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PATRIARCHAL RESTRICTIONS IN *SNOW FLOWER AND THE SECRET FAN* BY LISA SEE

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Abstract

Culture is a set of rules that form the way of perception of societies, reveals the ways of living and which it transmits from generation to generation by producing over time. The concept of culture is a series of rules that keep the traditions of the society. Some societies who don't want to break their ties in their past continue their lives according to these rules. These rules and laws, which are evaluated within the concept of culture, impose restrictions on the lives of societies, and especially in patriarchal societies, this situation causes damage to human life materially or spiritually. In this study, the negative effects of the patriarchal and restrictive rules of the society especially in women's lives will be discussed through the stories of the main character Lily and her eternal sister Snow Flower in 'Snow Flower and the Secret Fan' by Lisa See which tells Chinese society and their manner of life in the 1800s. The living conditions to which the women have been exposed, such as 'Nu Shu' which is a secret female writing language and the women have created and used for their eternal sisters in the 'Women Room' of their houses where they've spent almost all their lifetime from birth to death, and such as 'Foot Binding' which is a tradition applied to girls with physical torture will be analyzed.

Keywords: Culture, Tradition, Rules, Restrictions, Women, Patriarchy.

Introduction

Although culture has a lot of meaning as a concept, it is accepted as everything that human beings produce materially and spiritually. This concept includes societies' traditions, customs, literature, clothing, architecture, food, and especially religion and beliefs. This concept, which has shaped the lives of societies as a colorful heritage for centuries, brings restrictions and damages to the societies with some irrational practices that disregard human life. Some traditions that societies accept and apply without judgment

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include practices involving physical violence starting from a young age to death. Although these traditions, which differ from society to society, have lost their effectiveness today, there are also traditionalist societies that persist in keeping the traces of the past, persistently refuse modernization and science, and even believe that abandoning their traditions will bring them bad luck.

Despite their harmful nature and their violation of national and international human rights laws, such practices persist because they are not questioned or challenged and therefore take on an aura of morality in the eyes of those practising them (Maluleke, 2012, 428).

Traditions and customs, which are considered as unwritten laws, also have an impact on the life of society. Traditions, which can be defined as the rules governing people's behavior, form the lifestyles of societies. However, it becomes part of the culture. From this point of view, culture has a national identity.

There are some general features can be considered as precise lines of traditions. Among these, patriarchal society features are common in the majority of cultures. While patriarchy is less than harmless in some societies, even the existence of women is ignored in some societies. In such societies, the image of a strong and productive woman is ignored, and the image of a woman who does not speak and serves. The problem of women, who obey the male-dominated society in every way, is still experienced especially in rural areas.

I shall define patriarchy as a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women...the use of the term social structures is important here, since it clearly implies rejection both of biological determinism, and the notion that every individual man is in a dominant position and every woman in a subordinate one (Walby, 1990, 20).

One of many countries with different cultures is the Republic of China. China, where its different applications have not been applied in some regions these days, has a culture full of unique traditions and strict rules in its history, especially in rural areas. Modern Chinese families have been built according to the laws adopted in ancient times. Respect and vision of the old generation play an important role. Chinese society is based on patriarchy: the husband is the head of the family. As in many societies, the birth of a boy in China is a happy event, while the birth of a girl is not as well-received as a boy.

Families without sons were seen as dying out. Only men constituted and reproduced the social order. Daughters and wives were regarded as dependents and sometimes even property of the family (Cheung, Liu ve Henonen, 2010, 236).

The strict rules of the patriarchal family structure in China are seen 'Snow Flower and the Secret Fan' which is one of the novels of Lisa See. Although the book was developed on a fiction, Lisa See, who is a writer who knows her own culture well, based most of this fiction on reality with her researches in China. In this culture, where the husband's word passes, the woman's word has no value and even it is forbidden to speak in the face of situations, Lily and Snow Flower are two women who cannot find the power to fight against these strict rules.

