

The Southern Complex in Su Tong and Faulkner's Novels

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Faulkner, an American writer, and Su Tong, a Chinese writer, are both influential writers of their country. Their works have strong regional and cultural characteristics and all express the author's southern complex. Faulkner's *A Rose for Emily* tells the tragic fate of Emily, the last aristocrat of Southern Jefferson town after the civil war. Su Tong describes the tragedy of *Opium Family* in Feng Yang Shu Village after China's war of liberation. Both writers write about the southern region of the United States or China, and construct a social and cultural picture of the south for readers.

Keywords: Faulkner, Su Tong, *A Rose for Emily*, *Opium Family*, southern complex

Introduction

William Faulkner and Su Tong are two great writers in Chinese and American literary circles. They were born in the south of their country, Faulkner from Mississippi, Su Tong from Suzhou. Their thoughts and literary creation are deeply influenced by the social, historical, and cultural changes of their southern hometown. *A Rose for Emily* is Faulkner's famous short story, and *Opium Family* is Su Tong's famous work. Both writers express their southern complex in their works.

A Rose for Emily describes the fate of the Grierson family in southern town Jefferson after the civil war. Emily's father, in order to maintain the so-called hierarchy and dignity, drove away all the men who courted Emily. After her father's death, Emily fell in love with Homer, a Yankee who came to town to build the railway. When she found out that Homer had no intention of marrying her, she poisoned him with arsenic. From then on, Emily lived a life of isolation in a dilapidated house and slept with the dead body for 40 years until she died.

Opium Family tells the fate of Liu Laoxia, the landlord of Feng Yang Shu Village, from prosperity to decline before and after the founding of new China. The landlord's family lived by opium cultivation. Chen Mao, a longtime worker, adulterated with Liu Laoxia's wife and gave birth to Liu Chencao, the single son of the feudal family. After the end of the war of liberation, opium trafficking was no longer legal. The opium that the landlord family depended on was ignored, and the landlord family's power declined. Moreover, as the campaign to overthrow the landlord intensified, Chen Mao, the longtime worker, rushed to the front line of fighting against the landlord and raped landlord's daughter Liu Suzi. Liu Chencao revenges for his elder sister and killed his biological father Chen Mao. A large family has since disintegrated.

In this paper, from the perspective of cultural research, we will start with typical texts, and compare the similarities and differences of the southern complex and its presentation in Faulkner's and Su Tong's novels, so as to understand the complex feelings of the two writers for the southern hometown.

Southern Complex

Su Tong once talked about his preference for Faulkner in the interview. He said that "Faulkner shines like the sun on him", and he admired him so much (Su & Jiang, 2009, pp. 6-9). In his novels, *Feng Yang Shu Village*, the fictional literary worlds, can clearly see the influence of Faulkner's "Yoknapatawpha".

Faulkner was born in a famous family in the south of the United States. Under the protection of his ancestors, he lived in the upper class of the local society. Then it gradually declined. Faulkner spent most of his life in the small town in the south of the United States, and used the town and its surrounding areas as the blueprint of his fictional world. The southern tradition, like genetic inheritance, played a great role in his thinking and writing.

After the failure of the civil war, the usual pride in the southern ideology was broken. The south is mired in humiliation, suffering, and poverty. These situations did not enable the southerners to see themselves correctly. Instead of analyzing the reasons for the defeat of the south and making positive changes, they put all the responsibilities on the north. The failure of the civil war made the southerners escape from reality and "mythologize" the romanticism of the past. They defended slavery and the way of life in the south, beautified the old south as a "paradise" of "sweetness, tenderness, and sunshine", and regarded women in the south as "pure" saints, as "Athena shining brightly on the clouds", and even "slavery" became "God's gift".

