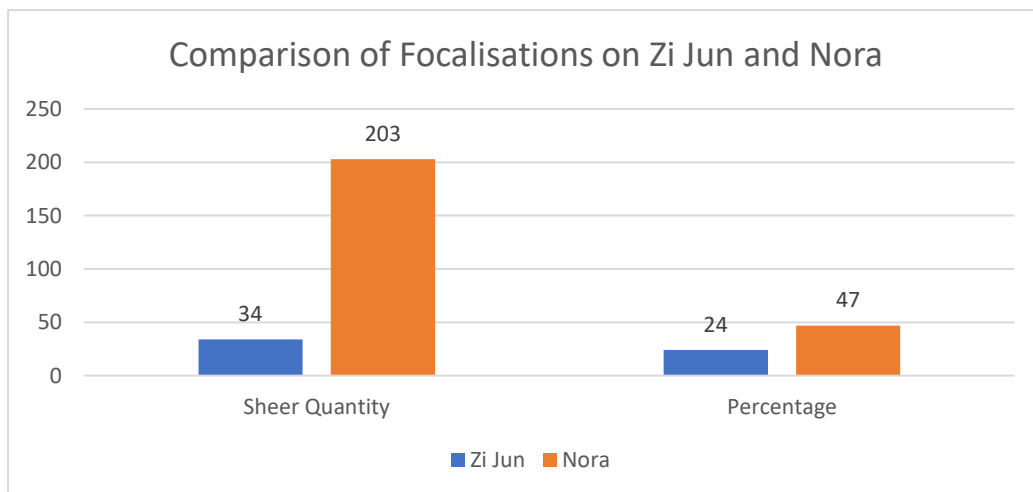
There are 103 focalisations from Juan Sheng, on the environment or himself. And 5 focalisations from him on other characters besides him and Zi Jun. With the 34 focalisations on Zi Jun, which are also from Juan Sheng, there are in total 142 focalisations in “Regret for the Past”. Focalisations on Zi Jun takes 34/142, 23.94%, of the total focalisations in the narrative, as shown in the following figure.



In *A Doll's House*, however, there are 427 focalisations totally in the narrative, 155, 151, and 121 respectively in each act. And there are 203 focalisations on Nora (from the narrator), 91, 70, and 42 respectively in Act One, Two, and Three. The focalisations on Nora in *A Doll's House* takes up around 47.54% in the whole narrative, and roughly 57.71%, 46.36%, and 34.71% separately in each act, as shown in the figure.



The average percentage of focalisations on Nora in the play is almost two times of the percentage of focalisations on Zi Jun in “Regret for the Past”. Even if we only consider the lowest percentage of focalisations on Nora in the third act of *A Doll’s House*, it is still 34% to 24%, where the former is more than 1.4 times of the latter. And letting alone the peer quantity of focalisations on Nora in Act Three to focalisations on Zi Jun in the whole text, it is 42 to 24, the former is 1.75 times of the latter.



The preceding figure clearly demonstrates the vast but apparent quantity differences between the focalisations on the two female protagonists in the two texts. And the distinction demonstrates an explicit importance difference of Zi Jun and Nora, i.e., Zi Jun is much less important than Nora. From both the percentage of voice of and focalisations on Nora, Nora is indeed the centre of Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House*, even though

she speaks and acts in a submissive way in the first two acts. Zi Jun, however, is only part of the regretful past of the narrating Juan Sheng, whose narrating of the regretful past is only for himself to forget. Even though Zi Jun and Nora are both referred by me as the female “protagonists” of the two narratives, Nora is indeed a female hero, while the former is just a less important character which functions as and only as a catalyst for the male hero Juan Sheng to deceive and protect himself. The status contrast between Nora and Zi Jun is great. Zi Jun is only a function without any agency in the male protagonist’s narrating, while Nora is agent to decide for herself to leave the narrating at the end of the play.

But this is not the only conclusion one can draw here. Both the voice and focalisation difference in the two texts that have been presented and analysed would lead to a reveal of the distance characteristics of the narrator, and the narrators’ distinct distance to their characters especially female protagonists, in the two texts.

### 2.3.3 Distance and (Un)Reliability

- Distance

“Distance refers to the similarities and differences between any two agents involved in narrative communication along one or more axes of measurement”.<sup>201</sup> And for narrators particularly, narrators “differ markedly according to the degree and kind of distance that separates them from the author<sup>202</sup>, the reader, and the other characters in the story”.<sup>203</sup> This is particularly true in our comparison between the narrators of “Regret for the Past” and *A Doll’s House*. The former section of “Voice and Focalisation” lays a foundation to a deeper analysis on the distance difference between the narrator of *A Doll’s House* and “Regret for the Past”, which will be conducted in this section.

Before moving to the distance comparison, however, distance is yet another term that requires clarification as claimed by Wayne Booth. In his *The Rhetoric of Fiction*,

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<sup>201</sup> Herman, “Distance”, in *Routledge Encyclopaedia of Narrative Theory*, ed. David Herman, Manfred Jahn, and Marie-Laure Ryan, 119.

