

An analysis of the reasons for Wu Sunfu's failure and success on three fronts in *Midnight*

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Abstract: This article starts with the causes of Wu Sunfu's three fronts, based on the specific content of the three fronts, analyzes the specific reasons for success and failure, and reveals the difficulties in the development of China's national industry in the early 1930s. On the first front, Wu Sunfu entrusted the task of quelling the labor movement to Tu Weiyue. Tu Weiyue quelled the labor movement by identifying Communist Party members among female workers and resolving conflicts with Qian Baosheng, Wu Weicheng, and others, victory was achieved on the first front, and the female workers resumed their work. On the second front, due to Wu Sunfu's persistent failure to solve the problem of insufficient funds, coupled with the outbreak of the original war, which resulted in unsold factory products, Yizhong Company gradually failed, and the second front was declared a failure. On the third front, Wu Sunfu fought against Zhao Botao with all his wealth, but his brother-in-law Du Zhuzhai betrayed and defected to Zhao Botao, directly leading to Wu Sunfu's failure in the bond market, and the third front was also declared a failure.

1 Introduction

Mao Dun is one of the founders of Chinese new literature, born in 1896 in Wuzhen, Tongxiang County, Zhejiang Province. His original name was Shen Dehong and his courtesy name was Yanbing [1]. *Midnight* is also regarded as a representative work of left-wing literature and is known as "China's first successful realistic novel [2]". There are many research directions regarding *Midnight*. Research on female characters, such as the portrayal of women from different social classes in *Midnight*, reflects the difficulties that women faced in social life at that time [3, 4]. The study of the spatial narrative structure of *Midnight* provides a new perspective for reinterpreting and evaluating *Midnight* from the perspective of spatial narrative [5]. From an economic perspective, research on the interpretation of *Midnight* and other aspects questions the national identity of the so-called national bourgeoisie by examining the ultimate compradorization of industrialists and extensively depicts domestic issues that are more directly affected than the global economic crisis [6]. The full text of *Midnight* extensively describes Wu Sunfu's struggles and successes and failures on three fronts. The first front was the strike of female workers at the Yuhua Silk

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Factory, which delayed production. With the help of Tu Weiyue, the crisis was successfully resolved and victory was achieved. The second front, Yizhong Company, had poor cash flow and suffered heavy losses due to the turmoil in their hometown, making it difficult to mobilize funds to establish Yizhong Company. Later, they were blocked by Zhao Botao's financial blockade and ultimately declared a failure. On the third front, Wu Sunfu engaged in a "battle" with Zhao Botao in the bond market and was betrayed by Du Zhuzhai, which directly led to his failure.

From the perspective of text analysis, a detailed analysis of the success or failure of the management of ethnic capitalist Wu Sunfu can truly reflect the social landscape that emerged in the 1930s, which is a meaningful topic. This article analyzes three fronts one by one and studies the problems faced by Wu Sunfu in the historical conditions of "saving the country through industry" by interpreting the relationship and contradictions between various social classes and Wu Sunfu. In addition, this article further analyzes the reasons for Wu Sunfu's three successes and failures on the three fronts, which can vividly reflect the social life and development difficulties in China in the early 1930s.

2 The strike at Yuhua Silk Factory

2.1 Background

In 1930, many small daily necessities factories in Shanghai were affected by the global economic crisis or war, resulting in overproduction and a large accumulation of goods that could not be sold. Some studies have pointed out that in the 1957 book *Materials on the History of Modern Chinese Industry* co-edited by Chen Zhen and Yao Luo, there is also a passage about the Chinese silk industry in 1930: At the same time, due to the decline of the world market, most silk factories in various countries reduced their production and business, the sales of raw silk greatly decreased, Japanese silk was sold at a discounted price, and Chinese silk could not compete. The decline of the silk industry has been rare for decades. Among the 106 silk factories in Shanghai, about 70 of them closed down at the end of the year, and among the 70 silk factories in Wuxi, about 40 of them closed down. The difficulties faced by Guangdong silk factories are also similar [7]. It can be seen that Huasi cannot compete with foreign silk. For example, the Qianhe Silk Factory founded by Zhu Yinqiu was eventually annexed by Wu Sunfu due to poor management and unwillingness to sell silk at a low price. Wu Sunfu once said, 'But I know another ghost, bigger and more profitable than this! The world's industries are declining, and factory prices are falling.' Wu Sunfu's Yuhua Silk Factory, which mainly made profits by exporting raw silk products such as 'factory prices,' will naturally be affected by the decline in silk prices. But Wu Sunfu sold a thousand bags of Yangzhuang silk four or five months ago when the silk market was not plummeting. Therefore, while other silk factories wanted to temporarily shut down, Yuhua Silk Factory was rushing to deliver the goods. That's why some workers use negligence as a threat to demand rice noodles. Due to the continuous exploitation and oppression of the working class, a large-scale labor movement eventually broke out. If there was no way to quell the labor movement and start production, it would be a fatal blow to Yuhua Silk Factory. Therefore, Wu Sunfu fully entrusted Tu Weiyue to quell the labor movement and resume work.

