

Tang Chun-i's Philosophy of Love

An early work of Tang Chun-i (唐君毅), *Ai-qing zhi fu-yin* (Gospel of love, 《愛情之福音》)¹ stands out among his many publications as somewhat peculiar, and scholars of Tang seem mostly to have neglected it. The superficial reason for this neglect is obvious: Tang is listed as the translator, not the author, of this work. After Tang's death, his student Li Tu (李杜), in his book *Tang Chun-i xian sheng de zhe xue* (The Philosophy of Mr. Tang Chun-i 《唐君毅先生的哲學》), states in the opening chapter on Tang's life and work: "[Tang] also wrote a book called *Ai-qing zhi fu-yin*, in which he introduces and elucidates the meaning of ideal love."² Li does not, however, discuss this any further; nor has he included *Ai-qing zhi fu-yin* in the detailed chronology of Tang's publications at the end of his book. Nevertheless, in *Tang Chun-i quan-ji* (The Complete Works of Tang Chun-i 《唐君毅全集》), published in the 1980s, *Ai-qing zhi fu-yin* appears in volume 2 with an editor's note: Tang, as confirmed by Mrs. Tang Chun-i, did write the book in 1940.

Ai-qing zhi fu-yin is therefore something of a mystery: why did Tang claim to be the book's translator instead of its author? For what purpose did Tang write it? In the preface to the first Shanghai edition (1947), why did Tang deliberately invent a legendary account of his access to it? Was the writing of the book simply a caprice? Or was there more to Tang's concealment of his authorship?

I believe that the writing of *Ai-qing zhi fu-yin* was not meant to be capricious and that it in fact marks an important stage in Tang's life and studies. Furthermore, in the history of Chinese philosophy *Ai-qing zhi fu-yin* is probably the first book ever written on the philosophy of love.³ In this essay I will explore the meaning of this deceptively insignificant little book in the thinking and life of Tang Chun-i.

¹ Tang Chun-i, *Ai-qing zhi fu-yin*, 12th ed., Taipei: Cheng-chung Shu-ju, 1982.

² Li Tu, *Tang Chun-i xian sheng de zhe xue*, Taipei: Taiwan Hsueh-sheng Shu-ju, 1982, p. 60.

³ As mentioned earlier, throughout the Chinese tradition, love, especially sexual love, has never been recognized as a legitimate philosophical concept. Confucianism discusses love in terms of *ren* (仁), a form of love that is general and interpersonal

Questions Concerning the Authorship of *Ai-qing zhi fu-yin*

The edition of *Ai-qing zhi fu-yin* that I have in hand is the twelfth, published in 1982 by Cheng-chung Shu-ju (正中書局) in Taiwan. The year of the first publication is given as 1945, with 克爾羅斯基 (Ke-er-luo-si-ji) as the author and Tang Chun-i as the translator. This edition does not have a translator's preface. The number of editions is fair proof of the popularity and wide readership that *Ai-qing zhi fu-yin* has enjoyed. In the appendix to volume 2 of the 1982 edition of *Tang Chun-i quan-ji*, it is stated that in the 1947 edition there was a translator's preface, which Cheng-chung Shu-chu deleted in the 1949 reprint. This means that there was no translator's preface in the first edition (1945); it was only added to the edition of 1947, but was taken out two years later. It seems that Tang himself realized the problem with the translator's preface, but had no intention of setting aright his identity as the author. From 1949 up until Tang's death, the author of *Ai-qing zhi fu-yin* remained "Ke-er-luo-si-ji" and the translator "Tang Chun-i." No explanation was given in the book as to how this had come to pass. It is said that when a student of Tang's once raised the question about the book's authorship, Tang only smiled and gave no reply.

In volume 2 of *Tang Chun-i quan-ji*, a remark by Hsieh Tingkuang (謝廷光), Tang's widow, is given in the appendix. Hsieh affirms that the book, written by Tang himself, was completed in 1940. She reveals Tang's motive and purpose in writing the book, and explains why Tang's name appeared as the translator rather than the author. Back in 1940, Tang and his sister were each preparing for marriage. This drew Tang to ponder the nature of sexual love. At the time, according to Hsieh, Tang felt that the prevailing understanding of love and marriage was generally too superficial. He therefore decided to