<sup>202</sup> As claimed earlier in this thesis, I avoid using the term “author” to avoid the authorial authority on text interpretation implied by this term, because this thesis emphasizes the readers’ agency of interpreting texts and generating meanings. Here the term is used because it is a direct quotation. And later in this section, the term “author” and “implied author” are also quotations from Wayne Booth.

<sup>203</sup> Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, 155.

Booth points out that the term can refer to a variety of distance that need to be specified during a distance analysis of a text. On the one hand, “distance” can refer to distance between varied agents involved in a text. For instance, distance between the narrator and implied author, distance between narrator and characters, and distance between narrator and readers, etc. Indeed, among all the agents involved in a narrative: author, implied author, narrators, narratees, characters, readers, implied reader, any of them can be somewhat distant from any other of them.<sup>204</sup> On the other hand, there are also different axes of measurements of distance between a certain pair of agents. The axes can be spatial, temporal, intellectual, emotional, psychological, ethical, and even physical (between a performance and its actual audiences for example), etc.<sup>205</sup>

The agents involved in the following distance comparison of this section are the narrators and their female protagonists respectively in *A Doll's House* and “Regret for the Past”. And the axes of measurements of the distance are ethical and psychological. The analysis and comparison on the psychological distance between the narrator of *A Doll's House* and Nora, and between narrator-Juan Sheng and “Regret for the Past” is based on the result of former section of “Voice and Focalisation”. This section of “Distance and (Un)Reliability” concludes the chapter of “Narrator” of this part.

The narrator of *A Doll's House*, unlike narrator-Juan Sheng of “Regret for the Past”, is closer to a camera-like narrating agency with little humane characteristics, as claimed in previous part of this chapter. But she is not merely a function of narrating. The statistical analysis in preceding sections of “Voice and Focalisation” demonstrates explicitly that the narrator of *A Doll's House* does pay more attention to certain character, i.e., Nora, in the narrative world, which is distinctive to a camera that pays equal attention to every detail of the narrative world. The narrator is camera-like but she is not a camera that only function as a narrating agency that reports everything in the narrative world. She selects what it narrates. She seems like a camera only because her most judgements of the characters in the narrative world are concealed by her ostensible

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<sup>204</sup> Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, 156-9.

<sup>205</sup> Booth, 156-9.

neutrality which can be uncovered by her underlining emphasis and selection of her own narrative.

There are thus two levels of the analysis on the distance between Nora and the narrator of *A Doll's House*: the seeming non-judgemental standpoint of the narrator, and the underlining closer relationship between them. And these two levels correspond respectively with the two axes of measurement of distance: ethical and psychological.

The non-judgemental appearance of the narrator reveals her ethical distance to Nora. *A Doll's House*'s setting is 19<sup>th</sup> century Norwegian bourgeois family, where the wife's affair is not ethical. Plus, from character within the narrative, Mrs. Linde, her reaction to Nora's potential lover in the beginning of first act also demonstrates that Nora's seeming affair (with doctor Rank) is against the norm of the narrative world. The narrator of the narrative, however, does not criticise her breaking of the norm. Indeed, she shows no judgement but only demonstrates Nora's ambiguous relationship with Dr. Rank, the family's friend, by depicting the famous stocking scene. But in a world where such relationship is against the norm, mere depicting without negative judgement is almost the same as being supportive, because depicting the action against norm is already a demonstration of power to the norm. And it shows how the narrator is ethically close to Nora on the one hand.

On the other hand, Nora's slamming of the door, her home-leaving, and her long and powerful speech about the law and religion are clearly against the norm of the narrative world. "I find it impossible to convince myself that the law is right. According to it a woman has no right to spare her old dying father, or to save her husband's life. I can't believe that." Compared to the inexplicit stocking scene, at the end of Act III the narrator demonstrates at length how Nora fights with her husband who is the speaker of the bourgeois values which is the norm of the narrative world that she is against. The demonstration is more powerful than the stocking scene because it is clear, and the voice of Nora is resonant. By staging Nora's fight with the bourgeois ethics in this way, the seeming non-judgemental narrator shows that she is ethically close to the rebellious female protagonist.

The ethical distance between narrator-Juan Sheng and the female protagonist Zi

Jun varies during the process of his narrating, while in *A Doll's House* the distance is nearly constant. Zi Jun's stunning line that "I am my own mistress" not only resonates with the women emancipation subject of the short story, but also demonstrate that Juan Sheng's successful preaching of the gender equality revolution converts Zi Jun to the *new youth's* new ethics of freedom, especially the freedom of free-loving. Before moving to a conclusion of the ethical distance between the two, it must be clarified that the distance between Zi Jun and narrator-Juan Sheng cannot be confused with the distance between Zi Jun and character-Juan Sheng, even though the narrator takes the same ethical stance as the character-Juan Sheng while the narrative develops.

