

“Fu Lei’s Family Letters is not only meaningful for the Fu Family, but meaningful for every family.” (The Educational Philosophy in *Fu Lei’s Family Letters*. Cao, Bin)

1. Opening Paragraph:

“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 *Fu Lei’s Family Letters* is a great book that shows one of the best parental education methods, but it should not be the holy bible for every family nowadays to imitate. Because the neither the patriotism nor the friend-like relationship between father and son are real or true.

2. Brief Roadmap:

I am first going to analyze the most reoccurring themes in *Fu Lei’s Family Letters*, including patriotism/nationalism, and the equality in father-son relationship, through a conversation from multiple authors. Then, I will propose some details behind those themes and answer why it is not a reliable resource for parents.

3. They Say:

Famous in his own time for XYZ, primarily read today for ABC

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.” Indeed, Fu’s translations of Balzac’s *Eugénie Grandet* and Rolland’s *Jean-Christophe* heavily influenced the intellectual life of readers a century ago, and some of his translations are still valid since I have even read his translated version in the twenty-first century. However, scholars and educators nowadays tended 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 banned and destroyed during the Cultural Revolution. 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-

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

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

Patriotism:

Patriotism acts like a thread in *Fu Lei's Family Letters*, weaving through it from the very beginning to the very end. Indeed, 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 Ethnics 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."⁴ 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."⁵

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."

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)"⁶ 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

⁴ Zhang Ding 张丁, "FuLei Jiashu Zhong De Lunli Jiazhi" 《傅雷家书》中的伦理价值 [The Values of Ethnics in *Fu Lei's Family Letters*]. *Zhongguo Deyu* 中国德育 23(2016): 80

⁵ 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

⁶ 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

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’.⁷

The equality in father-son relationship (the transformation from traditional father-son relationship to friendship/peer like relationship)

Fu Lei reconstructed his relationship with his son through the family letters. Having more than two thousand years of history, the Confucian’s way of parental education is always the mainstream in China. Fu Lei used to do the same thing—reprimanding or even beating Fu Cong whenever he made a mistake. However, as soon as Fu Cong study abroad, the physical distance between them simply made this type of punishment impossible. As a result, “it is the distance (between space and time) of the traditional family letters give this new kind of relationship that is between children-parents and friends-friends. It is a revolution towards the traditional children-parents relationship (father and son), as well as the dreamed relationship of most father and son.”⁸ Fu Lei finally had the chance to put down his pride, “realized the responsibility of the father after forty-five-year-old”, and communicated with Fu Cong effectively.⁹

4. I Say:

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.

The patriotism/nationalism results from the political environment at that time:

Fu Lei did not support the communist party right from the beginning. 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 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.

⁷ 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

⁸ Zhang Ding 张丁, “*FuLei Jiashu Zhong De Lunli Jiazhi*” 《傅雷家书》中的伦理价值 [The Values of Ethnics in *Fu Lei’s Family Letters*]. *Zhongguo Deyu* 中国德育 23(2016): 80

⁹ 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): 29

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.”¹⁰ Under this kind of pressure, it was impossible for Fu Lei to not include patriotic element in the family letters. Some scholars even argue that he purposely added sentences like “China will be proud of you” and “we need to greatly thank our motherland for that” to show he is a loyal patriot and not a “right-wing”.¹¹ 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.’”¹² 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, the 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.

What comes before the peaceful friend-like father and son relationship is absolute obedience:

The seemingly selfless father’s love is in fact the selfish father’s desire:

- Fu Cong once said in an interview that his father is somehow annoying for sending so many letters.

¹⁰ 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

¹¹ Guo Jianmin 郭剑敏, “Qingqing Yu Zhengzhi Yintong Jiujiexiade *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

¹² 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