



Interpret the “Laotong” Identity and Emotions of Lily in “Snowflake Secret Fan” from the Perspective of Queer Theory

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Abstract. “Snow Flower and the Secret Fan” is a well-known novel written by Chinese-American writer Lisa See. The whole text takes the “Female Book” as a clue. It tells the sincere and touching emotional story of a pair of “laotong”. Queer theory is a theoretical trend about this group that emerged in the West in the 1990s. “Queer” encompasses a variety of anti-conventional gender groups known today. The emotion of Lily and Snowflake is a special friendship of “friendship above, lovers are not enough”. On the basis of the interpretation of “Snowflake Secret Fan” by previous scholars on the basis of feminism, this paper uses the perspective of queer theory to observe the emergence and development of gender cognition of the two heroines, and through the interpretation of lily gender cognition and emotional changes, deeply understands the theme connotation of the emotions conveyed by the two “old comrades” in “Snowflake Secret Fan”, and provides enlightenment for the current interpersonal communication.

Keywords: Snow Flower and the Secret Fan · queer theory

1 Introduction

“Snow Flower and the Secret Fan” is a novel written in English by the Chinese-American writer Lisa See after using anthropology, sociology and other means to investigate the local customs and customs in China.” Snow Flower and the Secret Fan” takes the ancient Chinese feudal women’s unique text “Female Book” as a clue, telling the sisterhood of two feudal women, Lily and Snowflake, under the conclusion of the relationship of “laotong”. Because of its creative theme of two women’s mutual love and pity, “Snow Flower and the Secret Fan” has been discussed by scholars. The interpretation of the “laotong” identity and sisterhood of Lily and Snowflake in the academic circles is also a topic of endless debate in the academic circles. Previously, the “laotong” identity and sisterhood in “Snow Flower and the Secret Fan” were mostly based on feminism, and the text of “Snow Flower and the Secret Fan” was concerned from a feminist perspective. Although Lisa See put forward a clear denial when mentioning whether “Snow Flower and the Secret Fan” has a homosexual theme tendency, I believes that analyzing the creative theme and character shaping of “Snow Flower and the Secret Fan” from a feminist

perspective alone cannot accurately explain the emotional entanglement between Lily and Snowflake, nor can it clearly explain the main idea expressed behind the identity of women”. Therefore, I believe that when interpreting Lily’s “laotong” identity, it is necessary to further discuss Lily’s gender cognition with the help of the relevant theories and research results of queer theory, so as to be able to more fully explore the creative theme under the identity of “laotong” in “Snow Flower and the Secret Fan”, as well as the “queer space” constructed by Lily’s “queer” identity cognition and text.

2 The Creative Theme and Queer Theory of “Snowflake Secret Fan”

In “Snow Flower and the Secret Fan”, Lisa See used words to truly describe the emotions of Chinese, so that many people who had misunderstood China at that time understood the real situation in China. The story takes place in a Miao village in Hunan, China at the end of the 19th century, Lily and Snowflake two girls in response to the family’s requirements forced to marry “laotong”, thus establishing a connection, and learning “nüshu” to convey information to each other, and establishing a special feeling, after experiencing many winds and rains and divisions, resolving the gap and identifying each other as the best sisters. But the emotions of lilies and snowflakes change as the storyline unfolds. Their feelings from the initial strange temptation to the two of them after marriage can not forget, together to see the patriarchal center of cultural defects, together to make a reflection on the past behavior, together to experience the ups and downs, from mutual support to pity each other, Lisa See with the identity of the “laotong” connection of the intimate relationship makes their emotions like a small fire slowly simmered porridge, decades of warm out of the ordinary sisterhood of special emotions. Lisa See skillfully uses the two traditional Chinese cultures associated with women, “laotong” and “nüshu”, depicting the special friendship of women on the one hand showing the mysterious and ancient Chinese culture for the world, on the other hand, portraying the image of the female group that is not noticed under China’s feudal society, describing their emotions and lives, and describing their behavioral breakthroughs in the identity of feudal women, so as to achieve the purpose of better speaking out for female groups and even minorities in the patriarchal center culture. Lisa See’s creative theme has thus surfaced.

Queer theory is a theoretical trend that emerged in the West in the 1990s, and is a term for homosexuals. Defined from the perspective of gender and sexuality, “queer” includes homosexuals, bisexuals, transgender people, cross-dressers and sadomasochists. But from the perspective of theoretical concepts, “queer” is not a cultural theory with definite categories and unique definitions. The concept of “queer” as a reference to a social group includes all those whose sexual orientation is inconsistent with mainstream culture and dominant gender norms or norms of sex. Queer theory is the theory of these people. Queer theory developed in the context of Foucault’s discourse of power and other post-structuralism. Joan D. Hedrick tried to explain the queer theory in this way in his book *Saint Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography*: Queer is everything that doesn’t conform to conventions, jurisprudence, and dominant ideas. It does not necessarily refer specifically to anything, it is a kind of identity without substance... [It] depicts a possible horizon whose exact limits and specific scope cannot in principle be predetermined

[1]. From this point of view, it can also be seen that the proposal of queer theory is a deconstruction of feminist and lesbian discourse that has occupied a certain position in the academic circles at that time, in queer theory, the lesbian issue is no longer as dominant as it is in feminist research, queer theory extends the horizon to all sexual minorities, from a more lofty perspective to look at sexual minorities, non-mainstream sexual groups, while welcoming and accepting all other non-mainstream views and positions that cannot be classified. Although Lisa See makes it clear that the two women in the book are not gay, Lily's female self-perception and female image in the book are quietly changing, so it is necessary to explore the "queer space" constructed by the text with the help of queer theory.

