

# The Western and the Chinese Ideas of Love

## Introduction: What is Love?

What is love?  
Love means everything, means nothing;  
Love means nothing wrong, nothing right;  
Love means having everything, having nothing;  
Love means every possibility, no possibility;  
Love means nothing unreal, nothing real;  
Love means nothing bad, nothing good;  
Love means everything beautiful,  
yes, everything beautiful, and beauty only.  
Even the most heartless breakup,  
the most painful cry, and the last traces left on the heart,  
are all beautiful, and never ugly.  
This is love, the collective disclosure of personal secrets  
in the human world,  
for thousands of years.<sup>1</sup>

Pan Yuan-liang (潘源良)

Love is perhaps the most easily understood word. Apparently we all know what love means when we are told by our beloved that they love us. Love is everywhere on St. Valentine's Day. We are moved, excited, aroused and delighted by all the love songs and romantic films. Love is surely a most marketable product in our postmodern world. However, if we are asked what exactly love is, we may either give a whole series of definitions of love or no answer at all. Indeed there are hundreds of novels, poems, artworks and even philosophical texts written on the idea of love. Yet love, like the concept of time, is too obvious but too delusive to define. According to the Hong Kong lyric writer Pan Yuan-liang, any discussion on the meaning of love is indeed futile. It is neither necessary nor possible to define love, because love is everything and nothing. Love embraces all: it is truth, good and beauty.

---

<sup>1</sup> 潘源良：《愛 + 情故事》第一期，Pan Yuan-liang, *Story of Love and Qing*, 1993, p. 1.

I do not agree with this contention. I think if love is one of the most important ideas in life, it is even more important to discuss its meaning. Love is not something materialistic, as there is no such thing as love in the material world. The distinction between love and sex should be made at the outset. While sex can be seen as a kind of carnal drive, love is idealistic in nature. The idea of love is surely not a modern invention. It comes from a long tradition in the Western and Chinese cultures. The purpose of this chapter is to locate the two traditions of love.

There may be many differences in the meanings of certain concepts in Western and Chinese philosophy, such as the concepts of law and *fa* (法), humanity and *ren* (仁), or justice and *yi* (義). Nevertheless, they are well discussed in both philosophical traditions. However, this is not the case with the concept of love. For the Western philosophical as well as cultural tradition, love is one of the most important themes. In Greek mythology, Love, either in the form of Eros or Aphrodite, is a powerful deity that accounts for the creation of the universe and for passionate relationships between deities and mortals. In three of his dialogues, *Lysis*, *Phaedrus* and most important of all, the *Symposium*, Plato establishes a definitive ground of all subsequent philosophical discussions on the problem of love. Nearly all important Western philosophers after Plato philosophize on love. It is indeed no coincidence for the very term “philosophy” to have its etymological meaning of *philia-sophia*—the love of wisdom.

It seems remarkable to notice that in the Chinese philosophical tradition, love has never been a theme at all. Indeed, Confucianism discusses love in a very broad sense. *Ren* could be an equivalence to Western love. Nevertheless, love in the sense of interpersonal love between man and woman is hardly discussed in the major texts. The Mohists talk about universal love, but not sexual love. The Daoists have no interest at all in this topic. At the same time, love is the most important theme in Chinese literature. From the *Book of Songs* onwards, numerous love poems and novels have been written.

I think this is a very interesting phenomenon. “Love” clearly has many meanings and connotations. Love, whether it refers to desire, sex or interpersonal relationships, is a human fact that cannot be eradicated. The question is how to explain it with reference to a broader philosophical context. If there is a basic difference between the Western and the Chinese philosophies, then it should not surprise us to find different theories of love. However, my concern goes a little further. I would like

to seek an explanation of the fact that love, whether in its precise meanings as *eros*, *philia* and *agape* or later as passionate sexual love, is thematized in Western philosophy, whereas love is never a legitimate subject matter in Chinese philosophy at all.