³ (continued:) rather than sexual. The Mohists talk of universal love, *jian-ai* (兼愛), in which sexual love plays little part. The Daoists feel that, altogether, love and desire are harmful to human nature. Since these early discussions, there has been virtually no philosophical thematization and reflection on sexual love. Only in very recent times have there been a few Chinese intellectuals interested in the topic. Since the May Fourth period (1919), Lu Xun (魯迅), Lin Yu-Tang (林語堂), Chou Tso-jen (周作人), and other literati have written essays on various aspects of sexual love. See Shih Yen (石言), ed., *Hsing-ai che-hsueh* 《性愛哲學》, Haikou: Hainan Guo-ji Xinwen Chu-ban Zhong-xin, 1994. However, it is certain that no philosophical work has ever been written exclusively on sexual love.

write a book on the concept of ideal love, hoping to help young people to better understand the meaning of love and marriage. As to Tang's intention in posing as the translator, Hsieh offers two speculations: (1) The sage in the book adopts the tone of a prophet and gives admonitions and advice. Such a didactic tone did not match Tang's humble disposition, and it may be a further reason why Tang did not wish to claim authorship. (2) Tang, himself not yet married, was perhaps not in a position to guide and instruct others on matters of love. Hence, even though he displays wisdom and sensibility in the book, he did not want his true identity to be known to the reader.⁴

Finally, Hsieh expresses her own view that Tang was justified in taking pains to conceal his authorship: young people would more readily accept wisdom passed down over the generations from ancient times or from distant places; so, "in posing as the translator, Tang deliberately created a distance in time and space between reader and author with the hope of achieving a better effect."⁵

It seems to me that all three explanations above are reasonable, yet I have not been able to find further support from Tang's own writings. If we take the first of the two speculations, it would have sufficed for Tang to use a pen name, as this practice was already a trend among the literati in China at that time. If we take Hsieh's view that the name of the author given had to be from a distant time and place, then it would seem necessary for Tang to call his original work a translated piece. However, in the translator's preface to the 1947 edition, Tang's story of his first encounter with and subsequent translation of the book seems rife with contradictions. In the preface, Tang claimed that the book "was written by a nineteenth-century Polish writer Ke-er-luo-si-ji (Kileosky) and subsequently translated into English by Yue-han bei-le (John Balley 約翰貝勒) as *Gospel of Love*. The book soon went out of print. It was quite some time ago when I read a review of the book in an English magazine."⁶

Whoever has read this preface is likely to agree that the book is a translation, as the information given about the original author, the translator of the English version, and the book review in the English

⁴ Tang Chun-i, *Tang Chun-i quan-ji*, Taipei: Taiwan Hsueh-sheng Shu-ju, 1988,2: 87-88.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

magazine appears to be completely credible. Yet, after having consulted nearly all the relevant encyclopedias, I have not been able to locate either the Polish writer or the English translator. The original author of the book, according to Tang, was a Westerner, but the narrative was set in India. In the book, there is a prophet named 德拉斯 (De-la-si), originally a Zoroastrian, who later meditated on and came to realize the truth of the abode of Brahma, in Brahmanism. If the original author was a Westerner, there should be an acceptable explanation in the book as to why a Western writer would have to address the problem of love through the voice of an Eastern sage. Furthermore, ever since the appearance of Plato's *Symposium*, the problem of love has been an important topic of discussion in Western philosophy.⁷ The West has its own tradition of the philosophy of love, and it does not seem to draw upon Indian wisdom to elucidate the meaning of love. Moreover, the English title *Gospel of Love* seems to suggest close association with the discussions of love in the Western Christian tradition. However, there is no trace of any Christian idea in the book.

In short, the relation between Kileosky, the alleged author, and the views of love as expressed in the book is a riddle unsolved. Yet Tang goes on to relate how he came by the book, claiming that he discovered it in a secondhand bookshop in Chungking. It "bore a label showing a 'not-so-elegant' title, '*The Secret of Love*'." It was covered with dust, probably having lain unsold for quite some time. Tang's explanation for this was that "visitors to the bookshop, if they were decent people, would not care to open the book after seeing its title."⁸ It is noteworthy that "The Secret of Love" is a "not-so-elegant" title that "decent people" would not wish to read!⁹ But Tang felt that the work "on the whole corresponded with my [own] thoughts." Believing that young people in contemporary China needed a guide to help them through the difficulties of love and marriage, and that a good book on the subject was lacking in China, Tang decided to translate this one into Chinese. It originally consisted of eight chapters, Tang says, but he was able to translate and publish only the first five because the last three had been stolen. Besides, Tang said, the last three chapters were far too abstruse

⁷ See Irving Singer, *The Nature of Love*, 3 vols., Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966, 1984, and 1987.