Anyway, Zi Jun's stunning line is where the ethical distance between Zi Jun and narrator-Juan Sheng is the closest. But even when they are ethically close here, there is still the sign that the distance may not as close as it appears. Juan Sheng claims that even though he is the one who preaches the new ethics, he is also shocked by Zi Jun's astonishing statement.

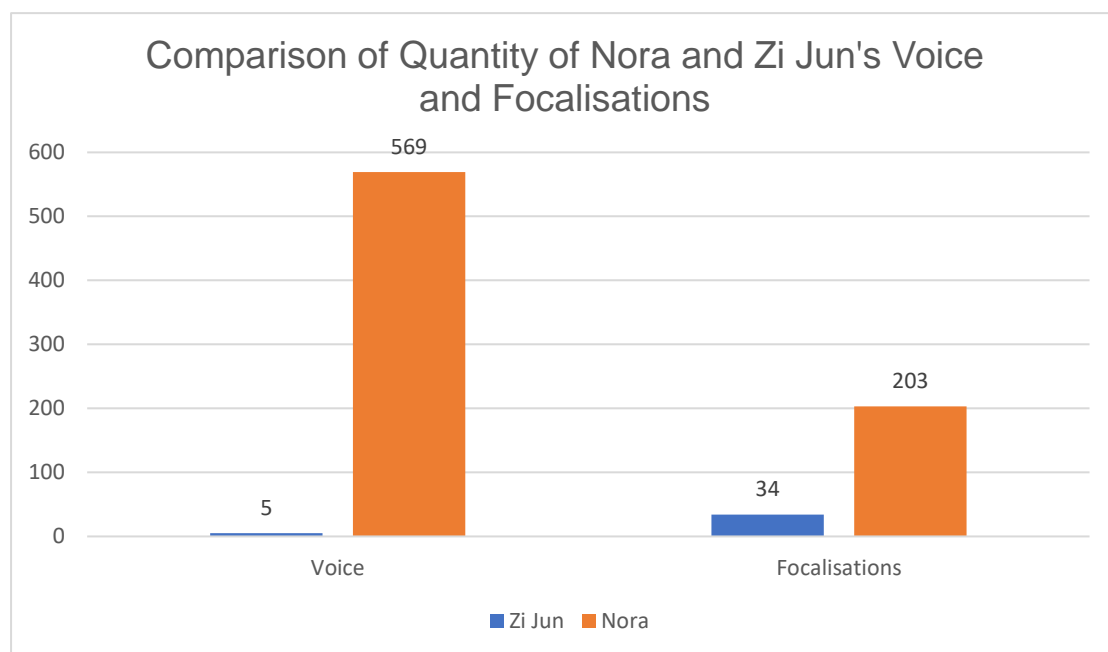
The narrator-Juan Sheng admits that his ethics on the *new ethics* of the *new youth* on the women emancipation changes as the story develops. After losing his job and thus losing the couple Juan Sheng and Zi Jun's income—unlike Nora in *A Doll's House*, there is no way for the female protagonist to earn a living—Juan Sheng feels like the result of his personal revolution, his free romantic relationship with Zi Jun, has become a burden which gradually overwhelms him. And he wants to break away from it. The narrator claims that compared to the equality revolution concerning another gender, the first and foremost thing in life is living which he believes is neglected during his revolution trial.

Zi Jun's ethics on the liberty of free loving remains the same while she realises that Juan Sheng "has changed a lot recently". The change is apparently his ethics on his revolution trial. The ethical distance between the two, the narrator-Juan Sheng and Zi Jun, is now distant.

Now that the difference of ethical distance between the narrators and the female protagonists of *A Doll's House* and "Regret for the Past" is explicitly stated. The distance is closer in the former narrative even though the narrator seems to be

unconcerned but narrating and demonstrating the revolt against norm at length is already a supportive gesture. In the latter narrative though, the narrator’s ethics are distant to the female protagonist’s ethics. Concerning the distance compared, it between Nora and the narrator of *A Doll’s House* is thus much closer than it between Zi Jun and narrator-Juan Sheng of “Regret for the Past”.

As for psychological distance<sup>206</sup> between the female protagonists and the narrators, the voice, and focalisations differences between Nora and Zi Jun reveals their different relationship with the narrators, and in this case, the difference of their varied psychological distance to the narrators.



