

A Comparative study of Ba Jin and Mahfouz from the Perspective of Patriarchy

Liang Juntong

Shandong University of Political Science and Law, Jinan, China

Email: carlotonyliang@163.com

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Abstract. Ba Jin and Naguib Mahfouz are two brilliant writers. They lived almost in the same era and both of them experienced social unrest and social change. They almost simultaneously wrote the “trilogy” representing the highest level of modern literature in their respective countries. Fathers are important characters in both writers works. Being typical images of tyrannical parents, these fathers are supreme in the family, and have definite dictatorship over children. The “Father” works as a cultural symbol, an authority and a social norm, the expulsion and absence of “father” also means the collapse of social order. Mahfouz’s novel not only expresses the resistance to patriarchy, but also continues to search for the ideal father after the resistance. The protagonist’s journey to find his father is also the journey to find his faith.

1. Introduction

Egypt and China are two ancient civilizations in human history. The Nile River and the Yellow River breed two great nations respectively. They are equally brave and industrious, and they have also made great contributions to the scientific and cultural development of mankind. In modern times, these two great nations were oppressed by imperialism, colonialism and feudalism. They fought for independence and liberation according to their respective national conditions, and they almost established new republics at the same time. Great nation and splendid culture will inevitably bring up great talents. Naguib Mahfouz of Egypt and Ba Jin of China are two great literary masters of these two great nations. They lived in almost the same era. They had similar experiences, sharing almost the same views on society and life. They almost simultaneously wrote the “trilogy” representing the highest level of modern literature in their respective countries, Ba Jin’s “*The Torrent Trilogy*” and the “*Cairo Trilogy*” of Mahfouz. They all deserve to be the leaders of modern literary circles in their respective countries.[5]

Naguib Mahfouz, an Egyptian novelist, was born in a middle-class family in Cairo on December 22, 1911. He graduated from the Department of Philosophy, Cairo University in 1934. In 1938, his virgin works, the collection of short stories ---Whisper of Madness, was published. In 1970, he was awarded the National Prize for Literature Honor, and in 1988, he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature, becoming the first Arab writer to receive this honor. Naguib Mahfouz is a recognized master of modern Arab fiction. In the early period, historical themes were the main themes, and modern national consciousness was used to give new explanations to historical events. His main works are: *Whisper of Madness* (1938), *Mockery of the Fates* (1939), *Cairo Trilogy* (1956-1957), *The Beggar* (1965), *Adrift on the Nile* (1966), *Stories from Our Neighborhood* (1975), *Respected Sir* (1975), *Echoes of an Autobiography* (1994), *Echoes of Forgetness* (1999), *Dreams of the Rehabilitation Period* (2004), *The Seventh Heaven* (2005). [6] These works depict the ups and downs of Egyptian middle-class life and spiritual conditions in turbulent times, deeply analyzing the pre-revolution Egyptian urban society, and expressing the humanitarian ideal and the desire to change the status quo. Among them, the trilogy is the peak of the author’s realistic creation. Naguib Mahfouz has a large audience in Egypt and the Arab world, and many of his works have been made into films or TV series.

Ba Jin, formerly known as Li Yaotang, was born in 1904 in a feudal bureaucratic family in Chengdu, Sichuan. He entered the English Tutorial school run by the Chengdu Youth Association in

the autumn of 1918 and studied in the Chengdu Foreign Language Specialized School in 1920. The May 4th Movement in 1919 baptized Ba Jin by the New Culture Movement, which greatly enhanced his anti-feudal consciousness. In 1923, he left his home in Chengdu to find his own way of life. In early 192, he went to France to study. When studying abroad, he translated some books and read many books about the 18th century bourgeois revolution in France. After returning from France, he completed his second trilogy, *Love Trilogy: Fog, Rain, Lighting and New Life*, from 1931 to 1933. [7] The protagonists of these works are young intellectuals, and the author eulogizes their spirit of resisting autocratic violence, pursuing brightness and daring to sacrifice themselves. Ba Jin completed his masterpiece *The Family* in 1931, Spring in 1938 and Autumn in 1940, collectively known as the *Torrents Trilogy*.

Both Ba Jin and Naguib Mahfouz lived in the period of historical change. At that time, China was transiting from a feudal old China to a new China, and Egypt was transiting from a feudal colonial country to an independent republic. [2] Therefore, they all had the unique sensitivity and profundity of writers in this period. Their works all reflect the so-called “crossroads” of history, the thoughts, feelings, yearnings and struggles of people in Chinese and Egyptian societies, when the future of society and the relationship between people were experiencing the intensification of profound contradictions. They made a serious and artistic exploration of moral values, expressing deep sympathy for the oppressed and humiliated people, and great anger at the feudal system or cruel slavery and racism that hindered social progress. The broad masses of workers, peasants, students and staff all rose up against the rulers at that time. It is the similar national conditions and similar historical experiences of the two nations that arouse the same creative passion of the two literary heroes. Because they all love their own people and want to wake them up with their pens to free them from slavery and oppression, they have written very similar masterpieces representing their highest levels.