⁸ *Tang Chun-i quan-ji*, 2:88.

⁹ This may be seen as indirect evidence that sexual love was still a taboo subject for most Chinese intellectuals.

to be of use to the general reader. Lastly, he says, "since the original book is lost, I am not able to correct mistakes in the translation and may probably have distorted the original meaning. For this I must express my apologies to the late author."¹⁰

This story about the provenance and translation of the book, the preface of which was written on November 30, 1940, was an obvious attempt to prove that Tang really was the translator and not the author, and the attempt was apparently successful. However, the translator's preface was used only in one edition (1947), and was removed after the 1949 edition.

There are two sources that offer evidence to prove that Tang was the author of the book. The first source is of course the remarks by Hsieh, discussed above, and the information provided by the students Li Tu and Tang Tuan-cheng (唐端正), with whom Tang was intimate.¹¹ Tang himself, however, never admitted to these things. To obtain further proof, then, we need to look into Tang's other works. It seems that Tang never mentioned *Ai-qing zhi fu-yin* in any of his published writings. It was not until the 1983 publication of *Zhi Ting-kuang shu* (Letters to Ting-kuang 《致廷光書》) that an answer to the riddle of *Ai-qing zhi fu-yin* could readily be found.

A total of thirty-six letters from Tang to Hsieh Ting-kuang, written between 1939 and 1942, before they were married, are collected in the *Zhi Ting-kuang shu*. For our purpose, the most important ones are the letters numbered 5 to 16 from 1940 (*Ai-qing zhi fu-yin* was completed around the same period). In the translator's preface to *Ai-ching chih fu-yin*, written on November 30, 1940, Tang says the book was completed "in May last year."¹² The five letters dated May 1940 are very long letters on the ideals and the metaphysical meaning of love between man and woman, and the content is very similar to the discussions in *Ai-qing zhi fu-yin*. We will discuss this further in the next section.

In letter 13, dated October 19, 1940, Tang mentions for the first time his plan to write the book. He thinks it is most important "to make people understand the true meaning of marriage and love [... T]herefore

¹⁰ *Tang Chun-i quan-ji*, 2:90.

¹¹ Mr. Tang Tuan-cheng has told me personally that Tang Chun-i admitted he was the author but never explained why he appeared as the translator.

¹² *Tang Chun-i quan-ji*, 2:89.

I want to write a book about the true meaning of marriage and love, hoping there will [thereby] be more happy and felicitous marriages. I am willing to use myself as an example; I would like to put into practice with you [Hsieh Ting-kuang] what I believe to be true and proper.”¹³ In letter 26, dated November 20, 1941, Tang again talks about the book. By then *Ai-qing zhi fu-yin* should have been completed, because Tang says, “About my book on the way to marriage—do you think you could find someone to do the copying for me?”¹⁴

Although Tang never mentioned *Ai-ching chih fu-yin* in his other works, we have reason to believe that the book about love and marriage mentioned in letters 13 and 26 is, in fact, *Ai-qing zhi fu-yin* because, apart from that book, Tang did not produce any other works on the subject of love.¹⁵ Tang’s identity as the actual author is therefore established. But the riddle remains: why did Tang claim to be the translator? Before we can answer this question, we should first determine the meaning of “love” as defined in this book.

The Metaphysical Meaning of Love (*Ai-qing*)¹⁶

The most important idea put forth in *Ai-qing zhi fu-yin* is that sexual love is definitely not a phenomenon of physical desire, but a manifestation of the spirit—a means of transcending the individual self to reach the cosmic reality:

¹³ Tang Chun-i, *Zhi Ting-kuang shu*, Taipei: Taiwan Hsueh-sheng Shu-ju, 1983, pp. 112-113.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 196.

¹⁵ There are at least three books by Tang in which love is discussed along the lines of *Ai-qing zhi fu-yin*; they are: *Ren-sheng zhi ti-yan* (The Lived Experience of Human Existence 《人生之體驗》) (1941), pp.58-59, 130-134; *Ren-sheng zhi ti-yan xu-bian* (The Lived Experience of Human Existence, Supplementary Volume 《人生之體驗續編》) (1955), pp.46-49; and *Dao-de zi-wo zhi jian-li* (The Construction of the Moral Self 《道德自我之建立》) (1963), pp.126-128.