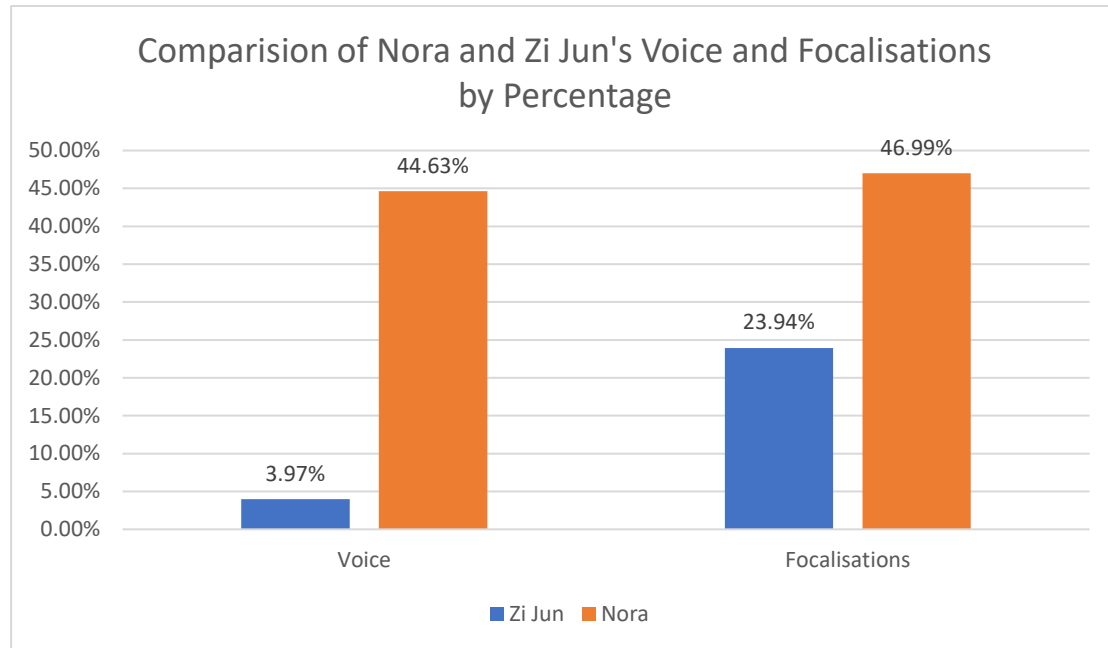
The graph demonstrates clearly that when the sheer quantities of their voice and focalisations on them are compared, the quantities of Nora’s voice and the focalisations on her are not in the same order of magnitude with the amount of the *Chinese Nora*’s voice and focalisations on her. The quantity of focalisations on Nora is almost 6 times of the focalisations on Zi Jun. And the quantity of Nora’s voice is more than 100 times

<sup>206</sup> Edward Bullough in his 1912 essay “Psychical Distance as a Factor in Art and Aesthetic Principle” formulates the “psychical distance” problem and claims that a work is supposed to be neither “over-distanced” nor “under-distanced” to be aesthetically valuable. Edward’s study of the “psychical distance” is inspiring to my study of psychological distance however his definition of “psychical distance” is not explicit and the “psychical distance” discussed by him is the distance between artwork (and its creator) and its audience, which are both different from my study here.



than of Zi Jun's.

Simply comparing the sheer quantities of two different genre of narratives in different length may not demonstrates the whole picture, so there is another comparison on the percentage difference of the voice of and focalisations on the two female protagonists.



The percentage contrast is also huge. For focalisations on Nora and the *Chinese Nora* it is 46.99% versus 23.64% where the former almost doubles the latter. And for voice of the female protagonists, Zi Jun's voice of 3.97% is overwhelmed by Nora's 44.63%, where the *Chinese Nora's* voice percentage in her narrative is less than 1/10 of Nora's in *A Doll's House*.

But how are these numbers connected with their different psychological distance to the narrators? During the narrating of narrators, the voice of the characters is mediated by the narrators' narrating, which means that to convey a particular voice of a particular character—Nora for example, the narrator—the narrator of *A Doll's House* as an instance—must be familiar with the character. The narrator of *A Doll's House* can only communicate Nora's voice precisely and convincingly, which is what she does in the play, to her audience when she understands the female protagonist well enough, i.e., being psychologically close to Nora.

And it is the opposite in "Regret for the Past". Narrator-Juan Sheng of the short

story fails to convey a reliable Zi Jun to his audience. The lack of voice of Zi Jun demonstrate not only the low willingness of the narrator to narrate the female protagonist, but also his inability to narrate cause his lack of understanding to the female protagonist. After all, how can the male narrator-Juan Sheng narrate the female whom he believes he has *true barriers* with?

The lack of focalisations on Zi Jun reveals the same. Focalising is selecting to the narrator. There are so many characters act simultaneously in the narrative world, but there can only be one character being focalised by the narrator at one time. The narrator must choose which one to focalise. And focalisation on a certain character thus demonstrates the interests of the narrator on the character, a desire to view and understand and to be psychologically close to her.

Almost 24% percent of the focalisations in “Regret for the Past” are on Zi Jun. This demonstrates a relatively high—compared to Zi Jun’s 3.97% voice—interest on the female protagonist. And thus, a relatively high desire to be psychologically close. However, Nora’s percentage of focalisations on her are 46.99% and the narrator of *A Doll’s House* is more intrigued to her female protagonist than narrator-Juan Sheng to Zijun, i.e., a stronger willingness to get psychologically close to her Nora.

