

The Impurity of Patriotism in *Fu Lei's Family Letters*

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“Fu Lei’s Family Letter should be taken as a guideline for all parents.”¹ Indeed, the book has been popular since its publication in 1981. It has sold more than one million copies throughout 20 years.² Parents employ ideas from the book to educate their children, and children have to read this book as student because it is included in the curriculum. As a famous translator and author, Fu Lei is the founding father of translation in French literature in modern China. However, he is actually more famous for *Fu Lei’s Family Letters*, which is a compilation of their family letters from 1954 to 1966 that includes more than a hundred letters.³ Although Fu Lei was regarded as a loyal translator and his family letters was integrated into the national curriculum to serve as patriotic education for students, a close read of some letters in the context of Anti-Rightist Campaign and other Cultural Revolution suggests that he was actually forced to express that attitude.

I am first going to define the term “patriotism” in the paper, then I will analyze the most reoccurring themes in *Fu Lei’s Family Letters*—patriotism. Many scholars have found multiple letters that shows Fu Lei’s patriotic heart, but they tend to only read what is written on the paper, not the sensitive historical context behind it, which I will interpret and explain later. Then, I will

¹ Li Lin 李琳, “Fulei Jiashu Jiating Jiaoyu Sixiang Yanjiu” 《傅雷家书》家庭教育思想研究 [The Education Philosophy of Fu’s Family—Research on *Fu Lei’s Family Letters*]. *Huabei Shuili Shuidian Daxue* 华北水利水电大学 1 (2016): 2.

² Huang Lan 黄岚, “Cong FuLei Jiashu Kan Xiandai Suzhi Jiaoyu” 从《傅雷家书》看现代素质教育 [To Understand Modern Education from *Fu Lei’s Family Letters*]. *Huazhong Keji Daxue Gaodeng Jiaoyu Xueyuan* 华中科技大学高等教育科学院 1 (2014): 47.

³ Chen Anan, Yu Bingjiang 陈安安, 余炳江, “FuLei Jiashu Zhong De Jiajiao Yu Jiafeng” 《傅雷家书》中的家教与家风 [The Upbringing in *Fu Lei’s Family Letters*]. *Anhui Wenxue* 安徽文学 2(2018): 28.

propose some details and answer why *Fu Lei's Family Letters* does not represent his earnest expression of patriotism, but in fact, the product of political environment.

Patriotism will be defined similarly as national pride in this paper. However, the love and devotion towards the country (patriotism) in the People's Republic of China is approximately the same as the love and devotion to the party (partisanism) even in nowadays. One cannot say they are a patriot if they are not a partisan, mostly because of Chinese one-party system that the position of the party always ranks in the same place with the country, sometimes even before it.⁴ This is even more exaggerated in Fu Lei's era, as we can see from numerous political movements happened in the 1950s and 1960s.⁵ For people at that time, it is impossible for them to even have the idea that they do not appreciate the country in any way because of the strict education and various political propagandas. One has to follow the patriotic trend under such atmosphere because this was the only way to make a living, which Fu Lei actually did but still failed.

Fu Lei was famous for his translation of various French literature in his times. People often said: "without him, there will be no Balzac in China."⁶ Indeed, Fu's translations of Balzac's Eugénie Grandet and Rolland's Jean-Christophe heavily influenced the intellectual life

⁴ Gries, Hays Peter, Zhang Qingmin, Crowson H. Michael, and Cai Huajian, "Patriotism, Nationalism and China's US Policy: Structures and Consequences of Chinese National Identity." *The China Quarterly* 205 (2011): 1. doi:10.1017/S0305741010001360.

⁵ Examples includes the Chinese Land Reform Movement, the Campaign to Suppress Counterrevolutionaries, the Great Leap Forward, the Cultural Revolution, etc. For more information, please visit [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_the_People%27s_Republic_of_China_\(1949%E2%80%931976\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_the_People%27s_Republic_of_China_(1949%E2%80%931976)) for more information.