¹⁶ “Love” is not at all the most appropriate translation of *ai-qing*. The term *ai-qing*, in fact, is not used in classical Chinese literature. The more preferable term for the English “love” is *qing* (情) by itself, while *ai* (愛), apart from the broader sense of “care” and “liking” in Confucianism, has the rather negative connotation of desire as used in Buddhism. *Ai-qing* has become part of the common Chinese vocabulary only in this century.

There exists only one kind of love in the universe, and all the kinds of love are only transformations of this one kind of love. There is only one kind of love, as there is only one true spiritual substance of life. All reflections cast on the human mind are only to enable man to come into contact with this true spiritual substance of life; and all loves are but this true spiritual substance of life. Sexual love is definitely not fundamentally different from other kinds of so-called pure, spiritual love. It differs from other kinds of love only in terms of the form, while in terms of the fundamental nature they are all closely interrelated. Therefore, sexual love is composed of all the kinds of so-called pure spiritual love, and pure spiritual love is often transformed from man-woman love.¹⁷

Tang's theory of love is basically metaphysical. The substance of the universe is the substance of life: all living beings are generated from the substance of the universe, while at the same time they are to return to the primordial One. What, then, is love? Love is the desire of all beings to break through the limits of individual existence to establish an empathetic exchange with other beings—love is this desire to transcend the finite to reach other beings and subsequently to return to the infinite. Tang goes on to say:

Among all beings, however, only the human being is capable of the conscious pursuit of breaking through the limits of his existence, and of the conscious desire for the infinite. Therefore, only the human being is capable of truly fulfilling the meaning of an infinite life, and of realizing that the meaning of an infinite spirit is to return to the primordial One. But by what means is a human being to return to the primordial One? By means of a perpetual, self-generating flow of love from his heart, a flow that never ends and lasts forever.¹⁸

Thus, human love, by nature, is infinite and never ending. In terms of the object desired by this infinite love, love can be classified into four kinds: love of truth, love of beauty, love of good, and love of God, that is, love of the universal soul itself. Tang explains:

¹⁷ *Ai-qing zhi fu-yin*, p. 8.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

When these four kinds of love become [reach the point] where the infinite unfolds, they become the highest love of man. This is because all of them are a quest for a transcendence of the self and a projection beyond the self. When the human being becomes where the infinite unfolds, he will forget his self and in turn sacrifice his self to complete the unfolding of love. And so, the human will be able to return to the primordial One: the substance of life, the spiritual reality, master of the world and the cosmic self. And so the human being gains the truest satisfaction within—he becomes the cosmic soul and master of the world, and experiences the joy and ecstasy of creating the world.¹⁹

From the quotation above we may derive the following understanding of love according to Tang: (1) Human love originates from the spiritual phenomenon of the unfolding of the everlasting and infinite process in which the substance of the universe splits and reunites. Such a spiritual phenomenon is manifested as a kind of perpetual, self-generating love. (2) There exists only one kind of love. All the phenomena of love—love of the true, the good, the beautiful, the divine, the opposite sex, and all other kinds of worldly love—are only different manifestations of the same metaphysical love. (3) Love is a desire—a desire for transcendence of the finite self to return to the infinite on the one hand, and a desire for reunion on the other. (4) Love is a conscious human activity, manifested through the spiritual activities of empathetic exchange and harmonious interchange with others. (5) The realization of all human values begins with love.

Tang's metaphysics of love is perhaps a combination of two traditions, Western and Chinese. The ideas of perpetual and self-generating love and of the substance of the universe can be said to derive from the Confucian concepts of *ren* and the union of nature and human beings. On the other hand, the idea of love as desire clearly originates from Plato's concept of *eros* in the Greek tradition. Understanding love to be the conscious activity of a subject and a mutual empathetic experience in which each party takes the other as the subject is the foundation of human values. This idea of love can be explained by the Confucian theory of *ren*. However, taking love to mean desire—a desire for transcendence of the finite self to achieve the infinite, in the form of love