With the statistics of voice of and focalisations on the female protagonists combined, the inspection of the narrators’ psychological distance to their characters reveals more. With 24% focalisations from the narrator fall on her, her voice only takes up 4% of his narrative. Narrator-Juan Sheng shows high interests on Zi Jun while he conveys little voice of the character. This contrast demonstrates that narrator-Juan Sheng concerns little of Zi Jun’s psychology, but he is only interested in viewing the female protagonist as an object. In *A Doll’s House* however, 44.63% of voice comes from Nora and 46.99% of all focalisations are on the female protagonist. The close percentages demonstrate both a high interest on Nora and a high understanding to her.

To conclude, the immense and apparent amount differences in voice and focalisations reveal that the varied psychological distance between the narrators and female protagonist of the narratives being analysed here. On the one hand, the narrator of *A Doll’s House* shows generally more interests on and understanding to her female

protagonist, and it leads to the conclusion that they are psychologically close. On the other hand, narrator-Juan Sheng shows generally less interests on and understanding to his “Chinese Nora” and the inconsistent contrast between his interests on and understanding to Zi Jun furtherly demonstrates that he is psychologically distant to the female protagonist.

- (Un)Reliability

Focalisation, voice, and distance have much to do with the reliability (or unreliability) of the narrator.<sup>207</sup> For Wayne C. Booth, who proposes the unreliable narrator as a concept in his *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, the moral and intellectual distance between the implied writer and narrator formulates the reliability and unreliability<sup>208</sup> of the narrator (158). According to his canonical definition, he calls “a narrator is reliable when he speaks for or acts in accordance with the norms of the work (which is to say, the implied author’s norm), unreliable when he does not”.<sup>209</sup>

Booth’s canonicalized definition, nevertheless, is criticised by theorists like Ansgar Nünning by arguing that Booth’s definition ignores the readers’ role of interpreting the unreliability of the narrator.<sup>210</sup> And Booth’s definition is especially inadequate and imprecise when the implied author is a construct established by the reader based on the whole structure of the narrative.<sup>211</sup> Nünning calls for a radical reconceptualising of the convention theories of unreliability where unreliability is caused by the contradiction between narrator’s narrative and reader's pre-existing conceptual knowledge of the world and her frames of reference which is usually unacknowledged.<sup>212</sup> Agreed with Nünning’s criticise that the reader is the dominant role in the interpretation of unreliable narrations, the unreliable narrator is thus defined here as a narrator whose ethics and psychology are discrepancy to the implied reader of the

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<sup>207</sup> Abbott, *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative*, 73.

<sup>208</sup> Since the main concern of this section is the unreliability of narrator-Juan Sheng in *Regret for the Past*, which is different to the reliability of the narrator of *A Doll’s House*, the term, “reliability and unreliability (or (un)reliability)”, would be referred as *unreliability* for short.

<sup>209</sup> Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, 158-9.

<sup>210</sup> Nünning, *Reconceptualizing the Theory and Generic Scope of Unreliable Narration*, <https://books.openedition.org/puf/3950>, paragraph 3.

<sup>211</sup> Ansgar Nünning, paragraph 10.

<sup>212</sup> Ansgar Nünning, paragraph 63.

narrative, i.e., a narrator who is ethically and (or) psychologically distant to the narrative's implied reader.

As claimed by Vera Nünning, considering the cultural and historical context of the narrative is necessary for determining the unreliability of a narrator.<sup>213</sup> The cultural and historical context of "Regret for the Past" has been thoroughly inspected in the first part of this thesis. And as put in the first part, "Regret for the Past" was written during the New Culture Revolution when women emancipation was well concerned by both male intellectuals and female students<sup>214</sup>. The short story was written for the potential "Chinese Noras", or the New Women, as a kind admonition that they may not end up well after a Nora-like home-leaving, especially when the Nora-like Li Chao died after leaving her home cause of lack of income.

It is then clear and that the implied reader of "Regret for the Past" is the female student fascinated by the preaching of women emancipation (by male intellectuals like Juan Sheng in the story) and inspired and passionate to be the Chinese Nora, like Zi Jun in the short story. Thus, the ethical and psychological distance between the narrator-Juan Sheng of "Regret for the Past" and the implied reader of the narrative, which determines the unreliability of the narrator, is identical to the ethical and psychological distance between the narrator and the female protagonist Zi Jun. And my analysis from preceding part of this section demonstrates that they are distant from each other in this perspective. That is to say that narrator-Juan Sheng is distant both ethically and psychologically distant to the implied reader of the narrative, and he is therefore an unreliable narrator according to my definition of unreliability.

The analysis of the reliability of the narrator of *A Doll's House* is like the analysis of narrator-Juan Sheng's unreliability. The implied reader of *A Doll's House* is not difficult to locate when considering the historical and cultural context of the play. The play's female protagonist Nora is based on Ibsen's daughter-like friend. And the

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<sup>213</sup> Vera, Nünning "Unreliable Narration and the Historical Variability of Values and Norms", 238.