⁶ Li Lin 李琳, "Fulei Jiashu Jiating Jiaoyu Sixiang Yanjiu" 《傅雷家书》家庭教育思想研究 [The Education Philosophy of Fu's Family—Research on *Fu Lei's Family Letters*]. *Huabei Shuili Shuidian Daxue* 华北水利水电大学 1 (2016): 2.

of readers a century ago, and some of his translations are still valid since students like me have even read his translated version in the twenty-first century.⁷ However, scholars and educators nowadays tend to focus on his Family Letters instead of those great translation works. First is because western literature, or even anything from the west, was strictly limited to the level that they were banned and even destroyed during the Cultural Revolution. Fu Cong actually cried when he heard the radio in 1980s China playing Beethoven's music, because it was banned in public for the whole Cultural Revolution period.⁸ Nobody was allowed to introduce any kind of translated novels because of their "capitalistic characteristics", except those like *How the Steel Was Tempered* (which strictly speaking that it is neither western nor capitalistic), and this restriction probably still had its long-lasting influence in today. Secondly, educators and people who set the national curriculum may recognize these translation works are not easy enough for middle school students to comprehend. But *Fu Lei's Family Letters*, on the other hand, is easier, better for patriotic education, and may provide rebellious teenagers with a parental insight that will improve the relationship between them. The result of incorporating *Fu Lei's Family Letters* into the national curriculum is obvious—many scholars wrote reviews and essays about it.⁹

⁷ Guo Jianmin 郭剑敏, "Qingqing Yu Zhengzhi Yintong Jiujie Xiade *FuLei Jiashu*" 亲情与政治隐痛纠结下的《傅雷家书》 [The Entanglement of Family and Politics Behind *Fu Lei's Family Letters*] *Zhongguo Xiandai Wenxue Yanjiu Congkan* 中国现代文学研究丛刊 6(2017): 163.

⁸ Guo Jianmin 郭剑敏, "Qingqing Yu Zhengzhi Yintong Jiujie Xiade *FuLei Jiashu*" 亲情与政治隐痛纠结下的《傅雷家书》 [The Entanglement of Family and Politics Behind *Fu Lei's Family Letters*] *Zhongguo Xiandai Wenxue Yanjiu Congkan* 中国现代文学研究丛刊 6(2017): 160.

⁹ Strictly speaking, every article I have cited in the bibliography is about the family letters.

Nevertheless, the mainstream of the conversation was praising the book itself instead of debating with each other.

Patriotism acts like a thread in *Fu Lei's Family Letters*, weaving through it from the very beginning to the very end. Indeed, in the context of 1950s China, it is everyone's responsibility to love their own country; but Fu Lei's love reached far beyond the normal level. Ding Zhang raises this patriotism to the degree of morality in his *The Values of Ethics in Fu Lei's Family Letters*. "There are several levels of love: first is to the family, then is to friends, then to the society, and then to the country. And patriotism would be the finest form of love... The concept itself is a kind of ethics that combines both moral relationship and moral practice, which is why it is included in 24 core socialist values."¹⁰ He and scholars like Anan Chen point out the fact that even though Fu Lei was designated and criticized as a "right-wing" writer in the Anti-Rightist Campaign, he still expressed such great love towards the country in the family letters. Maybe Fu Lei was what Chen has written, "a loyal patriot from the very beginning."¹¹

This patriotic love extended in his teaching-like words written for Fu Cong, an example will be the following excerpt:

- 10.1.1959 "(When Fu Cong was abroad) From now on, your performances are not your individual performances anymore—you represent the country. You should be very careful about everything you are going to do since you love the country. For the sake of your health, spirit, art, and the honor of China, you cannot decrease the number of plays anymore."

¹⁰ Zhang Ding 张丁, "FuLei Jiashu Zhong De Lunli Jiazhi" 《傅雷家书》中的伦理价值 [The Values Ethics in *Fu Lei's Family Letters*]. *Zhongguo Deyu* 中国德育 23(2016): 80.