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 6

for the true, the good, the beautiful, and the divine—belongs not to the Chinese tradition, but to the *eros* tradition developed from Plato's philosophy of love. In the discussions of love in the *Symposium*, Plato's main idea is that love is a desire for truth, goodness, beauty, and immortality, a desire for eternity through the transcendence of the individual. Obviously, Tang was familiar with Plato's idea of love. In his letters to Hsieh Ting-kuang, Tang refers to Plato at least twice. In letter 9, Tang remarks, "I do recommend that you read Plato's five great books of dialogues, in which he talks about the philosophy of love. A person who does not understand this philosophy will never be able to forget himself and so liberate himself to achieve spiritual renewal."²⁰

To achieve spiritual renewal is to transcend the limits of the body in order to reach eternal spirituality. At the end of the *Symposium*, when he has Socrates quote Diotima's remarks, Plato talks of the highest truth of love:

Don't you think he would find it a wonderful way to live, looking at it, contemplating it as it should be contemplated, and spending his time in its company? It cannot fail to strike you that only then will it be possible for him, seeing beauty as it should be seen, to produce not the likeness of goodness (since it is no likeness he has before him), but the real thing (since he has the real thing before him); and that this producing, and caring for, real goodness earns him the friendship of the gods and makes him, if anyone, immortal.²¹

The influence of Plato's philosophy, which reveres the mind and belittles the body, can be seen throughout *Ai-qing zhi fu-yin*. It seems that Plato's philosophy was the greatest source of inspiration for Tang when he wrote this book. In his eighteenth letter to Hsieh Ting-kuang about the problem and meaning of philosophy, Tang affirms Socrates's definition of philosophy as "the love of wisdom." At the end, by applying Plato's philosophy, Tang also discusses the relation among being, the universe, life, and wisdom:

²⁰ *Zhi Ting-kuang shu*, p. 76.

²¹ Plato, *Symposium*, trans. Tom Griffith, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989, sec.212a-b.

True, to study philosophy one must consider oneself to be a lover of wisdom, and [one who] makes the whole universe, all of life, his object of love. When you love a person, you will give every care and attention to him. Therefore, if you study philosophy, you have to give every care and attention to the universe and to life. This is to love the wisdom of the universe and of life. You must show an eager love and concern for wisdom before wisdom loves you in return. The more you love wisdom, the more wisdom will love you, until eventually you and wisdom embrace each other to become one. Your life and wisdom permeate each other, blend into each other, and in the end you cannot distinguish among love, wisdom, and yourself—such the true spirit of philosophy.²²

In a word, through love, human beings and the universe permeate one another and blend as One. Such is Tang's metaphysical meaning of love. But how is this concept of general metaphysical love to explain the love between man and woman?

The Metaphysical Transformation of Sexual Love

Ai-qing zhi fu-yin begins with a young man's request for advice from a prophet, De-la-si, on the problem of sexual love. The young man thinks that it is a general problem, but in the past, few sages or prophets had ever taken it as a genuine problem for discussion. Though sexual love is of little significance beyond the secular world, within this world it is a very common and most important issue. The young man, therefore, poses the following questions: How does one account for the phenomenon of sexual love in a "spiritual" philosophy? How does one find "the way from sexual love to the truth of the universe?"²³

These are the theoretical questions Tang attempts to answer in *Ai-qing zhi fu-yin* through the voice of the prophet De-la-si. In the *Zhi Ting-kuang shu*, however, it is existential questions that Tang sets out to address: questions about the conflict between feelings and rationality in his relationship with the object of his love, Hsieh Ting-kuang, and questions about the pain and joy he felt about his love.

²² *Zhi Ting-kuang shu*, p. 155.

²³ *Ai-qing zhi fu-yin*, p. 2.

The inspiration for answers to these questions is also drawn from Plato. In letter four, Tang talks about the meaning of the relationship between man and woman:

The relationship between man and woman is [that of] two discrete bodies desiring union into one; or two, which had originally been one but were split into two, now desiring for reunion. As Plato says in his book, man and woman were originally one person, but were split into two by the gods out of jealousy. Now, man and woman, therefore, desire to merge into one again. This is a subtle relationship: on the one hand there is a distance between them, and on the other a longing to reunite as one. The distance between them is respect; the desire for reunion is love. Between friends there is mainly respect, and among parents and brothers there is mainly love. And between man and woman, it is something in between. Therefore, the mutual comfort and care between man and woman bears yet an additional significance. From this I have come to realize the value of love.²⁴