<sup>214</sup> Noticing that the female students at Beijing Women's Normal School conducted the very first performance of *A Doll's House* in Chinese history, and Lu Xun, the writer of *Regret for the Past*, gave the speech "What Happens after Nora's Leaving" not long after the performance, and then wrote the short story after giving the famous speech.

playwright was promoting the woman emancipation movement back then,<sup>215</sup> like Lu Xun the writer of “Regret for the Past”. Plus, the focalisations on and the voice from Nora mediated by the narrator, the bourgeois settings of the play, all lead to the conclusion that the implied reader of the play is the intellectuals who supports the woman emancipation movement or at least sympathies Nora’s strong statement on the patriarchy culture and home-leaving, like the playwright himself. And the different reception between British Marxists (for example Bernard Shaw and Eleanor Marx) and Germany play-goers also supports such claim. The main difference of the two kinds of audience is the difference between their ideology on women’s agency. The implied reader does not necessarily accept the norms of the play completely, but she is supposed to be at least able to communicate with the text.

The British Marxists acceptance and the Germany play-goers rejection of the play again profiles the implied-reader of *A Doll’s House*, a reader that is at least not impetuously against Nora’s radical claims and acts, i.e., reader that is not ethically and psychologically distant to Nora. And since the narrator and the implied reader are both not ethically and psychologically distant to Nora, they are not ethically and psychologically discrepant to each other. Then according to my definition of unreliable narrator, the narrator of *A Doll’s House* is not an unreliable narrator. Or the narrator of *A Doll’s House* is reliable.

Olson stresses the distinction between fallibility and untrustworthiness of unreliable narrator and points out that the two different kinds of unreliability elicit markedly different reaction in readers<sup>216</sup>, which would help with my analysis on the unreliability of narrator-Juan Sheng.<sup>217</sup> Wayne Booth distinguishes two different unreliable narrators, the “untrustworthy” and the “fallible”, after giving the later canonicalized definition of unreliable narrators.<sup>218</sup> Olson interprets Booth’s implicit terms that “‘untrustworthy’ suggests the narrator deviates from the general normative

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<sup>215</sup> Joan Templeton, *Ibsen’s Women*, 135-7.

<sup>216</sup> Olson modifies earlier studies of different modules of Monika Fludernik (1999), and Phelan and Martin (1999). These studies will not be listed in this section because of the length limitation of the section.

<sup>217</sup> Olson, “Reconsidering Unreliability”, 100-4.

<sup>218</sup> Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, 167-8.

standards implicit in the text” and “‘fallible’ implies that the narrator makes mistakes about how she perceives herself or her fictional world”.<sup>219</sup> Olson claims that the first term concerns the narrator’s personality while the second concerns the narrator’s ability to perceive and report her narrative world faithfully and accurately.<sup>220</sup>

The analysis to the unreliability of narrator-Juan Sheng can move deeper beyond the plain claim of his unreliability from the theoretical length of Olson’s module. On the one hand, the narrative world of “Regret for the Past” is not faithfully and accurately reported by the narrator, because of the lack of voice from Zi Jun and the quantity discrepancy between the focalisations on the voice from her. A large part of the narrative world, the voice of the female protagonist, is neglected in his narration. And such neglect is rather a selection (whether consciously or not) by the narrator than a consequence of the narrator being first person and homodiegetic, because, as claimed by Olson, homodiegetic narrators are not necessarily unreliable even though they are subject to the epistemological uncertainty of lived experience.<sup>221</sup> Narrator-Juan Sheng is also untrustworthy when he claims at the beginning and ending of his narration that his narrating of regret is for the sake of both himself and Zi Jun. Letting alone the misrepresented and almost silent Zi Jun in his narration, such claim reveals his hypocritical characteristic that his two times of preaching of the power and liberty of women from Nora’s home-leaving<sup>222</sup> are mostly to fulfil his own needs as I have already analysed. And the narrator even admits that he is “taking oblivion and falsehood” as his guide. The hypocrite of the narrator, an intellectual and “new youth” who promotes the “new culture” and “new ethics” during the May Fourth Movement, does of course deviate from the general normative standards implicit in the text. Narrator-Juan Sheng is, on the other hand, untrustworthy in his narrating mentioned above.

### 2.2.3 Conclusion

This chapter examines the difference of the narrators and their different

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<sup>219</sup> Olson, “Reconsidering Unreliability”, 96

<sup>220</sup> Olson, 96.

<sup>221</sup> Olson, 101.

<sup>222</sup> The first time when persuading Zi Jun to leave her home and build up a romantic relationship with him, and the second time when driving her away from their home so that he can live on without the burden.

relationship to different agencies in the two text *A Doll's House* and “Regret for the Past”, which could be the biggest differences between the two narratives.

There is still a gap that needs to be filled to better understand the writing of the writer in the scholarship of Ibsen Studies where the dramatist's dramaturge, especially how the narratives of Ibsen's plays are narrated by the narrators and how the narrating structures of the narrators change and develop during the writing of the playwright, is not fully studied from the theoretical length of the narratology on drama. However, the theoretical studies of narratologists Seymour Chatman and Manfred Jahn lay a foundation to such studies, and my comparative study in this chapter on the difference of the narrators in Ibsen's *A Doll's House* and Lu Xun's “Regret for the Past”, in which the female protagonist is deemed as the “Chinese Nora” by the Chinese scholarship of Ibsen Studies, takes the first step to fill the gap.