¹¹ Chen Anan, Yu Bingjiang 陈安安, 余炳江, "FuLei Jiashu Zhong De Jiajiao Yu Jiafeng" 《傅雷家书》中的家教与家风 [The Upbringing in *Fu Lei's Family Letters*]. *Anhui Wenxue* 安徽文学 2(2018): 28.

In that times of China, the difficulty of studying abroad was similar to giving spacewalk—it is not impossible only for those who are rich enough to afford it. Which could explain why Fu Lei called his son “the lucky child (been born with a silver spoon in their mouth).”¹² Since Fu Lei understood that it was Chinese government’s decision to let his son study abroad, he needed to take good care of this opportunity to avoid any kind of withdrawal from the country. “It is Fu Lei’s education on patriotism that make Fu Cong never forgot where he comes from, as if a flying kite that is always connected with the motherland. Fu Cong did not let his father down, always claiming himself as ‘the son of People’s Republic of China’.”¹³

One cannot say what these scholars have commented on *Fu Lei’s Family Letters* is wrong. However, these praises are not very comprehensive. If we incorporate the political environment in that point of history, as well as Fu Lei’s personality and what he had done to his son in Fu Cong’s childhood, it is not hard to doubt the authenticity of the patriotism and the equal relationship. Things are different behind the lines.

Fu Lei did not support the communist party right from the beginning. Although there is no scholarly articles available, but some media from Taiwan reveals that in the 1940s, when the two parties were still having civil war, Fu Lei has already left Shanghai and fled to Hong Kong with his wife to avoid the turbulence of the war. After People’s Republic of China was established in 1949, he made the decision to come back and be the first group highly educated

¹² Zhao Mingmei, Zhuang Yuan 赵明媚, 庄园, “*FuLei Jiashu Dui Daxuesheng Daode Jaoyu De Jidian Qishi*” 《傅雷家书》对大学生道德教育的几点启示 [The Moral Education for College Student from *Fu Lei’s Family Letters*]. *Sixiang Zhengzhi Jiaoyu Yanjiu* 思想政治教育研究 29(2013): 93.

¹³ Chen Anan, Yu Bingjiang 陈安安, 余炳江, “*FuLei Jiashu Zhong De Jiajiao Yu Jiafeng*” 《傅雷家书》中的家教与家风[The Upbringing in *Fu Lei’s Family Letters*]. *Anhui Wenxue* 安徽文学 2(2018): 28.

people who reconstruct China. The Chinese media commented it as his firm love for the country, but probably at that time Fu Lei treated it as a chance to earn himself a better life. After all, being the founding father of modern Chinese literature is far better than a poor translator in Hong Kong. Another indication of that is Fu Lei started to take part in politics, which he never did in his youth. He became the chairman of the cultural department in Shanghai as an independent politician. In Fu Lei's understanding, he and his family will not get into trouble because he already sat at this high position in the government, but the Anti-Rightist Campaign proved that he was wrong.

Anti-Rightist Campaign happened around ten years before the Cultural Revolution. It is a movement to eliminate the “right-wing element” within the government system. At the very beginning of the campaign, Fu Lei even wrote a few articles and essays in the newspaper that criticized the potential “rightists” in the party. But just several days later, he was recognized as a “right-wing translator” and received rounds and rounds of struggle sessions. He was very disappointed at that time, even has the thought of committing suicide. He said to his wife: “if Min (their second son) is not a teenager, I will.....” Nevertheless, he did not say a word about it in the family letters, which also meant “he did not even mention anything that was bad for China.”¹⁴ But nobody would dare to include anything bad about China, since this could easily bring them and their loved ones into death-level troubles. As a result, it was impossible for Fu Lei to not include patriotic element in the family letters to give the party his signal of loyalty under this kind of pressure. Guo even argues in his article that Fu Lei purposely added sentences

