



Wu Sunfu and Darnay

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Abstract

The two characters, Wu Sunfu in *Midnight* and Darnay in *A Tale of Two Cities* are the typical representatives of Chinese and British gentleman respectively. The authors of these two books use the similar perspective and attitude, showing the complex images of the two gentlemen, different from other traditional ones. Two writers who live in the period of social transformation, experienced the time of change, so the image of gentlemen they shape is the literature expression of contradiction in writers' inner world.

Key words: *Midnight*; *A Tale of Two Cities*; Image of gentleman

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INTRODUCTION

The Chinese traditional class of gentlemen is very important, which plays a role of intermediary between the authority and ordinary people to mediate the contraction. Gentlemen are the classes enjoying privilege, but also are subject to the central power. They enjoy superior life of the privileged classes and also show sympathy for the ordinary people. The Chinese traditional society is also called as "SiMin"¹ society. Gentlemen belong to the class

of literati and officialdom and majority of them are not the officials in the imperial court with limited political power, but possessing rather social prestige in local places. They are the conservatives of safeguarding the traditional culture or the richest men in a place with strong wealth or just the representatives of the class of privilege.

The gentleman culture is a part of British culture and is also the deposits of British culture of thousands of history. The characteristics of each time in different historical phrases are different. As society develops, the connotation of the gentleman becomes colorful. The concept of the gentleman in Britain during the 18th and 19th century is complex and each English people have their own gentleman complex. Every English man wants to be a true gentleman. Traditional Britain is a society full of nobility and common people. Till 19th century, nobility includes most gentlemen, but not all the gentlemen are nobility. Most of gentlemen are between nobility and common people which mean that they have the economic guarantee and their social status is lower than that of nobility but higher than common people. With three times of parliamentary system reform during the 19th century, the political power of gentlemen has changed. A part of them has become people getting benefits from the new political system. During the social transformation, gentlemen are actively adapting to the modern life which is totally different from their former lifestyle, thus the British gentlemen culture gets further development and rich.

Both Chinese and Britain gentleman culture have their own distinct national features. Gentlemen have the similar social identity, economic status and political life in both countries. Under such premise, Chinese and Britain gentleman have the same life experience, which is fully embodied in the Chinese and Britain literature. Britain is experiencing its social transformation in the 19th and the first half of 20th century. The image of the gentleman in Britain novel has rich connotations, which are the

¹ Shi; Farmer; Worker; Businessman.

interpretation of social life and the pain and contradictory feelings of writers' inner world.

1. DECLINING FATE

Wu Sunfu in *Midnight* and Darnay in *A Tale of Two Cities* are people who are born in the class of gentleman. They are born with glory, with the privilege and servants at their service and live a superior life.

Wu Sunfu is born in the class of Chinese gentlemen. The declining fate of the old gentleman is described in the book, "I saw that the old zombie with five thousand years has been weathering in both old China and the rainstorm of the new time." (Mao, 1984, p.30) Wu Sunfu grows up in the class of gentleman. "The wealth, power and courage of Wu Sunfu are respected by others for a long time" (Ibid., p.81), which shows that he has high social prestige. In the period of social transformation, gentleman Wu Sunfu learns western knowledge but not insists in "being an official if learning well". In the past, traditional gentleman "entered into the class of power with the help of the imperial examination system, which shows the combination of knowledge with power" (Wang, 2002, p.16). However, Wu Sunfu chooses to devote himself to national enterprises and saves the nation by engaging in industry. He firmly believes that "China's industry must have hope as long as the country and government does what they should do" (Mao, 1984, p.84). He always hopes "to build his country as a modeled one" (Ibid., p.128), and he firmly believes his "big plan" (Ibid., p.68). Different from the mainstream literature in the first half of 20th century, this work rather than showing the negative meaning of Wu Sunfu as a gentleman, shapes the image of the gentleman with a rich connotation. Just as Mao Dun say "'people' has a kind of face in the bedroom facing his wife, another face in dining room when interviewing with his friends, another face in study when meeting with his superior or subordinate and another face which people will not see when he is thinking on his own" (Mao, 1980, p.24). The novel shows the image of Wu Sunfu from various aspects. In this story, no matter running the family or the enterprise, Wu Sunfu goes to failure. So he "becomes pessimistic inevitably and thinks there is little hope for Chinese industrial future" (Mao, 1984, p.145). At first, his status in the family has changed. "His sister doesn't understand him and regards him as tiger and even escapes out." (Ibid., p.549). He has no power to control of the family and has no prestige. Secondly, Wu Sunfu is always worried about national industry, which "has been charged by foreigners and it is unfavorable for Chinese industry to develop if foreigners take more control of it" (Ibid., p.528). At last, confronted with the labor movement, "he also wonders where is his determination and his energy which is full in the past seems to go."