The chapter mainly applies a statistical method to analyse the two very different narrators, starting with an analysis on the voice and focalisation differences. The differences are revealed plainly and apparently by the huge statistical differences of the voice and focalisation. Among all the voice mediated by the narrator of *A Doll's House*, the voice from Nora takes up nearly 50% of it. And the female protagonist is mostly focalised by the narrator by almost 50%. But the narrator of “Regret for the Past” narrates the short story remarkably different where the “Chinese Nora” has a much weaker voice of 4% while 24% of the narrator's focalisations are on her.

These statistical differences demonstrate the different relationships between the narrators and female protagonists in the two narratives and how the two texts are differently structured. In the section of distance and (un)reliability, the difference of relationship between the narrators and female protagonists is further revealed. The analysis in this section leads to the conclusion that on the one hand the narrator of *A Doll's House* is ethically and psychologically close to her main character Nora, but narrator-Juan Sheng is distant to the “Chinese Nora” on the other hand. And the study on unreliability concludes the chapter by demonstrating one of the vital, if not most vital, characteristic difference of the two narrators that the narrator of *A Doll's House* is more reliable than the narrator of “Regret for the Past”.

This chapter of this essay is the very first attempt to fulfil a thorough inspection on one of the narrators in Ibsen's plays. And the statistical method is also rarely applied in the scholar field of Ibsen Studies. Being ground-breaking in a way, the method applied, and statements claimed in this section can still be modified and hopefully improved in future studies. For instance, the question why the quantity of Nora's voice reduces during the play while she seemingly sounds more powerfully in the third act awaits to be more satisfactorily answered.



### 3 Conclusion

Answering the question “who is the Chinese Nora” is not a difficult task, however, answering how Nora and Zi Jun the so-called “Chinese Nora”, how Henrik Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House* and Lu Xun’s “Regret for the Past”, connect with, and probably more importantly, differentiate from each other, is indeed challenging. This thesis is the very first academic essay that manages to propose an answer to it, in the length of a master thesis.

This thesis starts with an inspection of the intertextuality between the texts and between the texts’ context, and moves to a narratological comparison, analysis, and interpretation of the texts. Besides the theory of intertextuality and narrative theory, the thesis conducts a detailed close reading of the texts by which the texts are compared. And the analysis and comparison lands on the statement that the two texts, and their female protagonists Nora and the “Chinese Nora” are semantically similar but syntactically much different. And finally, by managing to perform an academic dialogue<sup>223</sup> with both theoretical and analytical works in literary studies, this thesis fill a research gap where thorough intertextual and narratological comparison of *A Doll’s House* and “Regret for the Past” has never been made before.

My study contributes to the field of Ibsen Studies and Lu Xun Studies in several ways. I introduce a narratological method to the textual analysis of Ibsen’s dramatic text. It is not merely an introduction of a novel method which has never been conducted in the subject, but also a helpful theoretical tool to uncover Ibsen’s dramaturge. My comparison of the causations of *A Doll’s House* and “Regret for the Past” demonstrates that a key feature of Ibsen’s dramaturge is that the shadowing past, the events that have happened before the starting of the play, heavily influence the progress of the play. It is Nora’s signature forgery in *A Doll’s House*, Sigurd’s secret love to Hjørdis in *The Vikings at Helgeland*, and Oswald and Regina’s buried kinship in *Ghosts*, etc. I cannot conduct similar causation analysis to other Ibsen’s plays in this thesis because the length and subject limitation of this essay. Future studies, however, can do a thorough

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<sup>223</sup> In the sense used by Bakhtin.

causation research on the causations of Ibsen's plays, focusing on the motif of past secret. Such research would supposedly be able to reveal the development of Ibsen's dramaturge, which is less studied in Ibsen Studies. And since the motif of secret in drama is also a prominent characteristic of a lot of early works, this kind of research could also demonstrate the complex relationship between Ibsen's dramaturge and the long and continuous tradition of playwriting, for example how Ibsen was influenced by earlier playwriting styles like melodrama, and how Ibsen's dramaturge influenced the technique of playwrights after him.

The statistical method applied in this thesis is also promoting. Former discussions on the power of characters in *A Doll's House* are mostly qualitative and thus are to an extent vague and inexplicit, especially when referring to the degree of Nora's powerfulness. But by my statistical study of voice of characters in *A Doll's House* demonstrates clearly that Nora's voice takes up the most space in the play. And combined with Julie Holledge's research on stage directions, it provides a stronger argument to Nora's powerfulness.<sup>224</sup> The statistical method could be modified in future studies and similar quantitative method could be conducted to other narrative texts, to provide a more accurate understanding of the texts.

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<sup>224</sup> This study is not published yet. Julie claims in her seminar of lesson "Ibsen in Performance" that in the first two acts of *A Doll's House*, Nora is always the central character on stage and other characters follow wherever she moves to. This pattern partly demonstrates Nora's powerfulness in both the Helmer household and in the play.