### The Western Idea of Love as *Eros*

It is generally agreed that love in the Western tradition means at least three things: *eros*, *philia* and *agape*. *Eros* is now normally translated as “desire,” “sexual love” or simply “love”; *philia* as “friendship” and *agape* (*caritas* in Latin) as “the love of God,” especially in the Christian tradition. Among the three meanings, *eros* is the most profound because of its history is longer than that of the other two. At the same time, *eros* is also more fundamental, in the sense that *philia* can be seen as a derivative of *eros*. *Agape*, on the other hand, entered in a later stage of the Greek philosophical tradition with the introduction of Christianity.

Hesiod is probably the first Greek to describe the nature of Eros, one of the earliest gods on Mount Olympus. He says in his *Theogony*:

[...] and Love (Eros), most beautiful of all the deathless gods. He makes men weak, he overpowers the clever mind, and tames the spirit in the breasts of men and gods.<sup>2</sup>

Hesiod's conception of *eros* as violent and powerful sexual drive becomes the archaic meaning of love from ancient to modern times. Its meaning develops further in Greek mythology by association with the possession of arrows that aim at the victims of love, as well as with two inseparable companions, Pathos, the god of longing, and Himeros, the god of desire. Eros's arrow is a powerful symbol for blindness and randomness. It signifies an irrational and uncontrollable force that is outpouring from the longing and desiring subject towards the beloved.<sup>3</sup> The *eros* instinct in Freud's psychoanalysis clearly stems from this tradition.

---

<sup>2</sup> Hesiod, *Theogony*, trans. Dorothea Wender, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1973, p. 27.

<sup>3</sup> See Martin S. Bergmann, *The Anatomy of Loving*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1987, pp. 33-34.

When Greek mythology gradually gives way to logos, *eros* hereby gains a new cosmological meaning. Empedocles employs love and strife as two opposing motive causes that bind and separate the matter. In fragment 17 we read: “And these (elements) never cease their continuous exchange, sometimes uniting under the influence of Love, so that all become One, at other times again each moving apart through the hostile force of Hate.”<sup>4</sup> Love is therefore a cosmological force that unites and binds things together into a whole. To be sure, Empedocles’s *eros* refers not primarily to human beings but to the universe as a whole. Yet it has certain influence on Aristophanes’s conception of *eros* as the driving force for the reunited whole.

Both mythological and cosmological meanings of *eros* paved the way for Plato’s revolution in understanding the nature of love. In his most celebrated dialogue, the *Symposium*,<sup>5</sup> Plato examined first the existing theories of love through Phaedrus, Pausanias, Eryximachus, Aristophanes and Agathon before expounding his own theory through the recollection of Socrates of Diotima’s speech on *eros*. To be sure, all the speeches beside Socrates’s have lasting influence on the Western mind. Phaedrus’s eulogy of the greatness of the god Eros is a one-sided glorification of love: “Love is the most ancient, the most honorable and the most benevolent in bestowing virtue and happiness on men, alive and dead.”<sup>6</sup> Without going into a deeper philosophical discussion on the nature of love, Phaedrus’ speech is superficial. In the second speech Pausanias distinguishes two Aphrodites: the celestial (heavenly) and the common (popular). The common Aphrodite belongs to the heterosexuals who love lust and bodily pleasure. The heavenly Aphrodite, on the other hand, inspires men to seek lust-free and intellectual relationships with other men. With the Greek bias of male-superiority and preference of homosexual love, Pausanias makes an axiological distinction between the body and the soul. Bodily pleasure belongs to the popular Aphrodite, whereas wisdom of the soul comes from the heavenly goddess. “The man who is a lover in the common way is base—he loves the body rather than the soul. Nor is he constant, since he loves things which lack constancy [...]. But the person who loves

---

<sup>4</sup> *Ancilla to The Pre-Socratic Philosophers*, trans. Kathleen Freeman, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1962, p. 53.

<sup>5</sup> Plato, *The Symposium of Plato*, trans. Suzy Q. Groden, Boston: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1970.

