

Fu Lei: A Patriotic Chinese Intellectual



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ABSTRACT: Fu Lei, a well-known Chinese scholar, art theorist and translator, is well versed in a variety of Chinese and Western arts. He has profound cultural and academic knowledge, unique insights, meticulous and rigorous style of study, and a sincere pursuit of art and truth. He is an iron man with personality and thought, with ill-fated destiny, but he never surrendered. He has a strong character and is known as the most backbone of modern Chinese intellectuals. This article reviews Fu Lei's ups and downs throughout his life, introduces his representative works and writing styles in different periods, as well as the social influence of his works, and appreciates his passion for literature and art, noble personality and patriotism.

KEYWORDS : Fu Lei, translation, education, Chinese and Western arts

Fu Lei (1908-1966) was a famous Chinese translator, writer, educator and art critic who was proficient in both Chinese and French. In his whole 37 translation life, Fu Lei has translated more than 30 kinds of works, mainly French literary works, including Romain Rolland, Balzac, Voltaire and other famous writers' works, such as *Jean-Christophe*, *Vie de Beethoven*, *Le Père Goriot*, *Eugenie Grandet* and so on. His translation is fluent, rich in words and varied in color. He believed that translation should be in effect, not in shape, but in spirit. Fu Lei introduced western culture with a view to promoting the development of real Chinese culture and meeting the needs of times (Guo Min, 2020), which presented a magnificent and colorful world of French literature for Chinese readers.

Fu Lei was born in 1908 in Xiashatowship, Nanhui, Jiangsu province (now Hangtou Town, Pudong New Area, Shanghai). Fu Lei's father died at a young age, brought up by his mother who attached great importance to Fu Lei's enlightenment education. In 1920, at the age of 12, Fu Lei was admitted to the Primary School Affiliated to Shanghai Nanyang Public School (today's Nanyang Model High School). The following year, he was admitted to Shanghai Xuhui High School. However, Fu's mother was extremely strict with him, and Fu Lei's "rebellious heart" was triggered by his mother's harsh discipline, so he was expelled from school several times. As a young man, Fu Lei was deeply influenced by the May 4th Movement and had strong anti-imperialist and anti-feudal thoughts. In 1926, Fu Lei set off a revolt against scholar-lords in the High School Affiliated to Shanghai Datong University, and was forced to leave the school and return to his hometown. In the same year, Fu Lei studied himself and was admitted to Shanghai Chizhi University. However, influenced by the political situation at that time, Fu Lei's college life was seriously disturbed. Finally, Fu Lei decided to study in France. As a lover of literature since childhood, he hoped to "absorb

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nutrients from French literature to enrich the spiritual food of the Chinese people and arouse their consciousness to transform the old China and form consciousness to build a new China." In 1928, Fu Lei studied at the University of Paris in France, where he studied literature and art theory. In order to improve his French language, he began to translate French literature. In his spare time, Fu Lei also went to museums and art galleries to appreciate art works, and read a large number of works on aesthetics, art history and music theory, all of which have achieved profound attainments (Liu Zhixia, 2020). Three years later, Fu Lei returned to China after completing his studies in September 1931. Liu Haisu, then the president of Shanghai Academy of Fine Arts (now Nanjing College of the Arts), employed him as the office director of the school, concurrently teaching arts and French to translate and communicate French literature. But the following year, Fu quitted his job to devote himself to translating French literary classics.

His translation career can be divided into two stages with 1949 as the boundary: the first stage is during the Anti-Japanese War, which began from 1932 to 1949. The second stage was from 1949 to 1966 after he being labeled as Rightists. The two stages are just 17 years each, but Fu Lei's translation route and translation style have undergone great changes.

At the beginning, Fu Lei mainly translated the works of Romain Rolland, whom he regarded as his life mentor. The themes he chose for translation were full of the spirit of times and met the needs of the society at that time. During the Anti-Japanese War at that time, he chose to translate the three giant biographies: *Vie de Beethoven* (*Life of Beethoven*), *Vie de Michel-Ange* (*Life of Michelangelo*), *La Vie de Tolstoï* (*Life of Tolstoy*), which on the one hand contained his love for Romain Rolland's works, but the more important reason was the infiltration of patriotism spirit. Mr. Fu Lei translated *Vie de Beethoven* and *Jean-Christophe*, in the turbulent war and haze of the Anti-Japanese War, not only to told the French literature and to mold the national spirit, but more importantly, to expressed the translator's patriotism and national integrity.