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## Appendix

- The Outline of “Regret for the Past”

The genre of the short story “Regret for the Past” is that it is the male protagonist Juan Sheng’s notes after her girlfriend Zi Jun’s death, which at least partly determine the fact that Zi Jun’s own voice is overwhelmed by Juan Sheng’s. The following story is completely Juan Sheng’s recall.

The relationship of Zi Jun and Juan Sheng starts with their conversations of Ibsen, Tagore, and Shelly in Juan Sheng’s shabby room, focusing on the perspectives of breaking the tradition and the equality of men and women. In most time during their conversations, it is Juan Sheng who pronounces while Zi Jun only nods, smiles with her eyes “filled with a childlike look of wonder” as Juan Sheng recalls. Half year after their relationship begins, Zi Jun states that “I’m my own mistress. None of them has any right to interfere with me.” It is the first and one out of three direct speeches of Zi Jun in the short story. From her statement, Juan Sheng feels like to know that Chinese women are not hopeless and Zi Jun is more thoroughgoing and resolute than him.

When expressing his heart to Zi Jun, Juan Sheng spontaneously goes down on one knee, a new method – compared to Chinese tradition – that he has seen in films. Juan Sheng feels ashamed afterwards and recalls that “sadness and joy mingled with apprehension flashed from her (Zi Jun’s) childlike eye”.<sup>225</sup> Zi Jun is ready to fly out of the window and they start living together, after which Zi Jun is disowned by her uncle.

As they start knowing each other better than ever before, Juan Sheng notices that there are impediments that he has fancied he understands but turn out to be real barrels. Zi Jun is so occupied by housekeeping that they have no time to chat with each other. The occasional differences of meaning or misunderstandings also disappear. Juan Sheng tells Zi Jun he would rather not see her working hard like this, but Zi Jun just “glances at me without a word”.<sup>226</sup> In Juan Sheng’s recall, Zi Jun remains silence, again.

After being fired and losing his income, Juan Sheng tries to translate books to tide

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<sup>225</sup> Lu Xun, *Wandering*, trans. Yang Gladys and Yang Xianyi, 297.

<sup>226</sup> Lu Xun, 307.

them over in these difficult times. However, there won't be any income until his translation is accepted. Zi Jun is still busy with housekeeping and from Juan Sheng's view, she has "forgotten everything she has ever learned".<sup>227</sup> There is no response to it from Zi Jun.

Juan Sheng believes the calling of Zi Jun for him to meal interrupts his thought so much that he is not able to focus on his work. And because of the hens and dog she raises, there is a shortage in food. Juan Sheng believes the wretchedness of his present life is due to Zi Jun and "Zi Jun seems too obtuse now even to understand that".<sup>228</sup> Juan Sheng claims that it is the cold weather and Zi Jun's cold looks that drives him leaving their home for a public library where he continues translating the book. Juan Sheng starts thinking about the possibility of breaking up and believes that Zi Jun has lost the courage she once had. But what courage then? Neither Juan Sheng nor Zi Jun answers the question.

While the love between the two continues getting colder, one day Zi Jun's eyes flashes the childlike look that Juan Sheng has not seen for a long time when Zi Jun tries reminding Juan Sheng the time when their relationship first starts. Recalled by Juan Sheng, Zi Jun forces him to show his affection on her, but Juan Sheng only replies with lies. He feels that he needs the courage to tell Zi Jun the truth that he doesn't love her anymore and that Zi Jun is not brave enough to face the truth. "All the ideas and intelligent, fearless phrases she had learned are empty after all".<sup>229</sup>

Juan Sheng deliberately brings up their past. He speaks of Ibsen's *A Doll's House* and *Lady from the Sea* and praises Nora for being strong minded to imply that Zi Jun is supposed to act as a Chinese Nora and leave their home by her own. Zi Jun "listens, nodding agreement, then is silent".<sup>230</sup> Zi Jun feels like Juan Sheng has changed. Shocked by this, Juan Sheng finally states firmly that he does not love Zi Jun anymore. Zi Jun's only response is silence.

Juan Sheng flees to the public library to avoid the embarrassment after his

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<sup>227</sup> Lu Xun, *Wandering*, trans. Yang Gladys and Yang, 315.

<sup>228</sup> Lu Xun, 319.

<sup>229</sup> Lu Xun, 325.

<sup>230</sup> Lu Xun, 327.

confession. He thinks of Zi Jun's death and Zi Jun's Nora-like leaving which will both create new path ahead of him. One day after his return from the library, his neighbour tells Juan Sheng that Zi Jun is taken away by her father. Zi Jun leaves no letter but some foods, money, and the short words that I am gone. Juan Sheng is shocked, then relaxing. Once again, the childlike eyes of Zi Jun and her death appear in Juan Sheng's thought.

Zi Jun does die. Juan Sheng regrets that he should not have claim the truth so plainly for a while, but soon after he makes up his mind to forget so that he is able to start freshly in his life.