<sup>6</sup> See *Symposium*, 180b.

the character of a good man endures throughout life, merging with what is lasting.”<sup>7</sup> Exchange of virtues and not pleasure is the outcome of lovers inspired by heavenly love. Aristotle’s formulation of the *philia* based on virtue clearly reflects Pausanias’s speech. In the later development, the struggle between the heavenly and the popular, or in a more Christian sense, between the sacred and the profane, is a dominant theme in Western culture, especially in the arts.

Following a cosmological theory of love by Eryximachus in his speech, Aristophanes expounds a theory of love which proves to be of lasting influence. It is surely Plato’s deliberation to put this tragic-comical theory of *eros* in the mouth of the great Greek comedy writer Aristophanes. The suggestion that the human race originally came from three sexes that because of hubris were cut into halves by Zeus is too mythological to believe. Yet the powerful observation of the fact that we human beings belong only to one sex and hence are incomplete in our existence ranks Aristophanes among the most discussed philosophers of love. To strive for the original wholeness is the only way to overcome our loneliness. Aristophanes elaborates: “The reason for this is that our original nature was to be whole. And to the longing for wholeness the name ‘love’ has been attached. In the old days, as I’ve said, we were one; but now on account of our crime, we have been split up by god.”<sup>8</sup> It is indeed universal for lovers in both cultures, Western and Chinese, to want to be together, to live together and even to die together and never to be separated. Togetherness as a whole is considered as evidence of love. This does not require any moral or axiological explanation of love as two lovers proclaim themselves as a whole. Hence *eros* is defined as the desire and the pursuit of this wholeness. This understanding of *eros* transcends physical sexual desire since the aim of *eros* is clearly more than the momentary sexual union by intercourse.<sup>9</sup> It refers not just to the love of heterosexuals but also to that of homosexuals. The importance is to be a whole. This powerful insight of *eros* implies, however, a tragic problem. How does one know the other is really the half of one’s original whole? The wanting to be together as a whole by two lovers does not necessarily mean that they are originally a whole. What happens if they are mismatched to one another?

---

<sup>7</sup> See *Symposium*, 183d-e.

<sup>8</sup> See *Symposium*, 193a.

<sup>9</sup> See Gerasimos Santas, *Plato and Freud: Two Theories of Love*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988, pp.18-22.

The desire to be always together is surely a universal phenomenon, but its explanation cannot be based on a myth. Wholeness cannot be the object of love and it requires further qualification. Plato criticized Aristophanes's theory through Diotima. She says, "Whereas a person might make up a story, that those who seek after the other halves of themselves are loving, my own account describes love as being neither of the half nor of the whole, unless it should chance, my friend, to be something good."<sup>10</sup> Love (*eros*) is the desire for the good. This first but simple definition of love by Plato is the most fundamental in Western philosophy of love.

The significance of Plato's theory of *eros* lies in a revolutionary insight: *eros* is not something outside man but it is originated in the nature of man. *Eros* is neither good nor beautiful but a need for the good and the beautiful. Implicit in this formulation is the reference to the concept of happiness which consists of the possession of all good and beautiful things. Obviously these are not physical and corruptible things that are in Plato's mind. He further elaborates: "Love (*eros*) is for the good to always belong to oneself."<sup>11</sup> To be eternally possessed by the lover means to belong to the transcendent realm of ideas. The objects of *eros* are in the end not individual things but the good, the beautiful and finally the truth. The ladder of love described by Diotima demonstrates a gradual process from loving the individual beautiful person to the form of beauty shared by other beautiful persons; and then to leave physical bodies behind for the beauty of knowledge, and finally to come to the contemplation of the Beautiful through philosophy. Diotima concludes her speech as follows:

This is what it means to progress correctly to an understanding of matters of love, or to be brought to it by another: in beginning from these sorts of beauties, to move up constantly for the sake of that beauty, from one to two, and from two to all beautiful bodies, from beautiful bodies to beautiful acts, from beautiful acts to the beauties of learning, from learning finally to that knowledge which is none other than knowledge of the Beautiful itself, so that he comes to know, in the end, what beauty is. Here above all places, my dear Socrates, is the life that is worth living for man, lived in the contemplation of the Beautiful itself.<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup> See *Symposium*, 205e.