Lisa See

Describing the close relationship of two friends who struggle to be women in the rural areas of this wide culture, Lisa See is one of the members of the families who settled in the Chinatown in America before generations and live her life as a semi-Chinese but "American". Despite apparently not similar to the Chinese, even if their language has lost their fluency, she describes herself as a person who has grown up depending on her traditions and customs. While writing Snow Flower and the Secrets, she admits that she was inspired by the women's struggle of her great-grandmother. In her writing of Lily and Snow Flower, she talks about the effects of the life of her aunts and grandmothers with the 'just obey' rule in a patriarchal culture. Lisa See visits China to experience the traditions and customs in her book better and to listen to the writings of an exhausted culture 'Nu Shu' from the last ones. She writes her novel with what he learned there. The writing of the Chinese women and their suffering, which he came from the same culture and shared the same deep 'pain' of 'being a woman' on her soul, shows that deep traces came from China to America with him.

but I also called upon other beliefs that have been handed down in my family. I – and all my female cousins – grew up hearing "When a girl, obey your father; when a wife, obey your husband; when a widow, obey your son." Of course, we rebelled, but we also absorbed more of that aphorism than perhaps we'd like to admit (See, 2005, 298).



Snow Flower And the Secret Fan

This fictional book, written by a woman writer who has not been cut off from her roots, in the heart of the past suffering, tells the eternal friendship of two people from childhood to death. Lily and Snow Flower took the vow of their eternal friendship called 'laotong' in Chinese culture with Nu Shu, which is a hidden female written language on a spectrum with this method applied by many women. This Laotong relationship, which can be considered a kind of wedding, made sisters who connected many women without a kindred ship in China at that time. They promised to be with each other until the end of their lives with this loyalty oath.

When I looked at Snow Flower's interwoven garland at the top of the fan, I thought of the old saying, "Hyacinth bean and papayas, long vines, deep roots. Palm trees inside the garden walls, with deep roots, stand a thousand years." To me this summed up what I wanted our relationship to be: deep, entwined, forever. I wanted this one fan to be the symbol of our relationship. I was only seven and a half years old, but I envisioned what this fan with all its secret messages would become (See, 2005, 57).

'Nu Shu' is a written language that only women know and only women teach to women. This language is a language that the 'outside world' (the world of the men) does not know and is a necessary product of women's solidarity against the men's world. Because at that time, the Chinese women of the 1800s, especially the women of the rural areas, cannot speak or object; when they have trouble or feel depressed, they express themselves with Nu Shu.

Nu'shu was discovered in 1982 by a Chinese scholar named Gong Zhebing while studying the Yao ethnic group in southern China. Gong learned about the female-specific writing system from a male informant, whose deceased aunt was a nu'shu user in Jiangyong County, located near the borders of Hunan, Guangxi, and Guangdong areas. Investigating further, Gong discovered that younger women knew little of this script and that older women had stopped using it during the Cultural Revolution (1966-76), when nu'shu was condemned as "witches' writin" (Liu, 2008, 424).

It is mentioned in the book that Nu Shu is structurally more phonetic than the language of men. In other words, it is mentioned that all the words that make the same sound like a character can be explained, but the meaning can be expressed based on the context of the words. Many stories about the birth of Nu Shu are also included in the novel. They are written in the same way in Chinese sources.

This mysterious tone is reinforced by the still unknown origins of nu'shu. According to one local legend, nu'shu was invented between C.E. 1086 and 1100 by a woman named Hu Yuxiu, who was sent to the Imperial Palace to become a concubine of the emperor – not for her beauty but because of her reputed literary talent. Lonely and distressed, Hu wanted to send messages home, but her status as an emperor's concubine was a barrier. According to the legend, she invented nu'shu script as a means of getting around the court guards and censors, because the script only made sense when chanted in the Jiangyong dialect (Liu, 2008, 425).

Chinese Women created a solidarity of women by expressing their feelings and thoughts "freely!" To each other thanks to this language, they created without bowing to the patriarchal system. The correspondence of women buried with Nu Shu writings is written on a paper, on a fan, and sometimes on a fabric with the help of a brush by grinding ink in the inkstone.

Aunt instructed me on the special rules that govern nu shu. It can be used to write letters, songs, autobiographies, lessons on womanly duties, prayers to the goddess, and, of course, popular stories. It can be written with brush and ink on paper or on a fan; it can be embroidered onto a handkerchief or woven into cloth (See, 2005, 33).

Perhaps the only thing that did not play a role in wealth or poverty in Chinese society, where the hierarchy was so much that even marriages were built on it, is the language of Nu Shu. The reason they hide from men is that they are afraid of them and the distinction between the 'inner world and outer world' in their community. As can be clearly understood, the inner world is women and the outer world is men and the two 'sides' are obliged to stay away from each other's world.