(Ibid., p.24) From "possessing the adventurous spirit and courage" (Ibid., p.81), to the downfall of the hero, he is full of contradiction and helpless. He wants to maintain the former life with prestige, but an individual is so small in the face of time, just submerging in the wave of time. In the business circle which is full of changes, Wu Sunfu goes to failure at last with the declining economic and social status.

Wu Sunfu and Darnay live in the time of social transformation, so they have the same destiny and feelings. In the time of change, Darnay survives but is no longer noble gentleman.

Darnay abandons his noble identity. He is handsome, graceful, honest and polite and his biggest hope is to be a normal people. Just as he said "I would abandon it, and live otherwise and elsewhere. It is little to relinquish. What is it but a wilderness of misery and ruin!" (Dickens, 1998, p.108). "He had expected neither to walk on pavement gold, nor to lie on beds of roses; if he had had any such expensive expectation, he would not have prospered." (Ibid., p.173) The writer does not make Darnay as a unpardonable image, not like his uncle. His uncle is described as "Deep would have been the blot upon his escutcheon if his chocolate had been ignobly waited on by only three men; he must have died of two." (Ibid., p.139) Darnay hates the class of privilege, saying in the novel "his conscience regarded the crumbling fabric that he was supposed to uphold" (Ibid., p.320), but cherishes "the honor of your noble name" (Ibid., p.319). Even if he anticipates "of unjust treatment in detention and hardship, and in cruel separation from his wife and child" (Ibid., p.339). He proceeds without any hesitation. The gentleman Darnay achieves honor, but he also understands "the public current of the time set too strong and fast for him. The new era began" (Ibid., p.336). It is just as his fate of the past class which would be submerged in the time, no longer "deluge of the year one of liberty." (Ibid., p.361) Before the new era, "he more than once misdoubted his mind being in confusion." (Ibid., p.379) The class he belongs to is no more a part of this society. The gentleman class has no glory and even living can not be guaranteed. Facing the new time, hero is useless. The end of novel is made form the perspective of Carton, "I see the lives for which I lay down my life, peaceful, useful, prosperous and happy, in that England which I shall see no more. I see her with a child upon her bosom." (Ibid., p.494) Although the writer expresses his good wishes for the character Darnay, in the face of turbulent time, maybe everyone will sigh because of helpless especially the gentleman who has the privilege in the past and they have more profound feeling than common people.

The characters in *Midnight* and *A Tale of Two Cities* do not have the glory brought by their identity, while time endows them the unique tragic.

2. WRITER'S ATTITUDE

Mao Dun and Dickens are the writers who live in 19th and 20th century respectively. Novels of the two writers are all about general picture of society and various kinds of people are living in the writers' virtual world. The class of gentleman is the common subject which two writers focus on, so all kinds of gentlemen are always the content of the novel. The gentleman shaped by two writers embodies writers' sympathy and their ideal. Lu Xun has pointed that human needs "to be not indifferent and to care for each other" (Lu, 2005, p.544). Literature make people from different countries in different times gather together in the same virtual room, in which readers reach the goal of communication. Literature can space time and space, arousing the same emotional resonance.

England in 19th century and China in the first half of 20th are confronted with similar social problems which cause the suspicion of tradition, belief and life value. The series of problems are not only the question of the common people, but also the confusion in the mind of gentlemen. Gentlemen from generation to generation live a superior life. In the social turmoil, facing great changes in political, economic and cultural life, they are restrained by the time and they have to either follow the trend of the times or be changed or eliminated. They feel the unprecedented helpless and hesitation.

In view of the special literary context of China in 20th century, readers are often familiar with the negative affects of Chinese and Britain gentleman as the representatives of feudal culture and neglect the unique social value of this class and their inner contradiction and ignore that the family background of most writers is closely related to class of gentleman.