In Plato's *Symposium*, Aristophanes's theory of love begins with the myth that humans were once divided into three sexes: male, female and male-female. Also, the human body was originally round, with four arms and four legs and a head with two faces. Then, human arrogance offended the gods and the human body was split into two. The human being has therefore become an incomplete being, a half-being, and this half-being ever desires to acquire wholeness with another half-being. Quoting Aristophanes, Plato said: "That is why we have this innate love of one another. It brings us back to our original state, trying to reunite us and restore us to our true human form."²⁵ It is beyond question that Tang's definition of love as the desire for union into one is derived from Plato. Tang's concept of love, however, does not stop at Aristophanes's theory of the half desiring to become whole. According to Tang, the lust inherent in the desire for union between man and woman will be transformed into the love that is the desire for union between two spiritual beings.

Tang believed that the desire for the opposite sex developed at the same time as the human desire for the true, the good, the beautiful, and

²⁴ *Zhi Ting-kuang shu*, p. 20

²⁵ Plato, *Symposium*, 191d.

the divine. All four kinds of metaphysical love can be manifested in the relation of mutual desire between man and woman. When a man's eyes are set on the opposite sex, driven by her beauty, this is love for the beautiful. When a man is drawn to her body and soul, it is love for the true. When a man wishes to share happiness with her, it is love for the good. And when man feels her mastery over his soul and his life, with a power that manifests itself almost as a religious sentiment, it becomes love of the divine.²⁶ Therefore, "even in the shallowest and most unrefined love for the opposite sex, these four kinds of love are present, and if they are ever removed, love for the opposite sex is impossible."²⁷

Sexual love is that love in which all four loves of the universe are realized. It is also the means by which man and woman transcend the limits of the self, and by which expansion of the internal, spiritual self is manifested. In letter six, Tang includes a detailed discussion of the meaning of the union between man and woman:

The relationship between man and woman is the transforming of a physical relationship into a spiritual relationship, the physical relationship being symbolic of the spiritual relationship. Among all human relationships, only in the relationship between man and woman is this symbolic meaning of the physical relationship found. What man is pursuing is only the expansion of the internal, spiritual self. To expand the self means to be spiritually linked to others; to desire a spiritual link is to desire union; and to unite is to expand the self. Nevertheless, among all human spiritual exchanges, only the man-woman relationship has such a concrete symbol. This is because there is a physical desire for union into one. Apart from this, all other human exchanges do not carry such symbol[ism], yet spiritual interchange must have such a symbol. While spiritual interchange is internal, the symbol is external. The [purpose of the] internal is to unite with the external, and only in the man-woman relationship can we find such a symbol of union between the internal and the external. Thus, the man-woman relationship contains three levels of union. This is the special position sexual love takes among other human loves.²⁸

²⁶ See *Ai-qing zhi fu-yin*, p. 9.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Zhi Ting-kuang shu*, p. 35.

In *Ai-qing zhi fu-yin*, Tang expands the idea of union between man and woman into a process by which the universal soul, having been divided, recovers itself. The male and female represent two opposite qualities, and when the male unites with the female, these opposite qualities “complement each other to become a complete whole, like a microcosm.”²⁹ Therefore, sexual love “in effect is not man desiring woman, or woman desiring man: it is the universal soul, having been cut apart, desiring to recover itself, fusing the two severed parts so that together man and woman will return to the universal soul itself.”³⁰

It follows, then, that sexual love is elevated to the metaphysical, spiritual level. Nevertheless, the union in man-woman love is not a natural phenomenon, but a conscious, human moral and spiritual activity. Therefore, sexual love must be based on commitment, loyalty, and respect. The union of two human beings must be a union of morality. “The union of morality and the union of [human] beings must become each other’s [mutual] foundation. The two unions merge with each other, encircle each other, and this is a way to make love endure forever.”³¹

Tang takes sexual love as a model for all other loves. Only through the union in love between a man and a woman can we realize other human love relationships. Parent-child love, fraternal love, the love between friends, and human love for all things in Nature—all are born out of sexual love as the union of two human beings.

The light of love of the universal soul, expressed between parents, becomes the light of love between man and woman. This light of love shines through the man and the woman, lighting up their hearts; and in turn this man and this woman, with the same light of love, shine on their son, and so the light turns into parent-child love. [...] This is the greatest [form of love,] ethical love, transformed from the love of a man and a woman—*xiao* (fidelity 孝).³²

²⁹ *Ai-qing zhi fu-yin*, p. 18.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 21.