In the translation of *Vie de Beethoven*, Fu Lei wrote in the preface: "Only the real suffering, can drive out the romantic fantasy suffering; Only by seeing the heroic tragedy of overcoming difficulties can we accept our cruel fate; Only by holding the spirit of 'who will go to hell if I don't' can we save a dispirited and selfish nation, which was the lesson I learned when I first read this book fifteen years ago... Haze covers all over the sky now. We need spiritual support more than ever, need brave to insist, struggle, dare to challenge to the gods more than ever. Now, when the original music industry knows only hand skills training, and forgets to cultivate the divine work of mind, the *Vie de Beethoven* should have a more profound meaning to readers. -- for this reason, I retranslated the book." He not only tells the legendary life of the music master Beethoven with beautiful language, but also shows a great soul in front of the reader. The topics of Fu Lei's translated works were all in line with the national conditions and actual situations of China at that time. He wanted to awaken the patriotism of Chinese people through translation, arouse their indomitable and persistent fighting will, and gave light and hope to the confused Chinese young people (Tian Ling, 2014). His translation of *Jean-Christophe* to Chinese people has deeply influenced more than one generation. The famous translator LuoXinzhang commented that "Fu Lei has integrated his own vigor and passion of life, his own tenacity and spiritual strength into this book. Xu Jun thinks "Fu Lei's version not only translate the words of the works, also the life of the work. Because he has the same profound artistic accomplishment, a forceful personality and pure mind as Romain Rolland, he can hole into the author's artistic conception; permeate the ideas of the author soul."

In the later period, Fu Lei mainly translated Balzac's works, and his translation shifted from the romantic Roland to the realistic Balzac. The styles of two writers' works varied greatly. Fu Min, Fu Lei's son, once explained: "He translated Balzac mainly for political reasons. He translated Balzac, and he liked it." When talking about why he chose Balzac, Fu Lei said that he "had a headache" for Romain Rolland's romantic atmosphere. With the growth of experience, Fu Lei chose Balzac's novel with complex plot and rich color. Balzac's acrimony and satire and his depiction of the world also accord with Fu Lei's personality of skepticism. Even at the later stage of translation, Fu Lei always adhered to his original intention of translation creation. The first consideration was to choose works with the spirit of times, in line with the social development trend and the needs of readers. Fu Lei's translation output of Balzac's works is extremely high, including about 15 works, including *Le Père Goriot*, *Eugenie Grandet*, *Albert Savarus*, *La cousinebette*, *Le cousin Pons* and so on. As a translator, people evaluated Fu Lei that "Without him, there would be no Balzac."

In Fu Lei's translation of more than a dozen Balzac works, with *Le Père Goriot* the most effort. He knew that translation is a laborious work, but he also twice retranslated this novel, out of three editions. In the preface to the retranslation of *Le*

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PèreGoriot, the first paragraph clearly points out that: "Translation should be like painting, paying attention to the final effect, and what we seek is not likeness in form but likeness in spirit. In terms of practical work, translation is more difficult than painting. Each literature has its own peculiarities, its virtues which cannot be imitated, its imperfections which cannot be remedied, and, at the same time, its precepts which cannot be violated. As English and French, English and German as close to each other, there are many difficult to translate. The differences between Chinese and Western text frame are too far from these. To convey the meaning, we cannot grasp the dictionary or piece the original syntax together. (Fu Lei, 2010)." The attitude of striving for perfection and the nature of pursuing perfection prompted him to overthrow himself again and again and surpassed him. Fu Lei has always looked at his translated works from the perspective of development. After a while, he often put himself in the readers' shoes and looked at his works repeatedly from the perspective of readers' critical eyes. With a conscientious attitude towards his readers, he always thinks that his translation leaves room for further improvement. Among the various translations of *PèreGoriot*, Mr. Fu Lei's translation is the best, so far no one can match. *PèreGoriot* not only touched the hearts of the people at that time, but also brought great influence to the translation circle. This work fully embodies the characteristics of Fu Lei in translation. In the translation of proper nouns, the differences in cultural backgrounds can be taken into full consideration; the names of characters can be changed; the description of scenes can be specific, vivid, subtle and detailed. The words are varied; the writing style is smooth; the emotional color is rich. He pursued spiritual resemblance rather than excessive resemblance in form, adhered to the reader as the center. He has made outstanding achievements in translation practice and has unique insights into translation theory, which provides a reference for many translators.