It can and should be sung before an audience of other women and girls, but it can also be something that is read and treasured alone. But the two most important rules are these: Men must never know that it exists, and men must not touch it in any form (See, 2005, 33).

The Laotong relationship is crowned with Nu Shu, and the two women write to each other through this fan in hidden writing language until the end of their lives. Even when she died, everything she wrote with Nu Shu was burned and placed in the belongings of the deceased. The outside world would never



know about her and her laotong. The only thing these women feel as belonging to them, which is seen as a tool for childbearing by experiencing all the difficulties of being a woman, is their writings. What they write is not only their lives but also their selves. At the same time, the only place where they can be themselves is their writings, Nu Shu. Not only women with laotongs but every woman who wanted to learn this hidden writing could learn, and volunteer women who wanted to teach would teach Nu Shu. Nu Shu was the only product where women's power showed itself.

In addition to the Laotong relationship, there is the concept of 'Sworn Sisterhood' in the book. Unlike Laotong, this concept is a promised friendship relationship between more than two women. Each woman can choose her 'Sworn Sisters' herself, but Laotong relationship is a tradition that Chinese women believe that they emerged as a result of some similarities determined in fate and even determined the Laotong relationship through the 'Matchmakers' who had duties for this and marriage relations. This situation shows how much women need each other in Chinese society.

Lily and Snow Flower are inseparable parts of each other, not only on paper. They do not cease to love and envy each other from the beginning to the end of the novel. This deep love sets them apart for years because of unnecessary misunderstanding. Afterward, Lily realizes that she made the mistake of her life with the death of Snow Flower and years pass apart from each other due to a small misunderstanding; she regrets it until the end of her life, thinking that she cannot compensate for the pain of years even though she is with Laotong on his deathbed. "We were to be like long vines with entwined roots, like trees that stand a thousand years, like a pair of mandarin ducks mated for life. On one fold, Snow Flower wrote, We of good affection shall never sever our bond" (See, 2005, 12).

The relationship between Lily and Snow flower sometimes stands out as a husband and wife relationship. Although they seem to love each other as a characteristic of two friends, they sometimes envy each other and each other's lives and forget about all the problems when they are together, their touch and words show that they have different relationships and loyalties.

That night, he followed all the correct traditions, even removing my bridal shoes and putting on my red sleeping slippers. I was so accustomed to Snow Flower's gentle touch that I can't really describe how I felt having his hands on my feet, except that this act seemed far more intimate to me than what came next (See, 2005, 133).

In the patriarchal families of that period, it was only the fact that women were regarded as the means of giving birth to only one child or even just giving birth to a boy, they often used the term 'bed business' used in the relationship between husband and wife, and this relationship is just that. The fact that he came to the room only for this 'bed business' is a clear indication of the value given to women. However, there are chances that women may have to live without talking to their husbands and have looked for different relationships because of the patriarchal restrictions. Some of the sentences used by the author in her novel in the fiction prove that.

The air in that little house was surprisingly warm even though it was the tenth month, but goose bumps rose on my skin behind the path of Snow Flower's wet cloth. But how do I say this without sounding like a husband? When I looked at her I saw that her pale skin – always so beautiful – had begun to thicken and darken (See, 2005, 218).

The novel focuses on the application of strict rules of traditions, especially on women. Women are regarded as an item, daughter-giving women are humiliated and even beaten by their husbands; women who are degraded and insulted get used to this situation and belittle themselves. The result is a profile of a woman who is obedient, submissive, oppressed and, accepts to be oppressed. Women know that their value will increase in the ratio of children and even boys, "Because my husband says it is better to have a dog than a daughter" (See, 2005, 149) and their sole purpose is to give birth to at least 5 children in their lives. Women who have to obey the obedience rule are first raised with strict rules at home where they were born, and then they are followed by obedience rules by their mother-in-law when they are married.

Namely, the expression " 三从 (sān cóng) three obediences" means that the woman must obey three people throughout her life and she must follow these three people. It also refers to the basis of the previous 'guide of the husband's wife' base in the 'three main guides'. In three obediences, the woman is asked to spend her life with a man, following her. In other words, the woman must obey her father from birth until the time of her marriage, her husband after marriage, and her son, even if her husband dies, that is to follow them (Akman, 2018, 74).

