

Western Love, Chinese Qing

A Philosophical Interpretation of the Idea of Love in *Romeo and Juliet* and *Liang-Zhu* (or *The Butterfly Lovers*)

Any kind of romanticism, of idealization, or quasi-mystical ardor is excluded. Love, such as we understand it since our twelfth century does not even have a name in their language. In Chinese the nearest approach to our verb 'to love' is a word which denotes the relationship between a mother and her son. [...] From the viewpoint of the idea of love, there are really two worlds, the Oriental and the Occidental.

Denis de Rougemont¹

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to evaluate critically the claim of de Rougemont that there is no agreement on the meaning of love between the Chinese and the West, and that the idea of romantic love is totally absent in Chinese culture. I tend to agree with him in general that the metaphysical and theological approaches in the Western articulation of the problem of love in terms of *eros-philía-agape* are foreign to the Chinese mind. The idea of "love" in the Chinese culture is rendered as "*qing*" (情), which I think has a completely different meaning horizon from the Western conception of "love." However, de Rougemont is apparently ignorant of the complexity and richness of the concept of *qing*. His reference in the above quotation to the closest equivalent word of "love" in the Chinese language to that of the Western tradition is obscure.² He has merely made an assertion without going into Chinese philosophy and literature to illustrate his point. Perhaps his

¹ Denis de Rougemont, "Love" in the *Dictionary of the History of Ideas*, New York: Scribner's Son, 1973, p. 100.

² I could not figure out what Chinese word de Rougemont has in mind. *Xiao* (孝) does not mean love.

alleged ignorance should not be blamed. Compared with the vast Western philosophical literature on the problem and nature of love there is virtually very little said in Chinese culture on this topic. There was neither a *Symposium* written by a classical Chinese Plato nor anything similar to the three volumes of Irving Singer's *Nature of Love* by a contemporary Chinese scholar.³ For Chinese intellectuals, past or present, *qing* is not a proper subject matter to be thematized.

However, amorous relationships are human phenomena which are obvious and taken for granted in all cultures. The difference lies only in the understanding and interpretation of these phenomena according to the particular cultural categories of meaning. The *eros-philía-agape* schema denotes the hermeneutic horizon from which the human relationship called "love" is being conceptualized and understood in the Western tradition. Irving Singer, agreeing with de Rougemont, argues for the uniqueness of the West because the two cultural roots of the West, namely, the Greek and the Christian, determine the reference and meaning of all discourse on love. For the *eros* tradition, he says: "In ancient Eastern philosophy—Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, Zen—the *eros* tradition scarcely existed. Correspondingly, the East did not develop the concept of love in ways comparable to those of the West."⁴ On the other hand, religious love is also unique. Singer further comments: "Religious love is mainly a product of the Judaeo-Christian tradition. [...] The two thousand years of Christian theology and philosophy consist of one attempt after another to understand, and render amenable to worship, a love that might be God."⁵ The Greek concept of love as *eros* and the Christian idea of God's love as *agape* clearly belong to the Western tradition. When de Rougemont and

³ As far as I know, there was only one Chinese translation of Plato's *Symposium* in 1933. The first volume of Irving Singer's *The Nature of Love: Plato to Luther* was translated into Chinese in 1992. Of course there are other translations of Western classics on love, e.g. Ortega's *On Love*. Nevertheless, original academic study on love in Chinese is rare. Tang Chun-i's *Ai-ching chih fu-yin* (唐君毅：《愛情之福音》), published in 1945, is perhaps the only serious work on love by an original Chinese philosopher. However, in the preface of this book Tang claimed that he was only the translator of a certain book called *Gospel of Love* by an unknown Polish philosopher "Kileosky." Later evidence shows that Tang was indeed the author and not the translator. See *The Complete Works of Tang Chun-i*, vol. 2, pp. 87-90.

⁴ Irving Singer, *The Nature of Love*, vol. I, *Plato to Luther*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984, pp. 150-151.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 159.

Singer assert that romantic love is an invention of the West, it is because romantic love cannot be understood without the reference to both the Greek *eros* and Christian *agape*.