2. A Patriarchal Hierarchy

In the old Chinese and Egyptian societies, a father was supreme in the *Family*. Ba Jin’s portrayal of the Master Gao is a typical image of tyrannical parents. He can’t tolerate any different opinions and actions at home. He doesn’t know any other standards to justify right and wrong except his own likes and dislikes.

In Mahfouz’s novel, there is also a such father, Ahmad Abd al-Jawad, who sits on the throne of an emperor. Ahmad, the father of *Palace Walk*, is also a tyrannical patriarchal image and a representative of the feudal system and old ideas. When he was at home, the whole family was silent. No one dared to speak. He did not allow others to have their own thoughts and actions. Family members revere him as they revere Allah. The children said so about him, Allah is in heaven, and Dad is in earth.

Two tyrannical parents hold the fate of the whole family in their hands, first and foremost, the economic power, which is the basis of the existence of the family. Authoritarianism and parental dignity are closely linked like twin brothers. In Gao’s house, grandfather is the worship and awe of the whole family, often with an inviolable air. The autocracy of the Master Gao and Ahmad Abd al-Jawad is manifested through a strict hierarchy, and the autocrat has the supreme position. The rulers of the family regarded the whole family as servants and slaves. When the Gao family were having New Year’s Eve dinner, Mr. Gao, Mrs. Gao, concubines..... were all seated according to their ranks. If Mr. Gao raised his chopsticks, everybody followed him; if he put them down, everybody’s chopsticks were lowered. Occasionally, a couple of people talked in two or three short sentences. Servants, they can only stand by and wait on Mr. Gao for New Year’s dinner.

Similarly, when Ahmad Abd al-Jawad were having breakfast, a circle of cushions was placed around a table. As soon as Mr. Ahmad Abd al-Jawad came in, he sat cross-legged in the middle, and the three brothers went in turn. Yassin sat on his father’s right hand, Fahmy on his left hand, and Kemal on the opposite. No one dared to look up at their father, and they avoided exchanges of eyes. their mother can only stand by and serve them.

3. Dictatorship over Children

Master Gao, an authoritarian feudal parent, also had his own views on Juehui's entering school. He believed that reading was to read Confucian classics and some ancient poems. He did not need to go to any school to learn a foreign language at home. Schools and student associations at that time had attracted his attention. Such activities would cause young people to rise up against society and traditional ethics, which would not benefit him personally. If this continued, no one would listen to him and no one would obey him.[3]

Like the Chinese feudal parents, the Arab feudal parents decided to choose schools for their children: Ahmad Abd al-Jawad arranged for Fahmi to study law so that he could achieve an official career in the future, but the child refused his father, determining to devote themselves to education, and registered for the Normal College. Ahmad had a strong opinion of Fahmi's participation in the student movement and kept his son at home. As soon as he heard that Fahmy was taking part in activities outside, he called him back and told him not to go out to participate in them. Fahmy followed his father's words meekly. The children wanted to do something for the independence of the motherland, but their father only wanted their children to listen to them.

Marriage was also very cruel in feudal society. It caused many tragedies both in China and Egypt. Master Gao planned to choose a wife for Juexin, just because "Grandpa hopes to have a great grandson. "In this way, a sentence ruined Juexin's future, ideal and love. The old man also decided to choose a wife for Juemin, but Juemin refused to accept such arranged marriage. Unfortunately, grandfather proudly told him that there would be a wedding one day in two months. Master Gao did not know that this would ruin the happiness of his grandchildren. He just wanted to maintain his dignity without caring about the future of children, only to ask them to obey and endure.

Ahmad Abd al-Jawad's view of marriage is the same as that of Master Gao. His eldest son, Yasin has got a job and Ahmad believed that his son should get married. Then his father called him over and ordered, "I've decided to find a wife for you!" Yasin was shocked, hardly believing in his ears, but he still followed his father's words: "Your opinion is my opinion, Dad!" So simply, his eldest son got married. Fahmy, the second son, wanted to get engaged to the girl he loved. He wanted his mother to tell him about it, because he dared not tell him directly. Children in Egypt were particularly afraid of their father and are not allowed to discuss anything with him. Fahmy hesitated for several days before begging his mother to ask his father permission of marrying the neighbor's daughter. Her mother, who was equally afraid of her husband. Finally, one day, her mother summoned up the courage to talk to her father. The father suddenly raised his voice and said angrily, asking Fahmy to behave himself, and to concentrate on his studies. In this way, the tyrant shattered Fahmy's dream. Ahmad Abd al-Jawad holds everything in his hands, and his wife and children can only obey him, without any objection, because he controls their way of life. Family children exchange their father's inheritance right after death at the cost of marriage happiness.[4]

Although Master Gao was one man, he represented the ruling class of Chinese society at that time. The decline of Gao Mansion was the epitome of the decline of Chinese society at that time. Tens of millions of Master Gao and gentlemen wanted to stop the change of the country, trying to control everything in their hands and not allowing others any freedom. Others must follow what they said. They defended their position through this way. Master Gao was the incarnation of the feudal rulers of China at that time and was a statue of the tottering rulers. But the statue was finally shattered by the efforts of Chinese youth. The death of Master Gao reflects the fate that Chinese feudal society will inevitably perish. Old Master Gao had been an official of the Qing Dynasty for several years. He earned a lot of money from it. Because of his political position, he would not oppose the society at that time at all and would not allow others to oppose it. He firmly opposed Juehui's and Juemin's participation in student strikes or checking foreign goods and other activities against the government. He wanted to keep his descendants at home. He wanted to protect the "family" so as to make the feudal society continue forever.