2.2 Problems

To quell the labor unrest, Tu Weiyue faced two problems: first, the female workers were mixed with the Communist Party, inciting the people to strike; Second, Qian Baosheng, Wu Weicheng and others used female workers to break down the platform. To solve the first

problem, Tu Weiyue put eyeliner on the female workers and Yao Jinfeng was responsible for sounding out the female workers and stabilizing their emotions. In the end, Tu Weiyue secretly arrested the Communist leaders among the female workers, destroyed the revolutionary forces in the factory, and thus quelled the labor movement. The arrest of Communist Party leader Ma Jin, who was responsible for the strike of female workers, is directly related to the erroneous decision of Ke Zuofu. After the female party member was arrested, he still demanded a strike the next day, ignoring Ma Jin's reasonable opinions and accusing him of being right-wing, which directly led to Ma Jin's arrest. Another important reason for errors is that female workers cannot deeply understand revolutionary ideas. For example, female worker Chen Yue'e "found it difficult to understand the 'terminologies' of Ke Zuofu and Su Lun" and "she struggled to finish speaking" [8]. Because Tu Weiyue caught Ah Xiang who was causing destruction, the second problem was easily solved with the mediation of Li Mazi.

By resolving these two issues, Yuhua Silk Factory successfully quelled the strike and achieved victory on the first front.

2.3 Reasons

The fundamental reason for the outbreak of large-scale strikes is that factories continue to deduct wages and extend working hours. Female workers choose the form of strikes to express their dissatisfaction and demands. In addition, the working environment for female workers is extremely harsh. In the workshop of the Yuhua Silk Factory, the lights are dim, the steam is strong, and the noise of silk carts is extremely loud. These harsh working environments have also exacerbated the dissatisfaction of female workers. In addition, the infiltration of the Communist Party among female workers has also stirred up their emotions, that is, the shield between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. The reason for the conflict between Qian Baosheng and Wu Weicheng was dissatisfaction with Wu Sunfu's promotion of Tu Weiyue to manage the silk factory. Wu Weicheng and Zeng Jiaju, being relatives of Wu Sunfu, felt they had an advantage working in his silk factory. They refused to be under Tu Weiyue's authority and teamed up with Qian Baosheng to create their own group. They aimed to cause conflict between Tu Weiyue and Wu Sunfu and remove Tu Weiyue from the picture.

3. The financial problems of the Yizhong Company

3.1 Background

In the second front, it focuses on the Yizhong Company and depicts the whole process from its establishment to its bankruptcy. Starting from the operation of Yizhong Company, when Wu Sunfu first founded Yizhong Company, he was full of confidence and hope, but he experienced several big problems, such as changes in his hometown and a financial crisis successively, and Yizhong Company suffered heavy losses. At a later stage, Wu Sunfu found it difficult to maintain Yizhong Company with the existing funds, and then he was subjected to a financial blockade by Zhao Botao, who even wanted to swallow Wu Sunfu's corporation. This situation led to Yizhong Company fall into difficulty in poor capital turnover, and the second front faced a failure situation as well.

3.2 Reasons for failure

3.2.1 Internal reason - failure of individual decision-making

Firstly, the biggest problem that occurred in the second front of Yizhong Company was Wu Sunfu's personal decision-making mistakes. He's been buying up small factories like crazy. The investment of large sums of money that Wu Sunfu used led to poor cash flow within Yizhong. Besides, the breakage of the capital chain, which directly led to the failure of the second front. In the battle of wits with Zhao Botao, Wu Sunfu chose to pawn the plant in the backwater, so the company fell into greater financial difficulties, thus, Wu Sunfu once again put the goal of layoffs as a way to reduce the budget, "300 to 500, the cancellation of the Sunday processing, and extend the working time of one hour. [7]" The layoffs were followed by a ten percent discount on workers' wages. pay cuts, firings, and even an extension of the hours and content of the work in the end. Despite these actions, the problem of insufficient funds has never been solved.