Our present world, however, does not consist of isolated cultures. The Western cultural tradition has been eroded by the enormous forces of modernization. At the same time, all other civilizations were confronted by the challenge of the process of Western modernization. Consequently, the whole world is being transformed. "History has been changed by the West, which has made the world One World," says J. M. Roberts in his book *The Triumph of the West*.⁶ The result is a gradual adoption, sometimes unconsciously, sometimes with bitter struggle, of Western ideology, values, standards and, in short, almost all Western culture into one's own. We Chinese take for granted the ideas of political and economic freedom, human rights, government, science and technology as well as standard of living conditions, entertainment etc., which are all of Western origin, as if they were indigenous to our own culture. In fact, our generation is born into this predicament: we are both Chinese and Western.⁷ The stock of knowledge in our everyday life-world, using Alfred Schutz's phenomenological terminology, is built on the sedimentation of the cross-fertilization of Chinese and Western cultures in the last 150 years.⁸ If this is the case, then there is no sense in talking of a pure Chinese cultural tradition, because the Western tradition is also *our* tradition.

Let us come back to our major problem concerning the idea of love. It is indeed true to say that in the past, there were two different traditions of the idea of love in the West and the East. There was no romantic love in China. But this assertion has lost its validity in the contemporary world, at least in Hong Kong. The popular media culture shows that "romantic love" is perhaps the best and most welcome commodity. Even our vocabulary and the conception of love have changed drastically without our awareness. Less than a hundred years

⁶ J. M. Roberts, *The Triumph of the West*, London: BBC, 1983, p. 430. For a similar theory, see Theodore H. von Laue, *The World Revolution of Westernization*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987.

⁷ I have argued for this position in my paper, "Hong Kong Cultural History—Problems and Issues," presented at the 12th Conference of the International Association of Historians of Asia, Hong Kong University, 1991.

⁸ See Alfred Schutz and Thomas Luckmann, *The Structures of the Life-World*, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973.

ago, the locution “I love you,” which is most common today, did not exist in any Chinese texts, and definitely no Chinese would utter such a sentence to his or her lover!

I consider a comparative study of the idea of love between the Chinese and the Western tradition of more than academic interest. It is our existential concern to uncover the radical meaning of love as it is embedded in our present consciousness. What we mean by romantic love is the product of a cross-fertilization of two originally incommensurable traditions of love. To illustrate this, I choose Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* as the most obvious example of romantic love, which is at the same time one of the most well-known romantic plays to modern Chinese, and compare it with the Chinese legendary story of *Liang-Zhu*, or better known as *The Butterfly Lovers*, whose love is considered as equally romantic by most Chinese today. I would like to demonstrate that the *Liang-Zhu* legend contains nothing romantic. There is neither passion nor struggle in the story. Two important characteristics of passionate and romantic love in the Western tradition, the *Liebestod* motif and transgressional love, are absent. I contend that the contemporary conception of the *Liang-Zhu* has undergone a process of “romanticization.” The aim of this essay is to understand this process and at the same time to contrast the meaning of love in both traditions.

Liang-Zhu and Romeo and Juliet: Similarities

There are certainly many superficial similarities between these two stories. A contemporary Chinese scholar, Hong-xin (洪欣) compares the content of the two love stories and concludes that there are “surprising similarities.” He enumerates five points:

1. The heroes and heroines met accidentally and fell in love of their free will.
2. There were hidden conflict and crisis in their love.
3. There was someone who helped them in the realization of their love.
4. The two pairs of lovers were crushed and destroyed by “reactionary” force.
5. Their lives ended tragically.⁹

⁹ Hong-xin (洪欣), “A Comparison between ‘*Liang-Zhu*’ and ‘*Romeo and Juliet*’” (《梁祝》《羅密歐與朱麗葉》比較說), 《戲劇學習》, (4) 1985, p. 21. The version of “*Liang-Zhu*” compared in this article is not taken from the original story but a later derivative, *yue-yu* (越劇).

As for the meaning of the tragic end of the lovers, Hong glorifies the martyrdom and the triumph of humanism over reactionary feudalism. He emphasizes the struggle for individual freedom and equality of free love in both stories: "What *Liang-Zhu* tries to demonstrate is a common wish of the people to demand the equality of the sexes as well as self-determination in marriage. In this anti-feudalistic perspective, it has the same position as *Romeo and Juliet*."¹⁰ Yet undoubtedly, Hong's comparison is an overstatement based on Marxist ideology.