The Mystery of the Author Ke-er-luo-si-ji and the Prophet De-la-si

In *Ai-qing zhi fu-yin*, the prophet De-la-si has already acquired a thorough understanding of the truth of the universe. Before he returns to a high mountain to lead a life of seclusion, he shares with his young friends his views on the profound meaning of sexual love and spiritual philosophy. Who is this prophet De-la-si? Surely he is a fictional character created by Tang, but he is also Tang himself. In the appendix to volume 2 of the *Tang Chun-i quan-ji*, the reason Hsieh gives for Tang's posing as the translator instead of the author is that the didactic tone of the prophet-sage in the book did not match Tang's humble disposition. From the *Zhi Ting-kuang shu*, however, we see that in 1940, at the age of thirty, Tang was a very conceited young man. In letter 4, he says:

A person in my circumstances, who has managed to read all the important Chinese, Western, and Indian books of philosophy, who understands both literature and science, who has his unique way of thinking, and who has produced so many writings—a man like this, frankly, I have not seen [in] a second one except myself.³³

And in letter 11:

On January 17 last year, I reached the age of thirty, and I knew my method and area of philosophical thinking had already been established. Now I have already founded a system of philosophy that relates the philosophy of mathematics and science to the philosophy of religion. Where it is ingenious it strikes you as the work of ghosts or the design of gods, and where it is original and forceful it shakes the earth and shocks heaven. My aspiration is to complete within fifteen years three great works: one on the universe, one on life, and one on religion. I am sure these works will be passed down to future generations, though few people in the present age, I am afraid, will be able to understand them.³⁴

In letter 13, Tang boasts further:

³³ *Zhi Ting-kuang shu*, p. 19.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 96.

I believe that in modern China there has not yet been any other scholar of philosophy like me—who not only has gained from life experience a clear knowledge of the value of human dignity, of the spirit, and of love, but also has acquired a thorough understanding of the theories of Chinese, Western and Indian philosophers from ancient to modern times, and is able to present these theories through a brand new philosophical system. I therefore feel that my responsibility is truly serious. I hope my philosophical works will add to the strength and courage necessary for reforming the world of its cruelty, indifference, and disgrace, so that the pain and suffering of the present age can be lifted, if ever so slightly, from the human race [...] I am determined, also, to spread to the world a gospel of love.³⁵

We must remember that the remarks above appear only in Tang's love letters. There are seldom any comments as arrogant as these in his published works. Such a thorough and unrestrained confession of thoughts and feelings before one's love is certainly to be allowed, and is also most credible in this context. In any case, what these remarks mean is that during this period Tang believed that no one else in the world was comparable to him. That is, virtually no one but Tang himself could claim that he had completely understood the philosophies of China, the West, and India from ancient to modern times, had grasped the truth, and that now only he could offer a completely new philosophical system to solve the problem of human suffering. Posing as such a person, Tang would certainly have been a sage or a prophet. That the question of sexual love had never been discussed by Chinese philosophers and prophets was due to the fact that they had not seen the relation between the profound spiritual meaning of philosophy and the metaphysical meaning of sexual love.³⁶

In the history of Chinese philosophy, almost no philosopher had ever discussed the question of sexual love. The Confucian discussions of *ren* and love are only reflections on the level of ethics and morality, taking sexual love as a private matter too trivial to merit further attention. On the other hand, in the West, although there had been a tradition of discussion of the philosophy of love from the time of Plato, the emphasis was on love as the desire for truth, beauty, and the good. The concepts of love as an empathetic exchange between man and woman and as the all-embracing love of *ren* for things in nature were

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

³⁶ See *Ai-qing zhi fu-yin*, p. 3.

absent. Tang's *Ai-qing zhi fu-yin*, therefore, is a book about love that, without question, connects and yet transcends the Chinese and Western philosophical traditions. At the same time, with regard to the Indian setting of the story, the book can be considered an innovative attempt to unite the Chinese, Western, and Indian philosophies that had evolved from ancient times to the present.