3.2.2 Internal reason - The economic blockade of Zhao Botao

If Yizhong had raised enough funds, perhaps it could have maintained itself until after the war, but during this period, Zhao Botao imposed an economic blockade on Yizhong, spreading rumours and encouraging loose customers to run into Yizhong, and some depositors demanded early refunds under Zhao Botao's provocation, for which Wu Sunfu was in a difficult situation. Not only that, Zhao Botao, as a bought-and-paid-for financial capitalist, united with his counterparts in the banking sector and collectively refused to lend money to Yizhong, making it impossible for the small factories acquired by Yizhong to operate. On the other hand, Zhao Botao's economic blockade had a far-reaching impact on the later stage of the bond market [9]. After blocking the way of Wu Sunfu in the fight with Yizhong Company, Yizhong was unable to extract money from the bond market, which, to a certain extent, accelerated the decline of Yizhong Company in the second front.

3.2.3 External reasons -- current turbulence

Secondly, the outbreak of the Central Plains War led to instability. The war in the Central Plains affected the traffic and led to "commercial depression", and Yizhong Company "returned all the goods that had been loaded out last week". Yizhong took deposits to lend to eight factories, "the goods came out, but could not be sold, and also had to go to the stacks to spend money on the stacks". It was rumored that the government was to be organised in the north, and there were also rumors of moving the capital to Hangzhou. The most serious war since the Republic of China was on the verge of breaking out. The number of people mobilised for this war was unprecedented, and the duration of the move was unprecedented, even involving several central provinces in the war. The stagnation of factory products became the biggest problem. This was due to the fact that the products of the daily necessities manufacturing factory acquired by YiZhong Company did not have any competitiveness in the domestic market, while Wu Sunfu attempted to compete with the Japanese light industry factories constructed in China. With this unrealistic thinking, he found that his products could not be compared with Japanese goods at all. As a result, the contradiction between the development of national capitalism and imperialist oppression grew, and the development of national capitalism in China was finally abandoned by the trend of the times

Wu Sunfu, Wang Hefu and Sun Jiren realised the risk of internal and external trouble for Yizhong, and that there were only two ways for them to end up this situation, either by surrendering to Zhao Botao or by letting Yizhong go bankrupt. Wang Hefu suggested that by using the capital from the factory on public debt, they could struggle with Zhao Botao in this way. It was difficult for Yizhong to maintain the hard situation. It is written in the novel that

they thought that the current situation was hopeless for peace, and that one more day of Yizhong's maintenance would result in one more day of loss of capital, In the end, the three of them decided to top up the eight small factories of YiZhong to the foreigners and gave up the right to operate them. The problem was not that Wu Sunfu and the others were incapable of maintaining it, but because of the war, and the turbulence of the current situation, which made them realise that even if they persisted, they would go into decline because of the lack of peace.

As a result, the national industry in the second front failed at last. Under such a situation of internal and external problems, foreign capital oppression made Yizhong Company operate more and more difficult, it went towards failure step by step, presenting the tragic fate of national capitalists under the double attack of workers' strikes and foreign capital oppression, and announcing the complete bankruptcy of the second front.

4 The fight against Zhao Botao in the Bond market

4.1 Background

Wu Sunfu constantly struggled with Zhao Botao and the lack of capital led to the bankruptcy of YiZhong. Therefore, he conspired with Wang Hefu and Sun Jiren to use the funds of the factory to make bonds. Although Yizhong Company was bankrupt in the end, it could still continue to operate and participate in bond speculation because only the bond market had a chance to defeat Zhao Botao and make Yizhong free from Zhao Botao's blackmail. Thus, Wu Sunfu's third front started the bond trading in his battle of wits and courage with Zhao Botao.