A less academic comparison is found in a small popular book on traditional Chinese love stories. "Compared with other traditional love stories, *Liang-Zhu* is more complex, their love is more determined and exclusive. In this respect, the love of *Liang-Zhu* is no less inferior to that of *Romeo and Juliet*. Therefore 'Liang-Zhu' is the most welcome tragedy among all other local dramas. The two lovers have set up a model for thousands of young men and women."¹¹

On the whole, the romantic nature of *Liang-Zhu* is measured against the idea of love in *Romeo and Juliet*. We should also take note that the comparison is done by contemporary Chinese writers. To my limited knowledge, there is no comparison of *Romeo and Juliet* to *Liang-Zhu* from any foreign scholars.

The romantic love of *Liang-Zhu* has been further popularized and made known to nearly all Chinese not just through drama or film, but also through the *Butterfly Lovers Violin Concerto* written in 1959 by the two composers He Zhan-hao (何占豪) and Chen Gang (陳鋼). The hundreds of performances and thousands of CDs sold are proof of the popularity of the love story in music. It is perhaps the only romantic violin concerto in Western style composed by Chinese. Yet one cannot fail to notice the similarity in tone and mood of *The Butterfly Lovers Violin Concerto* to that of Tchaikovsky's *Romeo and Juliet* overture. Tchaikovsky, needless to say, is one of the chief romantic composers of 19th century Western music.

So much for the apparent similarities. In the following sections I would like to examine firstly the idea of love in the original *Liang-Zhu* story and secondly the idea of romantic love in *Romeo and Juliet*. After this exposition I will contrast the two ideas and theorize the process of romanticization of *Liang-Zhu*.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

¹¹ Jiang-feng (江楓), *Traditional Love Stories* (《古代戀愛逸話》), Hong Kong: (date and publisher not given), p. 46.

The Idea of Love (*Qing*) in *Liang-Zhu*

As a legend, *Liang-Zhu* has a long history. According to Lu-gong (路工), the editor of *Collected Stories and Ballads-stories of Liang-Zhu* (《梁祝故事說唱集》), there was already a reliable source of the story recorded in the Tang Dynasty. Since then it has appeared in many versions and variations of the original theme.¹² I take the version recorded in *Qing-shi leilue* (《情史類略》), literally *Compilation of Qing Stories*, edited and written by the important late Ming literary author Feng Meng-long (馮夢龍, 1574-1646),¹³ for the present discussion because Feng's story is in the original form and is concise. Most important of all is the fact that Feng classified *Liang-Zhu* under a definite category of love story: *qing-ling* (情靈).¹⁴ Feng's taxonomy of love should prove to be most valuable in understanding the Chinese idea of love.

Since the story is not a long one, it may be worthwhile to translate it completely for the purpose of discussion.

“Zhu Ying-tai” 〈祝英台〉

Liang Shan-bo (梁山伯) and Zhu Ying-tai (祝英台) lived in the time of the East-Chin (東晉) dynasty. Liang's family was in Hui-ji (會稽) while Zhu's home was in Shang-yu (上虞). They studied together for some time. Zhu went home first and was later visited by Liang in Shang-yu. Only then did Liang realise that Zhu was female. He went home and told his parents that he would like to marry Zhu. Unfortunately, at that time, Zhu was already betrothed to the young son of the Ma family. Knowing

¹² Lu-gong (路工), ed. *Collected Stories and Ballads-stories of Liang-Zhu* (《梁祝故事說唱集》), Shanghai, 1955, Preface, pp. 7-16.

¹³ Feng Mong-long, prolific writer of the late Ming Dynasty, compiled and wrote a large number of vernacular stories, which were very influential to the novel writing since his time. For a detailed discussion on Feng, see Patrick Hanan, *The Chinese Vernacular Story*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981, esp. pp. 75-97. Hanan translated the title of *Qing-shi leilue* as *The Anatomy of Love*, which I think to be rather misleading.