<sup>11</sup> See *Symposium*, 206a.

<sup>12</sup> See *Symposium*, 211c-d.

In the *Apology*, Socrates maintains that “an unexamined life is not worth living for a human being.”<sup>13</sup> Examination of life means a philosophical reflection on oneself—know thyself. In this connection man is engaged in *eros*, i.e. in the philosophical pursuit of the Beautiful itself, which is the true love of all. In this way, he is freeing himself from the mundane world of the physical and entering into the realm of the *eidos*, the immortals. Plato has already reiterated this position in *Phaedo*, where immortality of the soul is proved and asserted that the meaning of philosophy is exactly the preparation for death—to purify and to free the soul from the body.<sup>14</sup> At the end of her speech in the *Symposium*, Diotima describes the ultimate meaning of a lover: “He is able to bring forth true virtue, and to nourish it, and hence to be a favourite of the gods, so that, if any man can be immortal, it will be he.”<sup>15</sup>

The connection between philosophy and *eros* is very important. It emphasizes the capacity of man himself in the search for wisdom because man has the erotic urge in his soul. Love (*eros*) is therefore the sole business of each individual human being. He who exercised his own rational pursuit for the beautiful and for knowledge can be called a true lover and a true philosopher. In other words, only philosophers can be lovers.

It is clear that this Platonic theory of love is far from common sense. Love does not refer to interpersonal relationship but to the rational pursuit of wisdom. Indeed, it is a very demanding quest. However, to dismiss the ordinary understanding of love between two persons by referring to its untrue character seems to be very difficult. But if we accept the ladder-of-love theory, it can nonetheless be explained. Plato’s theory of *eros*, in spite of its metaphysical intention, is fairly easy to understand. *Eros* is acquisitive in nature. It is a human desire, a want for something external to oneself. This “something” may be beautiful things, knowledge or truth. The purpose of *eros* is equally clear: by acquiring these good things, one attains happiness. To love a concrete person means to love some particular good or beautiful things pertaining to this person. In fact, it is not this concrete person that matters, but the good qualities in him or her.

---

<sup>13</sup> See *Apology*, 38a.

<sup>14</sup> See *Phaedo*, 67-68.

<sup>15</sup> See *Symposium*, 212a.

I think this is the basic understanding of love as *eros* in the Western tradition. Irving Singer begins his three volumes of the study of the nature of love by stating the importance of Platonic *eros*. He says:

In the philosophy of love, however, I am convinced that every discussion must start with Plato. Courtly love, Romantic love, and major emphases in religious love all take root in him. They form a single tradition, albeit internally divided, that naturalistic and realistic writers have attacked in variety of ways. But even among the latter, from Lucretius to Freud, Platonic elements often contribute to the governing mode of expression.<sup>16</sup>

In sum, there are two fundamental meanings of love as *eros*. One comes directly from the mythological tradition in stressing the irrational physical desire. This is the meaning held by the naturalist in the classical period, like Lucretius, through Schopenhauer to Freud. The other is more philosophical. It is the Platonic *eros*, the spiritual desire for the Good and wisdom.

### The Chinese Idea of Love as *Qing*

In the modern Chinese language, love is usually translated as “*ai*” (愛); hence “I love you” is rendered as “*wo ai ni*” (我愛你). However, this usage is in fact modern. Nowhere in traditional Chinese literature before the 20<sup>th</sup> century can one find such expression of love. When Confucius talks about love (*ai*) in *Lunyu* (論語), saying that “the man of *ren* loves (*ai*) the people” (仁者愛人), he means caring and protecting, surely not in an erotic sense. The meaning comes closer to love as *agape*, yet is devoid of any religious connotations. In Mozi, universal love (*jianai* 兼愛) is the fundamental thesis of his doctrines. He explains the way of universal love as follows:

It is to regard other people’s countries as one’s own. Regard other people’s families as one’s own. Regard other people’s person as one’s own [...]. When all the people in the world love one another, the strong will not overcome the weak, the many