4.2 Causes

4.2.1 Differences in philosophy

The conceptual difference and struggle between the buying bourgeoisie and the national bourgeoisie is the most important part of Ziyou. Because of the frequent wars between the warlords, the governments of Jiang Jieshi issued a large number of public bonds in the name of the Nanjing Central Government, and speculation was prevalent in the public bond market. Whether the Central Army was victorious or defeated had a great deal to do with whether or not the old bonds could be repaid and whether or not they could make a profit; Wu Sunfu and Zhao Botao, one a reactionary national capitalist and the other a reactionary bought-and-paid-for capitalist, had different judgements of the current situation and war, and the actions taken by them differed as well. Some speculators believed that the Central Army would win in the end and repay the bonds with interest insisted that the bonds would go up. So they would buy more and more government bonds, waiting for the price to rise. In this situation, selling government bonds at a high price can make a big profit, and these people were called "long-term". On the other hand, another kind of speculators reckoned that the Central Army was going to fail in the future, if another "Central Government" came to power, and the old bonds would not be sold on time. They naturally did not look at the bonds, and lent a large sum of bonds to the Exchange as collateral, wanting to sell them at a large sum while the price had not yet fallen, and then buy them back at a low price after the price had fallen, so that they could wait for the delivery period and return the bonds to the Exchange, thus profiting from them. The novel is about Wu Sunfu's "short term" [6]. In the novel, although Wu Sunfu initially joins Zhao Botao to be long-term, he is worried about being swallowed up, so he turns to be short-term. The struggle between the two people began at that time. Zhao Botao relied on the power of American financial capitalists as his backing and colluded with the

reactionary warlords to manipulate and break the market [9]. As a result of this situation, Wu Sunfu and his Bonds purchased by his friend together were always in a state of suppression due to Zhao Botao.

4.2.2 *The betrayal of Duzhuzhai*

Finally, the duel between Wu Sunfu as the "short term" and the "long term" started at the horn announcing the "opening of the market". After the opening of the market, the rising amount of WuSunfu in the last shot decided to nearly one and a half million of the disarmament of the public debt in the market at once, as a result, after the listing has been in a state of decline [10], but as long as Du Zhuzai joined in time, only without delay, there was also a chance of victory. It didn't work out the way Wusunfu wanted, and Du Zhuzai used another plan after WuSunfu lowered the price, directly take advantage of the situation. Du Zhuzai becomes the new account. Unfortunately, Wu Sunfu put all the assets on his brother-in-law Du Zhuzai. Du Zhuzai turned to Zhao Botao during this time, which directly led to the short-term Wu Sunfu being defeated by long-term Zhao Botao and Du Zhuzai [11]. Worsely, the big reason that Wu Sunfu collapsed is that the day before he told the Du Zhuzai that things will be on the market with all the falsehoods and realities of the market, it's his proximity of reversal of fortune, but this is the ultimate reason for his failure.

By this time, the Third Front was also destroyed, and the whole factory of the Yuhua Silk Factory was shut down, which also declared the bankruptcy of the road of capitalism in China.

Wu Sunfu and Zhao Botao's speculation in public debt ended with Wu Sunfu's defeat in the struggle. This was closely related to Wu's judgement on the rise and fall of bonds and the war situation of the warlords at that time, and the judgement on the war situation was related to the respective political positions of both sides [6]. It can be seen that the industrial capitalist Wu Sunfu could not defeat the financial buyer capitalist Zhao Botao, which was also the inevitable result of his failure.

5 Conclusion

The analysis of one victory and two defeats on three fronts in *Midnight* reveals the plight of the development of the national industry. Wu Sunfu can be described as unscrupulous towards other enterprises in order to gain profits, and he is even more ruthless in oppressing the workers. All these three fronts from each aspect reflect the contradictions between capitalism and the proletariat and the masses. At the same time, through in-depth research of the reasons for the success or failure of the three different fronts, in the fight or struggle between Wu Sunfu and Zhao Botao, and even in the strikes of the women workers, we see and learn about the ideas and power of the revolution. From all sorts of people and events, we not only see that Shanghai in the early 1930s was in the midst of suffering for people, in daily life, surrounded by enemies and social unrest, but also feel the spirit of resistance of the national capitalists against foreign imperialism, as well as a strong sense of patriotism and nationalism. The author shows the spirit of resistance of the national capitalists against foreign imperialism and their strong patriotism and national consciousness.

Authors Contribution

All the authors contributed equally and their names were listed in alphabetical order.

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