¹⁴ See Feng Mong-long (馮夢龍), *Compilation of Qing Stories* (《情史類略》), Chang-sha, 1984. Attention should be paid to this re-issue of the classic: instead of publishing the original 24 chapters, two chapters are left out: “*Qing-wai*” (情外)—homosexual love stories and “*qing-hui*” (情穢)—stories of sexual perversion. A later version of the *Compilation* rendered into modern Chinese (1990) restores these two chapters.

that, Liang was very sad and was at a loss. Three years had passed before he became an official at the town Jin (鄞). Soon after he became seriously ill and was going to die. Before he died, he made a wish that he was to be buried at the foot of the Qing-dao mountain (清道山). Another year passed and this was the time for Zhu to leave home for the marriage to the son of the Ma family. The party was stopped by a sudden storm when they passed the Qing-dao mountain. Then Zhu visited Liang's grave and wept sorrowfully. The grave opened suddenly and Zhu threw herself into the grave and died. Having heard of the incident, the Ma family reported it to the Emperor's court. Minister Xie-an (謝安) requested the Emperor to ordain Zhu as "Chaste-lady" (義婦). In the time of the Emperor He (和帝), Liang manifested himself spiritually to serve the people. Because of this, he was ordained "Chaste-loyalty" (義忠). This story was recorded and inscribed at the Jin-temple. It was also recorded in the *Annals of Ling-po* (《寧波志》).

The butterflies in Wu-zhong were transformed from orange larvae. Women and children called the yellow butterfly as Liang Shan-po and the black one as Zhu Ying-tai. According to legend, the Zhu family visited the grave after Zhu died and burned clothes in front of it. From the flame of the burning clothes appeared a pair of butterflies. It was believed that such a tale was created by some concerned persons.¹⁵

For the modern reader who believes the romantic version of the *Liang-Zhu* story, the original is an anti-climax. There was no rebellious struggle of the lovers to act against their parents. Liang made no love vow to Zhu and contemplated no secret marriage. All he did was: he asked the permission of his own parents to marry Zhu and became seriously ill after he knew that there was no hope. There was no love at first sight. The whole episode took a long time (at least 7 years) to

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 282-283. 〈祝英台〉：

梁山伯、祝英台，皆東晉人。梁家會稽，祝家上虞，嘗同學。祝先歸，梁後過上虞尋訪之，始知為女。歸乃告父母，欲娶之，而祝已許馬氏子矣。梁悵然若有所失。後三年，梁為鄞令，病且死，遺言葬清道山下。又明年，祝適馬氏，過其處，風濤大作，舟不能進。祝乃造梁家，失聲哀慟。忽地裂，祝投而死。馬氏聞其事於朝，丞相謝安請封為義婦。和帝時，梁復顯靈異效勞，封為義忠。有事立廟於鄞云。見《寧波志》。

吳中有花蝴蝶，橘蠹所化。婦孺呼黃色者為梁山伯，黑色者為祝英台。俗傳祝死後，其家就梁冢焚衣，衣於火中化成二蝶。蓋好事者為之也。

complete. The Ma family was after all not bad or vicious. They even reported the story to the Emperor's court for recognition! The only trace of any romanticism was perhaps the butterfly legend, but it was only later added to the original story.

If we disregard the romantic frame of reference to understand the story and return to the original text we discover that the love manifested between Liang and Zhu was nothing extraordinary. It was most conservative and moral in nature. The idea of individuality and personal freedom was unknown to them. The overarching principle of morality in traditional Chinese culture is *li* (禮): appropriateness and correctness. For a learned scholar like Liang, the essential obligation is to see whether one's behavior abides by the moral order. Recognizing the mutual love between him and Zhu is one thing, but to develop this love into marriage is another. Marriage is considered to be no private business between individuals but between families. Consent and approval from parents are to be strictly observed.¹⁶ The tragedy of the lovers lies exactly in the conflict between their mutual recognition of love and parental approval. Since Zhu was promised by her parents to be married to the son of the Ma family, it could not be changed, simply because any change would intimidate the honor of Zhu's parents. It was sheer bad luck that Liang could not come for Zhu before the marriage was arranged.

As we mentioned earlier that Feng Meng-long classified the *Liang-Zhu* story under the category *qing-ling*, we shall now come to the meaning of this story according to him. What Feng valued is certainly not the "romantic" ending in the transformed butterflies but the persistence of love that endures all sufferings and finally survives even death. It is indeed most unfortunate to have an unconsummated love because of other moral duties, but it is of the utmost value to preserve this mutual love. Feng elaborates the meaning of *qing-ling* (情靈) in his commentary to this chapter:

People might live because of *qing*, and could die also because of *qing*. However, *qing* does not live because people live and does not die because people die. People live, yet *qing* could die; and when people die *qing* could live again. Even though the body cannot resurrect, *qing* does not simply perish. The unfulfilled

¹⁶ See Mencius. 《孟子·滕文公下》云：「不待父母之命，媒妁之言，鑽穴隙相窺，踰牆相從，則父母國人皆賤之。」

wish before death will be fulfilled after death; whereas the unrealized hope during the previous life will be realized in the next life. Hence it is obvious to understand why *qing* be called spiritual (*ling* 靈)!¹⁷

The mutual love (*qing*) between Liang and Zhu clearly illustrates the spiritual quality: it survives even death and the aim of this love is to be together forever.