---

<sup>16</sup> Irving Singer, *The Nature of Love*, vol. 1, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984, p. 47.



will not oppress the few, the rich will not insult the poor, the honored will not despise the humble [...]. Because of universal love, all the calamities, usurpation, hatred, and animosity in the world may be prevented from arising. Therefore the man of humanity praises it.<sup>17</sup>

Love (*ai*) in this context means selfless caring for and liking one and other. Interpersonal love between man and woman is not mentioned at all. The other significant usage of the term love (*ai*) is found in Buddhism. The twelve categories of causation explain the emergence of the phenomenal world of suffering (十二因緣). *Ai* is one category among the twelve. Because of sensation there is reception (緣觸有受); because of reception there is love (緣受有愛); because of love there is possession (緣愛有取). Love (*ai*) is greedy possession of things. Hence it has a negative connotation. The term *aiyu* (愛欲) can be understood as greedy desire.

When it comes to the love between man and woman, the only traditional Chinese term is *qing* (情). We refer to lovers as *qingren* (情人); people in love as *youqingren* (有情人). Unlike the term *ai*, *qing* is never used as a verb but always as a noun. It indicates a state between persons rather than an activity. However, the original meanings of *qing* do not necessarily have love as their connotations. In *Liji* (禮記) *qing* means feeling and emotions. There are seven feelings: joy, anger, sorrow, fear, liking, hating and desire. *Qing* is something innate and does not require learning. It is an external manifestation of the human nature (*renxing* 人性). It is along this line of interpretation of *qing* as feeling that classical Chinese philosophers discuss it within the context of human nature. Xunzi considers *qing* as natural feeling and emotion. He says: "The liking, hating, pleasure, anger, sorrow and joy of the human nature are called feelings (*qing*)."<sup>18</sup> In a similar way Zhu Xi interprets the meaning of *qing*: "Pleasure, anger, sorrow and joy are feelings (*qing*), but when they are not yet expressed, then they are nature (*xing*)."<sup>19</sup>

---

<sup>17</sup> Wing-tsit Chan's translation in his *A Source book in Chinese Philosophy*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963, p. 214.

<sup>18</sup> 荀子〈正名〉：「性之好、惡、喜、怒、哀、樂謂之情。」

<sup>19</sup> 朱熹《中庸章句》注：「喜怒哀樂，情也；其未發，則性也。」

Such understanding of *qing* as feeling and emotion is consistent in the whole tradition of Chinese philosophy. *Qing* as love is never thematized as a proper philosophical subject matter. The *qing* between men and women is only to be described and expressed in literary writings. Numerous poems are dedicated to *qing*.<sup>20</sup> Here we are facing one problem: whether there is any connection between the philosophical *qing* and the literary *qing*.

I think the relation between these two usages is ambiguous. In the philosophical discourse, *qing* is related to the theory of mind. Zhu Xi discusses the interrelationship between *xin* (心), *xing* (性) and *qing* (情) in the sense that the mind, *xin*, is the substance; nature, *xing*, the content; and feelings, *qing*, the expression.<sup>21</sup> The philosophical *qing* is employed in a psychological sense, whereas the literary *qing* refers to interpersonal relations. Nevertheless, feelings and emotion are the major forms of expression of persons in *qing*. Joy and sorrow, pleasure and sufferings as well as fear and anger are all vivid expressions of men and women in love. The difference between these usages lies in this: as psychological feeling, *qing* is the expression of human nature, but as intense feeling of joy and sorrow, *qing* is the cause of them. Joy and sorrow are not just simple emotions for the persons who are being moved by things around them, they are the outcome of the interpersonal *qing* of two lovers. In other words, *qing* can make people happy and joyous but also suffering, jealous, etc.