Three obedience rules, which are repeated frequently in the novel, prove that everything is forbidden for women and a woman has no influence on the decisions. A lament in the novel "Marrying a



daughter is just like throwing out water!" (See, 2005, 94) is emphasized the worthlessness of women in the world of men. In this society that shares the same world but divides their lives into classes by living their inner worlds, women are seen as "useless beings".

We are seen as completely useless. Even if our natal families love us, we are a burden to them. We marry into new families, go to our husbands sight unseen, do bed business with them as total strangers, and submit to the demands of our mothers-in-law. If we are lucky, we have sons and secure our positions in our husbands' homes. If not, we are faced with the scorn of our mothers-in-law, the ridicule of our husbands' concubines, and the disappointed faces of our daughters (See, 2005, 148).

The women who cannot dare to wonder about the outer world of men must live with one or several concubines when they get married, according to the wishes of their husbands. Even the songs and stories of women brought up with this proverb "A woman without knowledge is better than a woman with an education" (See, 2005, 290) *are full of pain, too*. When a woman gets married, she has to get enough of the food provided by her husband and his family. "As girls we are told that we are useless branches, because we will not carry on our natal family names but only the names of the families we marry out to, if we are lucky enough to bear sons" (See, 2005, 290)

Women who are seen as worthless branches of the family tree are forced to show their daughter how to suffer, not their love. With irrational practices, they prepare them for forced marriages and advise them to keep their pain and be obedient. Lily could not find this love, she could not see it from her mother, whipped to see, and directed her love only to her Laotong, Snow Flower. In the Nu Shu writings that Lily and Snow Flower wrote to each other in the novel, Lily's reactions to the suffering of Snow Flower were just like her mother's. As a woman who obeys Lily, she has given comfort to Laotong as 'obey and hope to have a son'. Although this did not reduce their love, they caused them not to understand each other. "With only a useless daughter and an unloved first son, she should try to get pregnant again" (See, 2005, 253)

It is a fact that women in Chinese society are afraid to move away from strict rules even among themselves. Even today, it is seen that families educated and then educated as traditionalists and these families are afraid to leave their traditions. Each generation insists on growing the next generation with the same rules. This situation prevents modernization of rural areas and women to have a voice and improve themselves.

Hierarchy and rules in the society have also affected the relationship of the two friends. Since Lily has a better marriage and sees herself superior, admits in her inner world that she must give her male child birth before her laotong. Regardless of the love of two people who are brought up by the rules of society, they will unconsciously resist living and keeping these rules alive.

The idea of Yin and Yang is mentioned in the novel. This idea is a philosophical view living in China. According to this view, it is the contrast that provides the balance. "Yin, negative style; characterized as dark, cold, inactive and female; yang, positive style; light, warm, active and male" (Hodous, 1946, 3). This philosophical view is mentioned as the factors that constitute the fate in the novel.

Women-men, dark-light or sorrow and happiness... In the Chinese society where women are not equal to men, the duties of women are at home and men are in the outside world. Man is responsible for the outside world. The Confucian philosophical thought system affected the Chinese society. It is argued in this idea that Yin and Yang, that is, the ace and the upper order are also valid for the social order. Yin was seen as a woman and Yang as a man. According to this view, the man is the strong one and the woman is the weak and the obedient one.

Despite the complementary nature of the yin-yang union, a confucianized Chinese society consigned yang to male and yin to female, signifying hierarchal gender relations. Women were considered inferior to men in the patriarchal family system. Misinterpretation of Confucianism promoted hierarchal relationships between men and women and, as a result, dramatically affected the gender-based attitudes and behavior (Yun, 2012, 583).

Another strict and most painful tradition in the novel is that when women are 5-6 years old, their feet are tied and this torment continues until their bones are broken and the foot takes its smallest shape. According to this illogical tradition, girls whose feet are small go to the noble and good family. Women with big feet either hierarchically go to a lower-class family or become little brides and marry older men than themselves. Therefore, every mother prefers to have the child suffer at the child's age. Some of these children die unbearably, but despite these death risks, society does not give up this oppressive tradition. "We three girls were nearly paralyzed from our physical torment, yet our trial had barely begun. We could not eat. Even with empty stomachs, we vomited out our agony" (See, 2005, 38).