3 The Breakthrough of Female Identity - The Gender Perception of Queer Identity

"Snow Flower and the Secret Fan" is a narrative unfolded from the perspective of Lily, who in the process of adulthood has always been disciplined by feudal society, well-behaved, obedient, and doing all her obligations to complete her duties, but it is because of the conclusion of the identity of "laotong" and the defects of China's feudal society that she unconsciously has a new understanding of her gender. Therefore, Lily's queer identity has strong Chinese characteristics.

The first is the baptism of "foot binding". In the original text, Lily once said when she wrapped her feet: "The binding altered not only my feet but my whole character, and in a strange way I feel as though that process continued throughout my life, changing me from a yielding child to a determined girl, then from a young woman who would follow without question whatever her in-laws demanded of her to the highest-ranked woman in the county who enforced strict village rules and customs" [2]. This shows that foot binding not only allowed Lily to enter the rich Lu family, and her status was highly respected, but also changed her personality from that time. The pain of foot binding makes her tenacious and tenacious, and the family interests involved behind the foot binding and the truth of the "lao tong" that surfaces over time make her gradually understand that obedience is not a bitter medicine for women to live out of me and pursue the meaning of life.

Second, Lily's queer identity occurred under the gender discipline of the other (male power) who supported China's feudal moral norms. In the "queer space" of the West, there are very few lesbian partners who forcibly fall in love according to the "one man and one woman" model, and most same-sex couples do not deliberately change or avoid their feminine characteristics. Most Chinese lesbians will distinguish between T (the mover who plays the role of a man) and P (the bearer of the female role) in order to make the two sides become a normal "relationship between men and women", because in China's feudal society, it is generally believed that the love of men and women is the only correct way to exist [3]. Lily's behavior also explains his queer space. She became the pillar of the family after her husband went out to do business, taking care of her in-laws, taking care of the chores of the family, and even telling the butcher that he would take care of her when he saw the butcher's atrocities against Snowflake. All indications are that Lily's queer spaces are moving in the direction of "T". Such behavior is the result

of the long-term discipline of male discourse on unconventional gender cognition, and it is also a confirmation of the natural development of queer thought in the early stage of male discourse suppression.

Finally, there is the queer space reserved by the “lao tong” identity and the “nüshu” culture. The intimate connection between Lily and Snowflake was initiated by the conclusion of the “lao tong” relationship, which was continuously sublimated through the unique female script of “nüshu”, so that under the impetus of these two cultures, Lily’s queer cognition was born. At the beginning, Snowflake Lily greeted each other through the “nüshu”, and then the two practiced the “nüshu” behind each other’s backs, so that the fragrant and intimate contact was enough to sublimate the feelings of the two people, and they felt sorry for each other in the words that only each other could understand. Later, when the two got married, when Lily chatted with her husband, her husband was speechless about her, and she wrote to Snowflake to tell her heart. It is also through such a thing that Lily uses the words that can only know each other to feel the situation as a woman, and through such a “secret language” Lily realizes that only each other can understand each other’s situation and emotions, and the two people’s state of mind will change from pity for each other to mutual warmth, and Lily’s queer cognition has also changed imperceptibly. Until finally seeing the butcher’s atrocities against snowflakes, Lily could no longer bear it, determined to use herself to warm the snowflakes and tell her love intestines, and the queer space reserved under the interweaving of the two cultures completed the final evolution, and Lily finally felt the feelings of the unusual sisters.

4 The Cracking of the Identity of “Lao Tong” - The Emotional Interpretation of Queer Vision

The emotional changes of Lily and Snowflake, through the special identity of “lao tong”, and then take the “nüshu” as a clue, the feelings of the two from knowing each other to feeling sorry for each other, after parting ways, they repented at the time of each other’s seventies and eighties, and realized each other’s special “sisterhood” that was different from their girlfriends. I’ll explain the emotional changes in both below.

First of all, the feeling of knowing each other, at first because of the order of her parents, Snowflake applied to Lily to marry her, and at the beginning of the folding fan, it was written: “I understand there is a girl of good character and women’s learning in your home. You and I are of the same year and the same day. Could we not be sames together?” [2] 2. Lily felt the sincerity and kindness of Snowflake through her aunt’s words, and the same date of birth and Snowflake’s affirmation laid the groundwork for the affection of the two. After seeing the woven garland on the fan sent by the snowflake, Lily thought of the old saying “Forever knotted, eternal and unchanging”, in fact, from the very beginning, Lily looked at the friendship between the two with the expectation of “entangled forever”. As the original text says: “How could we conceive of deep love, friendship, and everlasting commitment when we were only seven?” [2] 46. Therefore, when they got to know each other, Lily’s simple fantasy of snowflakes could be considered good forever took root quietly.