Qing is that something which binds two lovers forever together. Such is the simple meaning of love in the Chinese tradition. The twenty-four categories of *qing*, under which Feng classifies all love stories, do 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* is twofold. His 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 (情偈). His second purpose is a phenomenology of *qing* manifested in twenty-four forms of concrete living amatory experience between people or other beings. This implies that *qing* does not necessarily exist only between man and woman but also between homosexuals, between people and ghosts, gods and even animals. On the primal importance of *qing*, he 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

¹⁷ Feng, *op cit*, p. 310. 「人，生死於情者也；情，不生死於人者也。人生，而情能死之；人死，而情又能生之。即令形不復生，而情終不死，乃舉生前欲遂之願，畢之死後；前生未了之緣，償之來生。情之為靈，亦甚著乎！」

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.¹⁸

According to Feng, *qing* is the ultimate cosmological reality from which all life and the generation of life are derived. All human relationships are possible only because of the presence of *qing* between them. Without *qing*, the universe reverts to chaos. *Qing* is therefore that something which bestows meaning and value to human life and relationships. For Feng, the question of the 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, indulgence, chastity and virtue, all these human phenomena are the result of the functioning of *qing* between human beings. All *qing* stories collected in the *Qing-shi* are therefore concrete illustrations.

However, there is an educational purpose for compiling all these stories. Through these stories one may learn the moral consequences and finally understand the meaning of *qing* in one's life. In the preface Feng says:

This book begins with the chapter on “chastity” (*zhen* 貞) so that righteousness is admired; “affinity” (*yuan* 緣) follows, destiny is understood. Through “privacy” (*si* 私) and “greediness” (*ai* 愛), happiness of the sexes is enjoyed whereas through “vengeance” (*qiu* 仇) and “remorse” (*han* 憾) repression is ventilated [...].¹⁹

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 1-2. 「天地若無情，不生一切物。一切物無情，不能環相生。生生而不滅，由情不滅故。四大皆幻設，惟情不虛假。有情疏者親，無情親者疏，無情與有情，相去不可量。我欲立情教，教誨諸眾生：子有情於父，臣有情於君，推之種種相，俱作如是觀。萬物如散錢，一情為線索，散錢就索穿，天涯成眷屬。若有賊害等，則自傷其情。如暗春花發，齊生歡喜意。盜賊必不作，奸宄必不起。佛亦何慈悲，聖亦何仁義。倒卻情種子，天地亦混沌。無奈我情多，無奈人情少。願得有情人，一齊來演法。」

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 3. 「是編也，始乎『貞』，令人慕義；繼乎『緣』，令人知命；『私』『愛』暢其悅；『仇』『憾』伸其氣；『豪』『俠』以大其胸；『靈』『感』以神其事；『痴』『幻』以開其悟；『穢』『累』以窒其淫；『通』『化』以達其類；『芽』非以誣聖賢，而『疑』亦不敢以誣鬼神。」

In his commentary on the first chapter on “chastity” (*qing zhen* 情貞), Feng contrasts morality with *qing* in the stories and concludes that *qing* is more important than morality (*li* 理). He says, “The Confucians understand that *qing* should be regulated through morality, without realizing that in fact morality requires *qing* to sustain.”²⁰ Accordingly, moral duty without *qing* is hypocritical if not void of meaning. On the other hand, *qing* can only be manifested completely and perfectly if it is confined within the moral order.

With this idea of love as developed by Feng, the “tragedy” of *Liang-Zhu* is readily understood. There is the conflict between *qing* and moral duty. In this mundane world, morality triumphs. However, *qing* transcends morality and completes itself through willed togetherness in death.