The idea instilled in girls was that they could marry more when their feet were tied, that they were 'worthy of marriage', and that they were able to give birth. It also dominated the belief that the shape of the woman's foot as a result of tying her feet would stimulate the husband's sexual urges. Thinking that they would be pleased with their feet in the future, the girls were forced to live in a room like a prisoner for years with the force of their mothers and grew up with these strict cultural rules. Every child who experienced that physical torture by tied her feet applied this process to the girls without questioning when she was a mother in the future. Girls who do not die of gangrene and infection were called 'golden lotus' when their feet were small in the future. Women with golden lotus were warned not to mention foot-ties at all.

The aimed result of the long and excruciating process was to have feet no longer than 7.5-10 cm (3-4 inches), when they were known as jinlian - "Golden Lotus" or "Lotus" feet after the central life symbol of Buddhism (Cartwright, May 2020).

The marriage life in Chinese society, which Lisa See described in detail in her novel, was another problem that made women feel their worthlessness. In the novel, the value of women is shown in the eyes of the society by saying 'for the use of others' as the reason for the growing and marriage of daughters. "I heard women's voices sing: 'Raising a girl and marrying her off is like building a fancy road for others to use'" (See, 2005, 125).

Emphasizing that the woman was only a guest during her marriage life, obedience to husband, mother-in-law, and other members of the house was made compulsory. After the first three days of marriage, she returned to her father's house, and until he got pregnant, the woman lived in the father's home. She came to her husband's house several times a year. After her sons, she had to return to her father's house at certain times of the year. Women who were forced to give birth to at least 5 children during their marriage life were left at the mercy of their sons. If they were widowed after their children were born and raised either they were allowed to live in that house or forced to marry and sent from home. A woman without a son could not be happy in her marriage. "A wife who does not bear a son can always be replaced" (See, 2005, 197). Women who could never speak about their love, who were regarded as just a sexual and fertile object by their husbands, lived only to obey these rules and never rebelled and even confirmed this.

Many thinkers and historians in Chinese culture also agree on the patriarchal structure. Ban Zao, the philosopher and scholar who made history as the first known woman historian in China, gave them advice on how women should behave in her book titled "Nu Shu- Advice to Women". According to Ban Zhao:

The woman should have been ordinary, respecting her husband and ancestors. She should have thought of them before herself and always knew to stay one step behind (...) She should have always been timid and fearful. She had to work late, get up early in the morning. She had to fulfill her duties related to the household, day and night, without saying easy or difficult. She had to complete everything she had to do completely. She should have served her husband gladly, she had to have the right attitude. She should only be concerned with her own work, quietly obeying her husband (Kapanoğlu, 2006, 13).

Until they went to their husband's house, women who were seen as a preparation for marriage in the father's home, and only seen as a child-bearing tool after marriage, were both suffering and carrying them from generation to generation only because of the rules they obeyed. It is clear that women such as Lily and Snow Flower in the novel experience the suffering and keep it alive with the strict rules of patriarchal culture during their childhood to death. Nu Shu, the only shelter that they put forward all their efforts and self-respect to accept and hold on to life, are the only relics of the society that they keep away from the patriarchal rules.

Conclusion

Some traditions and customs that societies live under the pretext of 'culture' are harmful to human life. Societies cannot develop with the traditional rules of rigidity they have preserved for centuries, and especially rural areas continue their traditional lifestyle. Chinese society, one of the societies known for its traditionalism in the past, has made practices that disregard human life and especially women's life with its patriarchal and strict tradition and culture. In this study, the problem of which patriarchal Chinese society caused great pressures on obedient women was investigated in 'Snow Flower and the Secret Fan' by Lisa See. The novel tells the strict traditions of the Chinese society in the 19th century through Lily and Snow Flower; It has been understood that these obedient women, who have suffered greatly and physically, were



determined to continue the traditions like men. These women, who live and accept traditions without passing through the logic filter, walked the only way they knew without knowing a way other than submission. The way of traditionalism... Also, in the study, Nu Shu, which is the only port where 19th-century Chinese women regarded as shelters and did not feed the rules of patriarchal society, and the birth of Nu Shu was examined. In this society, where marriage and family are regarded as sacred, the contrast of the fact that women are seen as an item by men and the daughters are raised by mothers by instilling the worthlessness of women is also seen in the novel. The novel is detailed with the ethnic-cultural rules of Chinese society. It was concluded that patriarchal restrictions accepted without question include especially neglecting and destructive elements in the living space of women, but this rule-making and acceptance should be evaluated together in the occurrence of these restrictions.

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