The artistic image shaped by the writer is often the people whom the writer is familiar with. Mao Dun is born in the class of gentleman and knows very well about the life of this class. His father, Shen Yongxi was xiucai, one who passed the imperial examination at the country in the Ming and Qing dynasties and his mother also has good traditional cultural base. Mao Dun was encouraged by his great-grandfather as "gentleman should regard national mission as his own" (Mao, 1984, p.3). He has the thoughts and feelings worrying about country as a traditional gentleman from a young age. Because of his class, he can realize the pain of people from lower classes and have sympathy for people of gentleman class. When gentleman is gonging to disappear from history, the writer Mao Dun realizes clearly that "the contradiction of the petty bourgeoisie intellectual in the turmoil" (Ibid., p.425). In the past research, gentleman also is called as "petty bourgeoisie intellectual", which has some political factors. The author thinks using gentleman to divide social class is more reasonable. Mao Dun knows well about helplessness in the inner world of gentleman from the unique perspective. Just as Wu Sunfu this kind of

gentleman, they hope to develop national industry and commerce and thus nation can have hope. However, they would neither sacrifice their own interests and nor exploit and oppress on workers. This kind of gentleman in Mao Dun's novels has complex and various faces, which shows that the writer's contradiction in his own spiritual world. Mao Dun said: "At that time, I noticed many people have contradiction in their minds even in their behaviors, but they do not realize themselves." (Ibid., p.425) Mao Dun also confesses that "there is shadow of acquaintance" and "I have some contacts with them in my life" (Sun, 2010, p.70), which states that Mao Dun himself is very familiar with traditional class of gentleman. Around 1927, he "not only sees more contradictions between revolution and anti-revolution and even the contradiction inside the revolution" (Mao, 1984, p.425). The writer has said that the character shaping of Wu Sunfu "partly depends on observation of Lu uncle" (Mao, 1981, p.489). Lu uncle is a figure of gentleman class.

Wu Sunfu in *Midnight* is born in traditional class of gentleman and goes aboard. He has cultivated by Chinese and Western culture and can be called as progressive and has dream of developing the country. But as the class of gentleman, facing farmers and workers, he can not sacrifice his own interest and finally is caught in the life dilemma and eliminated by the times. The character written by Mao Dun is just like living in the real society. "The strong awareness of social participants always makes his creations connect tightly with trend of times and society. The nature of times and society is the distinct features of his works." (Wang, 2008, p.109).

Scholars have pointed to the lower class of the society is the focus of Dickens, however there are some descriptions on class of gentleman. The writer not only expresses his sympathy to character Darnay, but also appreciates the kindness and gentility of this young gentleman. He tells us that at that time, the society needs such kind and upright gentlemen. From his own life experience, Dickens promotes to the class of gentleman later. He lives a poor life in his childhood and makes a gentleman life through his hard working.

Scholars think that "critique on society, praise on morality and exploration of human nature are three aspects of Dickens's novel" (Zhao, 1996, p.194). The image of the gentleman shaped by the writer is also embodied such three factors. "Morality is the base of creating novels for Dickens." (Zhao, 1985) In the novel, though Darnay is born in the class of gentleman, he being different from his uncle and father, is kind and upright, handsome and polite. He feels pain about his identity of gentleman, so he is willing to abandon his class and goes to Britain on his own and feed himself by teaching French. In order to safeguard his principle, he goes to Paris to save his former servant, which shows that he is an affectionate gentleman. The best solution to ease the contradiction between all

classed in society given by Dickens is to obey the moral rules.

Dickens agrees with some social values of the class of gentleman. Critic Zweig has said that British has more national responsibility than French, which can reflect in Britain writers' literature. Which coincides with task shouldered by Chinese writers in the first half of 20th century. This can reflect the writer's ideology. The writer says that he uses vicious means to reach the vicious goal, which shows that Dickens disagrees with the violent revolution of "Jacques". The writer pays sympathy to class of gentleman and thinks that lack of moral boundary is the essential problem of the society. Dickens expresses his sympathy on oppressive farmers and he also sympathizes on class of gentleman when they are hurt by farmers. The gentleman culture contains sympathy on the weak and small, which is also the human feelings of Dickens as a gentleman.

This affectionate gentleman carries the value of Dickens. Gentleman is more determined by his morality and behaviors rather than blood relationship, which also can be proven by other writers in 19th century.

In the process of modernization, Mao Dun and Dickens both choose Chinese and Western gentleman as image of literature. The gentleman class, belong to the middle class of society, hopes to revolution and also is afraid of it and hopes to change while is fear of it. In the time of change, Wu Sunfu and Darnay go to the end of hero way, experience their small and helplessness and their life and feelings are in a complex state. Mao Dun and Dickens are familiar with all kinds of situations of gentleman in real life and have the similar life experience, so they express their emotions by character of novel.

CONCLUSION

In the system of literary reference, Mao Dun is divided into the school of realistic literature. Just as his recognition

says that "literature is driven by its background" (Mao, 1984, p.27). The gentlemen shaped by two writers are the real reflection of life. They have experienced privilege and attendants at service, while in the social transformation, they have to face reality and go to the end a hero. The two writers whose family background and life experience are closely related with the class of gentleman, show both sympathy and critique on gentleman, which embodies contradiction in writers' inner world.

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