The Idea of Love in *Romeo and Juliet*

Unlike the story of *Liang-Zhu*, which is basically moral and conservative, *Romeo and Juliet* is about passionate love, which is at the same time rebellious and transgressional in nature. Denis de Rougemont in his book *Love in the Western World* puts this story within the developmental history of the *Tristan* myth since the twelfth century.²¹ The legend of *Tristan and Iseult* is a story of adulterous love. Its origin is unknown but believed to have been formed in the twelfth century and later publicized by the *troubadours* in southern Europe. De Rougemont considers it the primal model for all subsequent stories of passionate and romantic love in the Western tradition. From Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* to Wagner’s *Tristan and Isolde* and Leonard Bernstein’s *West Side Story*, the *Tristan* legend functions as a prototype. The story is more than just a legend, it has a mythic characteristic that has been determining the Western mind over the last seven hundred years. De Rougemont explains:

The myth (*Tristan*) operates whatever passion is dreamed of as an ideal instead of being feared like a malignant fever; wherever its fatal character is welcomed, invoked, or imagined as a magnificent and desirable disaster instead of as simply a disaster.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 36. 「世儒但知理為情之範，孰知情為理之維乎。」

²¹ See Denis de Rougemont, *Love in the Western World*, New York: Harper & Row, 1956 (1940), esp. Book III, pp. 189-191.

It lives upon the lives of people who think that love is their fate (and as unavoidable as the effect of the love-potion is in the Romance); that it swoops upon powerless and ravished men and women in order to consume them in a pure flame; or that it is stronger and more real than happiness, society, or morality.²²

De Rougemont is extremely critical of this *genre* of passionate/romantic love, because in the final analysis all these exciting, turbulent and tragic loves are but a kind of useless self-consuming passion. What the passionate lovers want in their love is not the completion of love in the form of marriage or a “happy-ever-after ending” but the perpetuation of the feeling of love and being in love. Thus paradoxically, the passionate lovers do not love each other. “What they love is love and being in love.”²³ Neither do they aim at happiness since they welcome suffering, which is, in the final analysis, the essence of passion. Obstacles and conflicts, whether they are intrinsic or self-created, are the fuel necessary for the burning of passion. Death is the ultimate goal towards which the lovers move; by dying, they consume their passion in eternity. This is the meaning of the concept of *Liebestod*.

The transgressional and rebellious nature of passionate love lies exactly in this: While the lovers believe that their destined and fated love is unavoidable even though they know assuredly that it is forbidden, impossible and sometimes immoral, they vow to stay true to their love. In so doing they set the whole world against themselves. Tristan and Iseult committed adultery, and in the twelfth century when Christianity was still reigning, they committed a grave sin. “Thou shalt not commit adultery” is prescribed in the Ten Commandments. The families Capulet and Montague were age-old enemies; hence Romeo was not to love Juliet. But the emotional seizure of love renders the lovers blind as they are led by their destiny into the blind alley of passion. They consider everything that is obstructing them to be meaningless, be it family, friendship, morality or religion. Only through death can they escape this curse.

Yet there is a deeper level of transgression. The idea of love in the Western tradition from Plato to the Middle Ages is dominated by the *eros-philial-agape* schema. According to this schema, the true object of love is never an individual person but Truth, Good and Beauty. Passion, as portrayed by Plato in *Phaedrus*, is the irrational element which must

²² *Ibid.*, p. 24.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

be saved and transformed by reason, and in *Symposium*, *eros* is defined as the desire for the permanent possession of the Good, the Beautiful and ultimately the desire for immortality.²⁴ The Aristotelian *philia* does not include emotion or pleasure as the essential element, but virtue, and accordingly, only between virtuous men can there be true *philia*.²⁵ *Agape* is the unconditional love that God bestows on men. "Beloved, let us love one another; for love is of God, and he who loves is born of God and knows God," and further, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself. Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law."²⁶ In short, the dominant idea of love before the Middle Ages is intellectual, virtuous and religious love.

It is no wonder that the idea of passionate love is in every sense a reaction against this classical love. While the latter emphasizes the objective, universal and general nature, the former takes the subjective, individual and particular as issue. Of course, the idea of passionate love takes a long history to develop. The second volume of Irving Singer's *Nature of Love* is devoted to outlining the genesis of passionate love through the development from the courtly love in the twelfth century to the romantic love in the nineteenth century. According to Singer, the criteria for courtly and romantic love do have common characteristics, despite controversies still present in defining the two loves. He formulates five criteria:

- (1) sexual love between men and women is in itself something splendid, an ideal worth striving for;
- (2) love ennobles both the lover and the beloved;
- (3) being an ethical and aesthetic attainment, sexual love cannot be reduced to mere libidinal impulse;
- (4) love pertains to courtesy and courtship but is not necessarily related to the institution of marriage;
- (5) love is an intense, passionate relationship that establishes a holy oneness between man and woman.²⁷

²⁴ "So if we were right in describing love as the desire always to possess the good, then the inevitable conclusion is that we desire immortality as well as goodness. On this argument, love must be desire for immortality as much as for beauty." Plato, *Symposium*, 207a, trans. Tom Griffith. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985.