Ahmad Abd al-Jawad was also a representative of the conservative older generation. The Egyptian people at that time lived a miserable life under the double oppression of colonialism and feudalism. The corruption of the government, the suffering of the lower class, the destruction of young people

by feudal ethics and the spiritual crisis of intellectuals have caused serious unrest in Egyptian society. Under such historical conditions, Ahmad played the role of a feudal guardian, who hated all new ideas.

4. Cultural Metaphors in Patriarchal Narration

Since “Father” works as a cultural symbol in a broad sense, as an authority and a social norm, the expulsion and absence of “father” also means the collapse of social order. After breaking the restraint, the descendants are in a state of suspension, and fall into rootless anxiety and fear. Therefore, by recalling the blood of the family, they try to eliminate this anxiety and try to fill this ideological gap.

However, in family narrative, parents are given more color of authoritarian domination and become the symbol of authoritarian power, which is related to the context of the creative era. In the early family narrative, grandparents or fathers appeared as heroes. They defended their families and their country, establishing meritorious deeds, and leaving behind their prestige and prestige. In the modern family narrative, parents are the symbol of the feudal autocratic order. They undertake the task of criticizing the feudal autocratic rule. Their cruel and trivial images are metaphors of the gloomy traditional cultural order and the inevitable collapse. At the turn of the century, the image of grandfather has changed again, which represents the traditional spirit and personality style, demonstrating the current society’s recognition and call for the essence of tradition in the collapse of value and disorder.

The theme of “father and son” often constitutes a conflict between tradition and anti-tradition. Parents often represent tradition, while descendants represent a deviation from tradition. The material, spiritual and cultural shock brought about by the Western colonial invasion have made social order increasingly chaotic and the traditional social structure increasingly disintegrated, which has brought about the crisis of families and the decline of the “father”, who represents the authority of feudal patriarchal system.[1] A father is no longer a decent parent, but an unrestrained force in the sea of personal pleasure, which results in the contradiction and conflict between “father” and “son”, and the hatred to “father”. In the patriarchal narrative, the writers’ cultural ideal of rebuilding social order and personal spiritual beliefs is placed in it.

Mahfouz’s novel not only expresses the resistance to patriarchy, but also continues to search for the ideal father after the resistance. Mahfouz has already placed his cultural ideal of rebuilding social order, authority of father’s surname and personal spiritual beliefs on his motif of “sons hate their fathers and seek new ideals” in the novel. Finding a father means finding new life ideals, beliefs, life pillars and spiritual conversion. In a broad sense, pharaohs, teachers, guides, and Sheikh all approximate the role of “father”, which represents an authority and power. Junedy Sheikh in “*the Thief and the Dogs*” (1961) and Balkh sheikh in “*Thousand Nights*” are the men who have such paternal authority. They represent a religious feeling with their kindness, forgiveness and tolerance. They are all sincere believers of Allah on the earth, exercising Allah’s spiritual power as mortals. And Allah is the common “father” of mankind. As an idealized father, the worship of the “father” can be said to be a major core of all religious beliefs.

In Mahfouz’s patriarchal narrative, rebellion against his father and search for his father constitute the dilemma of his character selection: both rejection and admiration, both rebellion and submission. It also reflects the perpetual dilemma of human beings - freedom and belief. The pursuit of freedom and resistance to fathers make mankind lose faith, while the pursuit of faith is an escape from freedom, which will deprive mankind of freedom in the conversion of fathers as spiritual authority. A father symbolizes patriarchy on the whole, not a father in the physiological sense. He symbolizes dignity, freedom and peace. Since those “fathers” in fact have degenerated even lost and cannot undertake their cultural mission, the pursuit of spiritual fathers constitutes a cultural pursuit, an effort to rebuild the social and spiritual order and the tradition of father’s surname. The protagonist’s journey to find his father is also the journey to find his faith, in which he hides his spiritual destination.

5. Conclusion

Both Ba Jin and Naguib Mahfouz choose family novels to reflect their thoughts and feelings when their countries are experiencing changes and contradictions, showing deep sympathy for the oppressed and humiliated people. “Father” is an effective cultural metaphor, and both writers use it to express the collapse of social order. The conflict between “father and son” often implies a conflict between tradition and anti-tradition. After the “son” breaks the restraints, the descendants are in a state of suspension, and fall into rootless anxiety and fear. In order to eliminate this anxiety and try to fill this ideological gap, the “son” begins to seek new ideals. By this motif in novels, the writers try to express their cultural ideal of rebuilding social order, and personal spiritual beliefs.

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