There is certainly a good amount of arrogance, conceit, and indeed ambition in Tang's undertaking. When in his later years Tang reflected on his life, he admitted that his arrogance had been greatest around the age of thirty. After thirty, this arrogance slowly abated, and he later began consciously to suppress it.³⁷ Tang probably sensed the problem in the way he approached the writing of the book, and he knew that he could not appear as the author, but had to pose instead as the "translator." Nonetheless, the translator is still an interpreter whose mission is to represent the ideas of a foreign cultural system in terms of his own culture. In this context, then, the theory of love in *Ai-qing zhi fu-yin* should be seen as an attempt at interpretation of the philosophical thought of China, the West, and India, and it can be argued that Tang's claim to be a "translator" was therefore quite appropriate.

In the preceding discussion, I think the question has been answered as to why Tang appeared as translator rather than author of *Ai-qing zhi fu-yin*. Tang was well aware of his own arrogance and conceit in writing the book. His aim was nonetheless to communicate to himself and to Hsieh Ting-kuang his lofty ideals. He believed that he understood the true meaning of love, not only on a theoretical level, but also through reflection on his feelings during his actual experience of being in love. Certainly, *Ai-qing zhi fu-yin* is different from the *Zhi Ting-kuang shu*, the former written for general readers, and the latter for only one reader. For this reason, as the author of *Ai-qing zhi fu-yin* Tang turns himself into a foreign writer Ke-er-luo-si-ji (Kileosky), and in the narrative he becomes an Indian prophet De-la-si. Through these two characters Tang expounds his personal beliefs.³⁸

³⁷ See Tang Chun-i, *Bing li qian kun* 《病裏乾坤》, Taipei: O-hu Chu-ban She 鵝湖出版社, 1970, p. 13.

³⁸ It remains a riddle why Tang chose for the author the name "Kileosky" and for the prophet the name "De-la-si". One possible conjecture, suggested by the anonymous referee of this essay, is that Tang might have been influenced by Nietzsche's *Also sprach Zarathustra*, using Zarathustra as a model for the prophet. However, there is little evidence to support this theory as Nietzsche is never mentioned in Tang's early works.

Conclusion

Tang's life before the age of thirty was an important stage in his personal development. In the afterword to his final important work *Sheng-ming cun-zai yu xin-ling jing-jie* (The Existence of Life and the Condition of the Mind 《生命存在與心靈境界》), Tang reflects on his life in this period:

The fundamental ideas and theories in this present book, and my fundamental beliefs about the universe and about life, had been conceived before I was thirty.

Around the age of thirty, I completed two books: on my feelings and thoughts about life, and on the constructing of the moral self. They both took the form of a monologue, by which I conversed with myself on what I had seen and experienced. At that time I had already read books of philosophy by ancient and modern philosophers from both the East and the West, but in the two books there was almost no discussion of the thoughts of philosophers other than my own. It was certainly an extremely naive, but sincere and artless act. But I do not think that in these two books there is anything crude and original in my approach to the truth of the universe and of life that I have failed to keep since then. The scope of the present book is still within what was set up in the previous two books. Surely this may only show that I have advanced and improved myself but little over the years, but it also proves that there is present in this universe and in life a certain truth that stands valid and fresh through time. In the thirty years since this period, I cannot say I have not studied hard; as a matter of fact, my knowledge has improved and expanded. But after going through so many twists and turns, I realize that I am still walking along the original road I chose to take.³⁹

Ai-qing zhi fu-yin was written when Tang was around thirty years of age. Tang does not mention the book in the quotation above, yet certainly the profound meaning of the transcendence of love and of spiritual philosophy expounded in the book is no less significant than Tang's thoughts and feelings on life and the moral self. In fact, the highest realm of the moral life is the experience of transcending the self to unite with the universe. Sexual love, according to Tang, is the most

³⁹ Tang Chun-i, *Sheng-ming cun-zai yu xin-ling jing-jie*, Taipei: Taiwan Hsueh-sheng Shu-ju, 1980, p. 1157.

profound experience of this kind of union. Although after the completion of the book Tang seldom discussed the subject of love, human love as an empathetic exchange and harmonious interflow became the foundation of his philosophy. The abundance of ideas and arguments put forth in the *Sheng-ming cun-zai yu xin-ling jing-jie* are ultimately to be grounded in a *Xing-qing zhi xing-shang-xue* (Metaphysics of Love [xing-qing] 《性情之形上學》).⁴⁰

⁴⁰ See *ibid.*, pp. 1180-1184.