²⁵ See Aristotle. *Nicomachean Ethics*, Bk 8.

²⁶ *1 John* 4:7; *Romans* 13:9-10.

²⁷ Irving Singer, *The Nature of Love*, vol. II, *Courtly and Romantic*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1984, pp. 22-23. For a comparison between the courtly and the romantic, see pp. 300ff. "[...] the concept of Romantic love renews these five

With the clarification of the idea of love both in the classical and in the passionate sense, we can return to the analysis of *Romeo and Juliet*. It is clear that the love in question here does not fall into any of the categories of classical love. Aristotle would definitely dismiss the immaturity of this pair of youngsters as in need of moral education. In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle comments:

Young people are amorous too; for the greater part of the friendship of love depends on emotion and aims at pleasure; this is why they fall in love and quickly fall out of love, changing often within a single day. But these people do wish to spend their days and lives together; for it is thus that they attain the purpose of their friendship.²⁸

We should remember that before Romeo met Juliet, he was deeply involved with Rosaline, who was immediately forgotten when he was struck by the beauty of Juliet! The whole series of events from falling in love to committing suicide covered less than a week!²⁹ One might doubt the grounds for their love except that they were attracted to each other sexually and emotionally. The meeting at Juliet's balcony confirmed the overwhelming mutual desire for each other. They believed that they were destined to be lovers. "Call me but love, and I'll be new baptiz'd; Henceforth I never will be Romeo."³⁰ With this pronouncement, they put the whole world against them and their fate was then sealed. "Through such challenge to law, secret lovers come close to madness, they are ready for crime." Thus comments psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva on the acts of the passionate lovers in her book, *Tales of Love*.³¹ The condition for the sustenance of this love is the presence of the third party. Kristeva echoes de Rougemont in this respect:

conditions within its own context, It too implies that sexual love between men and women is in itself an ideal worth striving for, that love ennobles both lover and beloved, that it is a spiritual attainment that cannot be reduced to sex alone, that it pertains to courtship, and that it is passion creating a special oneness." Of course, there are many other differences.

²⁸ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1156b, 2-5.

²⁹ See the introduction to the New Clarendon Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, Oxford: at the Clarendon Press, 1981 (1941), p. 10.

³⁰ *Romeo and Juliet*, Act II, Scene II, lines 49-50.

³¹ Julia Kristeva, *Tales of Love*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1987, p. 211.

The shadow of a third party—relatives, father, husband or wife in the case of adultery—is doubtless more present to the mind during carnal excitement than the innocent seekers of happiness together are willing to admit. Take away the third party and the whole construct often crumbles, lacking a cause for desire, after having lost some of its passional tinge.³²

Under this assumption, all the subsequent events: the secret marriage, the duel and finally the suicide of this pair of lovers, become understandable.

If it is the case that this passionate, romantic love between Romeo and Juliet is but an emotional and sexual madness of two adolescents, then what is the reason for its powerful influence on the Western consciousness of love? Is there any positive meaning in passionate love besides discarding it with Stendhal as self-deception or with Freud as mere sexual neurosis?

I think the lasting contribution of the idea of love exemplified in *Romeo and Juliet* and other romantic love stories lies in the recognition of the self as the individual subject of love. Exactly because the classical love in the *eros-philia-agape* tradition aims at universality, perfection and immortality, it renders any humble individual impotent in the search for love. After all, normal people are weak and fragile. The demand for the intellectual pursuit of the true and the good is too idealistic for most common people. However, the sudden awareness of falling in love transforms the lovers: the overwhelming power, albeit a self-deceptive one, generated from the passionate union of love, isolates the lovers from the rest of the world. They become themselves. Each lover identifies himself as a unique particular person in front of his beloved. The particularities of two individuals paradoxically dissolve into the universality of love. This is why, very often, passionate love is compared with the mystical experience of the union with God by the mystics in the Middle Ages.³³

“With love’s light wings did I o’erperch these walls; For stony limits cannot hold love out, And what love can do that dares love attempt [...]”³⁴ Henceforth Romeo has acquired the greatest happiness and power that any single individual can have. By giving himself

³² *Ibid.*

³³ See *ibid.*, chapter 4 on the mystical love of Bernard of Clairvaux.