It is certainly not true that traditional Chinese philosophers do not discuss interpersonal relationships. Indeed, the major theme of Confucianism is human relationships. The ultimate aim of Confucianism is to propose a harmonious community based on the principles of *li* (禮), *yi* (義) and *ren* (仁). In such community, people are classified into roles in accordance with their respective relation to each other. Between ruler and minister, father and son, husband and wife, between brothers and between friends are definite duties and responsibilities for everyone to act accordingly and to fulfill. Hence all interpersonal relationships are moral in nature. *Qing*, denoting natural feelings, is to be regulated according to the principle of *li*, so that they can be expressed in an

<sup>20</sup> A recent book of collected traditional Chinese *qing*-poems lists more than one thousands entries, see 呂美生編：《中國古代愛情詩歌鑒賞辭典》，合肥：黃山書社，1990。

<sup>21</sup> 朱熹《朱子語類》卷五：「虛明不昧，便是心。此理具于中，無少欠闕，便是性。感物而動，便是情。」

appropriate manner. Mencius and Xunzi as well as all the later Confucians are all concerned with guiding human feelings and emotions in morally acceptable ways. As far as the literary *qing* is concerned, the Confucians regard literature is the appropriate realm of discourse of human feelings, love included. In addition, they might consider love as *qing* is a private (*si* 私) business between man and woman and is not universal (*gong* 公) enough to be philosophized.

Perhaps the only theoretical formulation on the phenomenon of *qing* is expounded by a literary writer from the late Ming Dynasty, Feng Menglong (馮夢龍), in the preface of his *Compilation of Qing-stories* (《情史類略》). Written in the form of a Buddhist verse, Feng asserts that *qing* is most fundamental and most real of all things. Through *qing* people who are unconnected become intimate; whereas if there is no *qing*, intimate relations break down. Things are like separate coins, which are joined together through the thread of *qing*.<sup>22</sup> Based on these conceptions of *qing*, Feng collected hundreds of traditional *qing*-stories and divided them into twenty-four categories.<sup>23</sup> Commenting on the first category of *qing*-stories concerning chastity (*qing zhen* 情貞) he compares *qing* with morality (*li* 理) and concludes that after many chaste stories *qing* is more important than *li*. He says: "The Confucians understand that *qing* should be regulated through morality, without realizing that in fact morality requires *qing* to sustain."<sup>24</sup>

*Qing* is that something which binds two lovers forever together. Such is the simple meaning of love in the Chinese tradition. In classifying the love stories into twenty-four categories of *qing*, Feng does not mean that there are twenty-four kinds of love. There is only one *qing*, yet it is manifested in twenty-four forms of relationships. What Feng wants to achieve in his *Qing shi* (情史) is twofold. The first aim is to describe the primal importance of *qing* by a quasi-theoretical formulation of the nature of *qing* in the form of a Buddhist verse. The second purpose is a phenomenology of *qing* manifested in twenty-four forms of concrete amatory experiences in life shared between two human

<sup>22</sup> 參看馮夢龍〈《情史》序〉：「……惟情不虛假，有情疏者親，無情親者疏……萬物如散錢，一情為線索……」《情史類略》，長沙：岳麓書社，1984，頁1。

<sup>23</sup> Feng's classification of *qing* stories into twenty-four types is itself a very innovative phenomenon. As far as I know there is no equivalent classification in the West. This deserves further study.

<sup>24</sup> 馮夢龍：「世儒但知理為情之範，孰知請為理之維乎。」同上，頁36。

beings or between a human being and a being of another kind. This implies that *qing* may exist not only between a man and a woman, but also between homosexuals; and not just between human beings, but also between a human being on the one side and a ghost, a god, or even an animal on the other side. On the primal importance of *qing*, Feng says:

If there is no *qing* in heaven and earth, there is no life. If there is no *qing* in all living beings, there is no generation of life. There is no destruction of life since *qing* never dies. The four elements are just illusions and *qing* is the only reality. Because of *qing*, strangers become close relatives. When *qing* is absent, close relatives become strangers. A great difference exists between the presence and the absence of *qing*. I would like to establish a religion of *qing* so that I can teach all people: The sons have *qing* for their fathers while the ministers have *qing* for their emperors. All other phenomena can be derived from this and this should be so considered. All things are like separate coins and *qing* is the thread. Hence the separate coins are threaded through *qing*, as separate individuals from two distant places are joined as lovers. If a person inflicts harm on the others, he hurts his own *qing*. Like watching flowers blossoming in spring, we are blessed with happiness. Consequently there is no theft and no conspiracy; no need for the passion of Buddha nor any need for the benevolence of the sage. If *qing* is lost, cosmic chaos is the result. Unfortunately, I have too much *qing* while others have too little. I do hope all people who have *qing* join hands in demonstrating these phenomena.<sup>25</sup>