At the beginning of the 20th century, things began to change. The south is gradually redeveloped. When southern scholar Ellen Taylor analyzed the causes of the Southern Renaissance, he said: "The South re-entered the world in the first World War. It looked around and for the first time since 1830 found that the Yankees were not responsible for everything". At this time, young Faulkner began to look at his beloved hometown from a new perspective and take the crimes of southern society seriously. This painful self analysis has produced a mixed feeling of love and hate for the south in his hearts.

The psychological motivation of a writer's writing is very complex and diverse. For Su Tong, the poor and lonely childhood and the quiet learning experience are the emotional factors that affect his life creation. The cold rain in the south, the wet stone bridge alley in Suzhou, the elegant scenery in the south, and the nostalgic literati tradition are also integrated into his works as regional factors. In the ancient southern tradition of Chinese literature, the beauty and elegance of southern literature has always been praised. The poetic of southern poems and songs brings the lost dreamlike temperament to the south. Since the Southern Dynasty, southern literature has inherited the soothing, poetic, and melancholy end-of-century style of the end-of-century aesthetics, the decadence of history and personal bitterness, which makes another decadent south lurk behind the apricot blossom rain. Su Tong, who was born and grew up in south of China, was nourished by the traditional southern literature. His novels always showed the classical charm and the special feelings for the south in the language of silk and flowing water. The reason is that the water culture and the decadent personal sentiment in southern China have cultivated Su Tong's unique aesthetic appreciation of the south and deconstructed the literary imagination of the traditional literature on the elegant and warm feelings of the south.

Although the south of the United States and the south of China are located in different regions, they are both very humid. The description of the south in their works is also filled with humid, dark, decadent, and melancholy tone. Moreover, the two writers' writing is based on their love and hate for their hometown. Therefore, Faulkner and Su Tong's "south" are quite comparable.

Construction and Keynote of Their Southern World

Jefferson by Faulkner

The first part of *A Rose for Emily* describes Miss Emily's manor as follows:

It was a big, squarish frame house that had once been white, decorated with cupolas and spires and scrolled balconies in the heavily lightsome style of the seventies, set on what had once been our most select street. But garages and cotton gins had encroached and obliterated even the august names of that neighborhood; only Miss Emily's house was left, lifting its stubborn and coquettish decay above the cotton wagons and the gasoline pumps—an eyesore among eyesores. And now Miss Emily had gone to join the representatives of those august names where they lay in the cedar-bemused cemetery among the ranked and anonymous graves of Union and Confederate soldiers who fell at the battle of Jefferson. (Zhu, 2010. p. 2)

In this description, Miss Emily's dilapidated house is located in an elegant street, and the image of the fallen aristocrat appears on the paper in a few words. "Garages" and "cotton gins" are metaphors, suggesting that with the invasion of industrial civilization in the north, the agricultural civilization in the south has become decaying, but it is stubborn to adhere to its own. This kind of impact on the dilapidated south makes people gradually fall into spiritual crisis, and the seeds of tragedy have already been planted.

Entering Miss Emily's manor, the furnishings in the house were even shabbier:

They were admitted by the old Negro into a dim hall from which a stairway mounted into still more shadow. It smelled of dust and disuse—a close, dank smell. The Negro led them into the parlor. It was furnished in heavy, leather-covered furniture. When the Negro opened the blinds of one window, they could see that the leather was cracked; and when they sat down, a faint dust rose sluggishly about their thighs, spinning with slow motes in the single sun-ray. On a tarnished gilt easel before the fireplace stood a crayon portrait of Miss Emily's father. (Zhu, 2010. p. 3)

The Emily family, a noble family symbolizing the spiritual monument of the south, has lost its luster. The decline of the aristocrats in the south can be seen from the cracked leather cover, the rising dust, and the tarnished easel. Through such a series of environmental descriptions, Faulkner created a state of alternation between the old and the new after the impact of the war on the American South, and the aristocrats who represent the conservative spirit of the South show a decadent scene.