³⁴ *Romeo and Juliet*, Act II, Scene II, lines 66-68.

totally to Juliet, he gains her totally in return: this complete union—this wholeness—is exactly the ideal of love expounded by Aristophanes (whose idea, though, is refuted by Socrates later in the dialogue) in Plato’s *Symposium*. Love is the desire for the whole. “[...] this is where happiness for the human race lies—in the successful pursuit of love, in finding the love who is part of our original self, and in returning to our former state.”³⁵ The tragedy lies, unfortunately, in the polarization of this union and the rest of the world. Insoluble conflicts and obstacles will remain and not disappear, though they are temporarily suspended. Apparently there is only one answer: only in death can the wholeness be petrified. Death is the final climax of passionate love. Indeed, Kristeva refers it as the “final orgasm.”³⁶

After all, passionate love, whether in the courtly or the romantic tradition, is not entirely new. Its meaning goes back to Aristophanes’s myth in classical Greece. The myth of the divided whole seeking its lost other half reappears in the Middle Ages, now in the form of passionate love.

Conclusion: On the Romanticization of *Liang-Zhu*

From the above analysis, we might agree with de Rougemont that, as far as the idea of love is concerned, there are two worlds. It is clear that in the traditional Chinese culture there was neither intellectual and religious love nor passionate and romantic love. Lin Shu (林紓), one of the very first Chinese literary translators, rendered Charles and Mary Lamb’s *Tales from Shakespeare* into Chinese in 1904. The story of *Romeo and Juliet* was thus translated not just into the Chinese language but in a way into the Chinese culture. The love scene was conveyed in a very subtle way. The common word for love, “*ai*” (愛), did not appear yet in Lin’s stories. I suspect that the words and phrases of love such as *lian-ai* (戀愛), *ai-qing* (愛情), and *ai* (愛) used as a verb as in *wo-ai-ni* (我愛你) were introduced between 1900 and 1918, as Lu Xun (魯迅)’s new poem, “The Goddess of Love” (〈愛之神〉), was published in 1918.³⁷

³⁵ Plato, *Symposium*, 193c.

³⁶ Julia Kristeva, *op cit*, p. 215.

³⁷ Pan Kuang-dan (潘光旦) mentioned in one footnote in his Chinese translation of Havelock Ellis’ *Psychology of Sex* in 1933 that *lian-ai* (戀愛) was only recently used in China. See his *Psychology of Sex* (《性心理學》), Beijing: 1987 (1933), p. 461.

Since that time, Chinese culture underwent tremendous changes. The May-fourth movement was not only just an outcry for science and democracy, which were believed by Chinese intellectuals of the time to be the answer to the modernization of China, but also a cultural revolution of the Chinese mind. The active introduction of Western culture by Chinese intellectuals aimed at a transformation of the traditional Chinese ways of thinking and feeling into what they thought to be modern, in the hope that thereby, emancipation from the conservative bondage of the past could be achieved. Love is one of the major categories of change. Leo Ou-fan Lee points out the importance of the Western meaning of love in that period. He says:

Love had become an over-all symbol of new morality, an easy substitute for the traditional ethos of propriety which was now equated with external restraint. In the general temper of emancipation, love was identified with freedom, in the sense that by loving and by releasing one's passions and energies the individual could become truly a full and free man.³⁸

Such an idea of love is clearly not the traditional idea of *qing* but essentially the meaning of romantic love in the Western sense. Hence Lee refers to these Chinese intellectuals as the romantic generation.

I believe that the romanticization of the Chinese *qing* begins in this period. Since then, moral virtues are no longer seen as the fundamental constituents of the idea of *qing*. Instead, passion and romance become true meanings. Interpreted from this perspective, it is no surprise to see that the modern version of the legend of *Liang-Zhu* does not have the classical meaning of *qing* but is regarded as a romantic story similar to *Romeo and Juliet*.

³⁸ Leo Ou-fan Lee, *The Romantic Generation of Modern Chinese Writers*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973, p. 265.