Then there is the pity for each other, after knowing each other, the two have no reason to easily meet each other because they are married, the two will still use the female book

to communicate, but this pity, not only the sublimation of the feelings of both sides, but also the life of Lily after marrying into the Lu family makes her have a deeper understanding of the feelings of snowflakes, and has a more intimate sublimation of this sisterhood. Because after Lily married into her husband's family, her husband had no common topic with her, and her mother-in-law let her work, coupled with the discipline of her parents in the past, all of this was not out of love, but out of their own purposes, so Lily recalled what she and Snowflake experienced, and would find out how pure and beautiful each other's lives were, so in the text Lily said more than once how much she loved Snowflakes. Lily wrote in a female letter to Snowflake: "I don't see my husband very often. Do you? I look out the lattice window to yours. You are always singing in my heart. I think of you every day" [2] 158. Missing becomes a rainbow bridge connecting the hearts and emotions of the two, different from the normal and husband's male and female love, Lily at this time truly realizes who her emotions and sincerity should be given.

Walking through the pity for each other, Lily and Snowflake look at each other because of Lily's blunt words, but this kind of look and disgust can just prove Lily's special feelings for Snowflake. Lily is first of all because of the intercourse between snowflakes and butchers and feels sullen and unhappy, because of the intervention of others and unhappy, which is the so-called "jealousy", and Lily sees that snowflakes are distressed by her husband's domestic violence, because she gradually moves from obedience to independence, so she has been asking snowflakes to be independent and strong. She said in the original text: "If she truly loved me, why couldn't she do as I had done—wrap herself in the conventions that protected women—to make her bad situation better? To all these queries she just sighed or nodded" [2] 232. At that time, Snowflake was suffering from the loss of her son and the discipline of the family, and could no longer communicate with Lily, and even retaliated by making friends with other "righteous sisters", and Lily was very angry, so that the two did not interact for decades. But Lily, who is jealous of the love and sisterhood of men and women, also proves that her feelings for Lily transcend friendship. After decades of vicissitudes, Lily discovers the secret of love. Her relationship with Snowflake In the end, when Snowflake is sick, Lily accompanies her to the end of her life to solve the mystery. Snowflake said to Lily that the righteous sisters were angry with her, and after eight years, the misunderstanding between the two was resolved, and Lily and Snowflake also firmly expressed their love for each other, so that the feelings of the two were sublimated in the end. Lily put it this way: "I've experienced the other types of love—pity love, respectful love, and gratitude love. But looking at our secret fan with its messages written between Snow Flower and me over many years, I see that I didn't value the most important love—deep-heart love [2] 3." Only the feelings between the old colleagues are the most precious love that originates in the depths of the heart. Their emotions are into each other's hearts, which are different from male and female love and blood affection, but the emotions that were connected by practicing women's books and using women's books to physically practice each other in childhood a long time ago. As the text says: "lao tong is a free choice of union, to become a partner of each other's feelings, and to be loyal to each other forever." A laotong relationship is made by choice for the purpose of emotional companionship and eternal fidelity. A marriage is not made by choice and has only one purpose—to

have sons” [2] 44. Therefore, under the patriarchal central culture, women’s voice in China’s feudal society is lost, and two people in similar situations can get together with women’s books, feel sorry for each other, and find a harbor for them to live in peace. This is an emotion that transcends ordinary love, and their union is a free choice, not a matchmaker’s words, not a lifetime of chai rice oil and salt, but a real resonance and fit of the soul. Under the conclusion of the identity of “lao tong”, they are a pair of soul mates, even in the time and space when they cannot see each other, they can break through various disciplines, live in each other’s hearts, and stay together until they are old.

5 Conclusions

In the feudal era of China depicted by Lisa See in “Snow Flower and the Secret Fan”, there were multiple cultural dregs such as the supremacy of male power, the loss of women’s right to speak, and foot binding, but it was precisely because of that era full of dross that such a special pair of “lao tong” was created, their words symbolized women’s unique right to speak, and their friendship symbolized pure heartfelt love. What the identity and emotional evolution of “lao tong” gives us is the rethinking of friendship in this fast-paced and materialistic era, is it that in this era full of temptation, we stare at the mobile phone screen and ignore the cultural exchange between people? Is it that in this era of drunken fans, the people around us who are always good will no longer appear, and only themselves and shadows are left in life living in the light? Lisa See shows us the pure and beautiful sisterhood of that era that transcends friendship, and also gives us the current thinking about self-emotion and pure friendship. Under the identity of “lao tong”, lily and snowflake are like two intertwined branches, like a thousand years of wood, and like a pair of Mandarin ducks with eternal knots, which read endlessly. Let us be full of awe and sincerity for such a friendship, and also reflect on our own existence through such emotions, and guide us to have such a pure and beautiful feeling in the future.

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