In addition to being a translator, Fu Lei was also a famous educator. His *Fu Lei's Letters for Family* is well known both at home and abroad. This is a very special book, which can reflect his thought and spirit. In 1954, Fu Cong, his elder son, left home to study in Poland and began a 13-year correspondence with his parents. *Fu Lei's Letters for Family* is a collection of letters between Fu Lei and his son, which reflects his father's attention and care to his son. *Fu Lei's Letters for Family* fully embodies Fu Lei's thoughts. It's written on paper, just like family talk. He was free to write what he thought in his mind, without fear of "censorship" or "criticism". The significance of "*Fu Lei's Letters for Family* has gone far beyond the scope of family education. In the book, Fu Lei's views on life, values and world outlook have given people great inspiration, and he has provided all-round education on music, culture, fine arts, philosophy and literature (Xu Jun & ShenKe, 2013). In addition, Fu Lei's patriotic education for his son is also deeply permeated in this book, showing Fu Lei's love for the motherland. In 1981, *Fu Lei's Letters for Family* was first published, and went through several editions. Only Yilin Publishing House has published eight editions. Jin Yong once commented: "Mr. Fu Lei's letter for family is a Chinese gentleman teaching his children to be a real Chinese gentleman." There is no doubt that Fu Lei's education of his eldest son Fu Cong is successful. Every time Fu Cong performs, he shows his subtle heart and unique style. He is an artist who loves his motherland and is well equipped with morality and talent. The younger son Fu Min is also very upright, kind, diligent, not being proud or arrogant because of the aura of father and brother. This book is a profound portrayal of both ordinary and typical modern Chinese intellectuals, which is a good book that can make us better improve our self-cultivation.

Fu Lei is also an artist. During his study in France, he was especially crazy about painting, music and art, and devoted himself to exploring art theories. He also had his own unique insights into both Chinese and Western culture and art. Studying in France, he has repeatedly visited Paris, Brussels, Rome and Geneva, enjoying the world-famous art museum treasures, trying to figure out a large number of classic works of western art history as well as researching the evolution, achievements and characteristics of various schools in different period. Accumulated quite profound artistic experience, he can accurately grasp the spirit and essence of these art treasures (Liu Zhixia, 2020). At the same time, Fu Lei also emphasized the absorption and development of the national traditional culture, and believed that "as a Chinese, we must not be isolated from the tradition." The Chinese nation not blindly imitate and pursue art, but to have the soul of the Chinese people and Chinese poetry. Fu Lei is a sincere aestheticism and idealist. This was true of his infatuation with the beauty of art, of his ideal of life, and of conducting himself and literature. But in this world, it is the idealists who are the most vulnerable and the least visible.

It is because of Fu Lei's aestheticism and perfectionism of character (Li Jingduan, 2008), he hated injustice like poison and was upright and integrity, pursuing to be meticulous to his cause. We can read the innocence and feelings of literature and art, see the integrity and persistence of Chinese intellectuals, feel his love, respect and expectation for China from him. Fu Lei is like a

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tough guy with personality and thought, who sees the personality more important than anything else. Mr. Fu Lei once translated a very classic words, meaning that “man is nothing but a reed, the most fragile creature in the nature. Man is also a reed with thought, because of the thought, so he is the most powerful creature. A drop of water, a wisp of vapor, may kill a man, but human is still superior to the world that overcomes him, because he knows where the world is superior to him.” Indeed, Fu Lei is a reed, and is a strain of reed with his own thought, with his own independent and sober thinking. He always knew what was right and what was wrong. He was an honest, stubborn and innocent translator, writer, educator and artist. Fu Lei's life is full of ups and downs. Even in the turbulent times, he never bowed his head. Even in the last moment of life, he has always insisted on his original intention, and went through life tragically.

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