Feng Yang Shu Village of Su Tong

Su Tong's novels often take the familiar south as the background, and many stories take place in the humid and warm south. In *Opium Family*, Feng Yang Shu Village is like this:

The next day it was foggy, and the hills were wet with a piece of white water vapor, and the stems and leaves of plants and crops gave off a warm smell. This is the unique wet morning of maple poplar village. Fifty miles of countryside is beautiful and sad. (Su, 2003, p. 181)

The fields are full of strong incense of poppy waves roar, pushing you to an island, everything is far away from you, only the kind of deadly incense drill into the depths of the heart... (Su, 2003, p. 182)

The red opium incense billows on the whole field and penetrates into the deep heart of people. The sticky smell of death breeds the deformity of the whole village. Opium has become a typical image in Su Tong's novels. Although red opium is beautiful, it is evil because the essence of its fruit is drugs. At the time of opium harvest, the strong aroma of opium always drives people in Feng Yang Shu Village to commit violence and murder. And the opium family itself is full of filth. Opium symbolizes the fallen family.

Violence and Death in the Declining Southern Society

The two typical texts of Faulkner and Su Tong both write about murder and death. It can even be said that killing is a way for them to express their feelings of life. In order to avoid the nightmarish spell, the characters in the story, as hostages to history, can only solve problem by killing.

In *Opium Family*, Liu Laoxia, the landlord, killed his father in order to marry his father's concubine. Liu Chencao killed not only his brother Liu Yanyi, but also his biological father Chen Mao. It is not uncommon that brothers, fathers, and sons are cruel to each other, and sell daughter to save their son. These killings, as well as the habit of killing, led to the death of Liu's family. Just as the fiery and prosperous opium is highly poisonous, the rich Liu family is in fact an unstoppable decline.

The description of violence and death is often used by writers to express the ideological conflict and the imbalance of social order. In *A Rose for Emily*, Emily poisons Homer, a Yankee, with arsenic, and hides his body in her boudoir. She embraces and sleeps with the corpse every night. This kind of almost abnormal behavior shows the invasion of northern culture into the south, the conflict between the old and new ideas, the collapse of the original aristocratic system, the challenge of aristocratic dignity, and the depression and disorder of human spirit. And only killing can ease the conflict.

By the same token, these two writers put pen and ink on the description of murder and death, and have a deep perspective on human nature. The purpose of writing murder and death is to explain the reason for its existence, which embodies the author's compassion for the victims of conflicts in these times who are unable to redeem.

Impact of Social Transformation on People

There is also a common point in their works, that is, they pay close attention to the psychological changes of people in the period of social transformation. At the turn of the old and the new, the old ideology is always reluctant to leave, which still restricts people's thinking and behavior.

In the eyes of the villagers in Feng Yang Shu Village, Liu Laoxia, the landlord, is not only a rich and powerful landlord, but also a "God". When Liu Laoxia wanted to set fire without success and was burned to death, all of the villagers told it to the next generation as a legend: "Don't mess with Laoxia Liu. You're going to set yourself on fire" (Su, 2003, p. 180). When Liu Laoxia was criticized for being a landlord, the villagers applauded for the event, and when a gust of wind blew up the title deed of the landlord:

At first, 3,000 Fengyangshu villagers held their breath and gazed. The land lease bills flew low like butterflies, making a gentle hum. From the depths of the crowd, they burst out a roar, "Grab!" All of a sudden, the crowd rioted, and 3,000 maple trees bumped against each other, pushing and shoving each other, with their black arms stretched out into the air. Lu Fang's staff members yelled, "Villagers, don't rob. The land lease bill is useless." But no one listened. Lu Fang said that he had no choice but to fire three more shots... After three shots, people of Fengyangshu village are calm again ... They tuck in the pieces of paper as contentedly as they tuck in the land... (Su, 2003, p. 251)