¹⁴ Chen Anan, Yu Bingjiang 陈安安, 余炳江, “*FuLei Jiashu Zhong De Jiajiao Yu Jiafeng*” 《傅雷家书》中的家教与家风[The Upbringing in *Fu Lei's Family Letters*]. Anhui Wenxue 安徽文学 2(2018): 28.

like “China will be proud of you” and “we need to greatly thank our motherland for that” to show he is a patriot instead of a “right-wing”.¹⁵ But for most scholars, like Chen, Zhang, and Zhao, they did not write about anything before the campaign. And they only employed the campaign as a proof for Fu Lei’s loyalty. The campaign itself was also not elaborated in any of their articles, which shows the deficiency of their aspects in analyzing *Fu Lei’s Family Letters* as the expression of Fu’s patriotism.

Similar to the campaign, the incident of Fu Cong left for England and changed his nationality to English was also not explained in detail. Only Chen and Yu mentioned it in one sentence to further support the claim of Fu Lei’s patriotism. “Fu Lei seriously declared his position (in the letter to Fu Cong):

- ‘You never forgot about your country, and your country will never not forget you: China still give you the opportunity to come back. The gate will never be closed.’”

Apparently, Fu Cong’s escape from the socialist country Poland indicated his betrayal. He did not come back to China until 1980s, when the communist party finally exonerated his parents and made an apology. Furthermore, both the thought of suicide in the Anti-Rightist Campaign and the actual attempt in the Cultural Revolution implied Fu Lei’s disappointment towards the country. His own pride does not allow himself to be humiliated. It would be hard to still argue Fu Lei’s love for the country after all these historical contexts. He did put his faith in the country, but the country never paid him back.

¹⁵ Guo Jianmin 郭剑敏, “Qingqing Yu Zhengzhi Yintong Jiujie Xiade *FuLei Jiashu*” 亲情与政治隐痛纠结下的《傅雷家书》 [The Entanglement of Family and Politics Behind *Fu Lei’s Family Letters*] *Zhongguo Xiandai Wenxue Yanjiu Congkan* 中国现代文学研究丛刊 6(2017): 161.

Another quote here to demonstrate Fu Lei's appreciation for the party by praising chairman Mao.

- 3.18.1957 "...Chairman Mao's speeches were extremely personal and straightforward, and his style and his tone were very accessible and humorous. His speeches never struck a didactic note, they were delivered at an easy pace, and they were interspersed with appropriate pauses. None of this could have been adequately conveyed in written form. His grasp of Marxism is truly transcendental. Whenever he touches upon any aspect of the subject, he goes to the heart of the matter, expressing it in the most wonderful and natural way. The truth seeps imperceptibly into the minds of his audience. The underlying logic of his speeches is always hidden, never explicit. He is an artist, a true master..."¹⁶

We can easily see from this letter that Fu Lei purposely wrote a whole paragraph on the details about Mao and his speech, also mentioning about Marxism to prove his support of Communism. The words he used clearly indicates his intention to keep he and his family in a safe and good place. The other patriotic letters are similar to this praise of Mao's speech. Fu Lei picked some minor merits from the party then elaborated and magnified on it.

Although being the greatest translator in the twentieth century of China, Fu Lei also had his identity of a father and a husband. He only wanted his family to be in good condition. That is why he chose to take part in the politics of Communist China, but he never expected his prosecution even under these presupposes. The patriotism in his family letters seemed believable, and these passages were indeed utilized as a require reading for raising student's patriotic awareness. However, is it really good for the education system to include this seemingly earnest national pride in national curriculum, even though students have learned about Fu's past and his suicide? Furthermore, do we really have the pure patriotism that comes from any authors? Last

¹⁶ John Minford, "A Matter of Life and Death: The Translator Fou Lei." *China Review International* 24, no. 2 (2017): 84.

but not least, is it necessary to include this element into education, shouldn't student learn this by themselves? Most of these answers may be a "no", but the reality works the other way around.

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