According to Feng, *qing* is the ultimate cosmological reality, from which all forms and the generation of life are derived. All human relationships are possible only because of the presence of *qing* among human beings. Without *qing*, the universe reverts to chaos. *Qing* is therefore something which bestows meaning and value on human lives and relationships. For Feng, the question of the metaphysical origin of *qing* does not exist. *Qing* defies definition because it is simply there. The evidence of *qing* is seen from its functions in the human world. Suffering, happiness, joy, sadness, sorrow, anger, jealousy, perversion, indulgency, chastity and virtue, all these human phenomena are the

---

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 1-2.

result of the operation of *qing* among human beings. All *qing* stories collected in the *Qing shi* are therefore concrete illustrations.

In summary, traditional Chinese philosophers do not consider *qing* as an equivalence to love. *Qing* as love is employed in literary writings as a state of intimate relationships between persons.

### Conclusion: A Preliminary Comparison

The late Neo-Confucian Tang Chun-i (唐君毅) was a prolific writer on philosophy and cultural matters. In 1945 he published a small book in China entitled *Gospel of Love*.<sup>26</sup> Curiously enough he claimed that he was only the translator but not the author of this book on love. However, upon the confirmation from one of his students, he is in fact the author. This small book remains one of his least discussed.<sup>27</sup>

Apparently Tang, together with most Chinese philosophers, past and contemporary, regards love as a taboo topic in philosophy, whereas Western philosophers would consider their discipline incomplete if love were not being thematized in it. Two great Western philosophers, Kant and Hegel, both highly praised by the neo-Confucians, take love as a most serious matter to be philosophized.<sup>28</sup>

This phenomenon needs to be explained. After discussing the concept of love in both traditions in the above sections, we come to an understanding that because of the basic differences in philosophical orientation, love is conceived differently. Western philosophy places great emphasis on the rational pursuit of knowledge. Therefore love, being regarded by Plato as the erotic urge for the good and wisdom, is implicit in the very concept of philosophy. Philosophy is indeed the love of wisdom. The distinction between the love (*eros*) as physical sexual drive and as spiritual desire stands witness to the fundamental metaphysical dualism of the Western philosophical tradition in dividing reality into body vs. mind, particular vs. universal, and phenomenon vs. noumenon. *Eros*, thus conceived, is metaphysical.

---

<sup>26</sup> 唐君毅譯，克爾羅斯基著：《愛情之福音》，台北：正中書局，1981。

<sup>27</sup> Mr. Tang Tuan-cheng told me that he got the confirmation from Tang Chun-i himself during his life time. The explanation which he gave for being the translator and not the author was apparently that it was not suitable for a philosopher to discuss love matters at that time. For more on this see below the chapter devoted to this book.

<sup>28</sup> See the discussion of the theory of love by Kant and Hegel in Robert G. Hazo, *The Idea of Love*, New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1967, pp. 270-275 and 385-387.

The predominant philosophical concern of Chinese philosophers, on the other hand, is moral. Love is thereby considered as feeling and emotion. Unlike their Western counterparts, Chinese philosophers do not believe that the urge for philosophization comes from the erotic desire of an individual whose aim is knowledge and wisdom. They place neither epistemological nor metaphysical interest as their priority. The mind-body distinction and the subject-object dichotomy do not exist in Chinese philosophical thinking. The interpersonal relationship is primarily considered as a moral problem.

As I have said in the beginning of this chapter, love is one of the least discussed subject matters in comparative philosophy. At the same time, it is also the least philosophized topic in Chinese philosophy. My discussion so far is only a first step toward a fuller understanding of the problem.