The villagers fell into riot like crazy, grabbing land titles. Only the gunshot can frighten people. Even if the land deeds are no longer useful, the villagers are satisfied to take these pieces home, which shows that the revolution has not been deeply rooted in the hearts of the people, and the thoughts of the feudal tradition are still rooted in the hearts of the farmers. They shouted slogans and fought landlords just to get revenge. They fought against the people who were once rich and let them taste the bad luck, but not really want equality and freedom. Once they have the opportunity to oppress others, they will immediately oppress and trample others without thinking. Chen Mao, a permanent worker, is a typical example. When he was regarded as a revolutionary comrade with advanced ideology, the first thing he did was to take his *suona* horn to Liu's house to show off his power, and even raped Liu Suzi, the daughter of the landlord. What he raped was not only Liu Suzi, but what he longed for which was to surpass the class he had surrendered to. His "advanced thought" actually came from the feudal inferiority in his heart. The change of the times did not really change the village, but it was the upheaval that made the people in the village at a loss.

Southern American literature is inevitably related to social changes, class changes, and the impact of traditional values. Faulkner focuses on the impact of social change on Emily's heart in *A Rose for Emily*. The end of the civil war symbolized the end of the glorious history of the south, which many southerners could not accept but had to accept. Immersed in the old southern social habits, they spontaneously maintained the noble descendants who represented the spirit of the south. People in the town did not want to disturb the lady Emily, even though the smell of her house was really bad; after Emily died, even though she was a terrorist murderer and slept with the corpse for many years, people still wore the uniform of the Alliance Army and attended her funeral ceremoniously, because her death actually symbolized the death of the last generation of nobles and the fall of the spirit of the south. Even though Emily killed Homer, people still respected her,

her marriage with Homer is not a combination of love, but a continuation of the civil war that just ended. Emily did not fail to live up to expectations and won the national conflict, which dwarfed the revolutionary predecessors who had been allies. (Hong & Hao, 2006, pp. 28-31)

People maintain her as a tradition. For Emily herself, she was a direct historical victim of the decline of the southern aristocracy caused by the civil war. Her love with Homer is just a common thing, but it caused a stir in the town. People think that she destroyed the level difference in the south. Emily's conquest by Homer—the lower Yankee—is just as painful to the local people as the conquest of the south by the north. Emily, who represents the southern moral standard, is under great pressure. She is a symbol of conservatism—when her father was alive, he refused to let low status men approach her, and after his death, she insisted that her father was not dead. She refused to change the mailbox and also refused to pay taxes. But she was rebellious—she fell in love with a northern foreman, and even though the foreman had homosexual rumors, she bought many wedding utensils, although she finally killed her lover. In her inner conservative and rebellious desire, coupled with the town's blatant intervention, "she was squeezed between a strong public opinion and the same strong instinct desire, which is very hard to make a choice" (Li, 2004, pp. 33-37). No one hurt Emily's body, but society and the people in the society carried out a spiritual murder on her. The transformed society gives Emily hope to follow the times, but it also kills her glimmer of hope and pushes her into the dark abyss of mental distortion. It seems that every screw in society has contributed to the tragedy of her life.

Conclusion

To sum up, Faulkner and Su Tong both show strong southern complex, construct their own literary world, and reflect a certain isomorphism of literature. Both writers grew up in the south. They have a nostalgia for their hometown and past life. They constantly write the style of their hometown. Faulkner wrote about the depression and dilapidation after the civil war in the south of the United States. Su Tong described the backwardness and stupidity of southern China. They depicted the outline of their hometown in a decadent style. They loved and hated their hometown. Although the living environment of the two writers is different, there is also a resonance between different cultures. The two authors are dedicated to exploring the changes of ancient traditions influenced by the times. In the process of change, the survival and psychological state of the native people were alienated, which brought violence and death. Through the text, the author profoundly explains the complexity of human beings, severely interrogates the soul of human beings, and promotes people's reflection on the social distortion caused by the dramatic changes of the times.

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