

Jung Chang's *Wild Swans*: Love as a Political Concept

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Abstract

This article explores the different forms of love which appear in a work which is part family memoir, part autobiography, and part literary fiction: Jung Chang's *Wild Swans: Three Daughters of China* (1991). This exploration is underpinned by theories of love articulated first by Karl Marx and Alexandra Kollontai and later by Erich Fromm and Michael Hardt. In different ways these thinkers all point to the idea that love is not merely a private matter between two individuals but rather a social and political phenomenon. Fromm's insistence that love changes according to historical and cultural circumstances is shown to be relevant throughout as Chang portrays love adapting to the vast political changes taking place in China from approximately 1924 (when her grandmother became a concubine) until 1976 (the death of Mao). Corresponding to a large extent to the life histories of the "three daughters of China" — Chang's grandmother, Chang's mother, and Chang herself — the article traces a distinctive movement through property love and family love to "winged Eros"-based love, "red love" and finally love as a decision.

Keywords: property love, red love, Alexandra Kollontai, Michael Hardt, Jung Chang, the CCP

One thinker who stands out in the twentieth century for making love political is Karl Marx. Love becomes political, according to Marx, especially when it is connected to money. In a section entitled "Money" in his "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts" he explains that "[m]oney, since it has the property of being able to buy anything, and to appropriate all objects to itself, is thus the object *par excellence*;" and, therefore, "[m]y power is as great as the power of my money" (179, 180). Money represents "the bond of all bonds" (181). Thus, from Marx's perspective, although the members of a couple — assumed to be bourgeois, heterosexual, and married — might like to think of themselves as inhabiting a love-based relationship, their union is often underpinned primarily by money, especially money invested in private property. Marx highlighted "the ignominy of private property that wishes to establish itself as the positive essence of [not just the couple but] the community" (148) because he believed in the power of private property and money to reduce the possibility for genuine love.

These ideas were taken up and modified by the revolutionary Bolshevik and later Commissar for Social Welfare in the USSR, Alexandra Kollontai, who, like Marx, insisted that love was inherently political. "Love is a profoundly social emotion," she writes, "[l]ove is not in the least a 'private' matter concerning only two loving persons" (278). Kollontai took up arms in particular against the institution of marriage when "grounded in (a) material and financial considerations, [and] (b) the economic dependence of the female sex on the family

breadwinner — the husband — rather than the social collective . . .” (225). Following Marx, Kollontai saw financial issues in a marriage as often linked to ownership of property, and this was one reason why she supported the abolition of private property.

Writing much more recently, literary theorist and philosopher Michael Hardt detects in Kollontai’s work a formulation of the idea that love of property involves relations based not just on a person’s ownership of property in the traditional sense but also on one person’s possession of another person. Hardt captures this important insight when he writes, “In capitalist society, even romantic love is a property relation. ‘You are mine’ and ‘I am yours’ are emblematic of the pledge of love of property” (“Red Love” 783). He seems to get to the heart of Kollontai’s vision when he writes, “[o]nly once property love is abolished can we begin to invent a new love, a revolutionary love, a red love” (781). Kollontai had been following up on an idea implicit in young Marx’s writings, the contention that the abolition of private property could bring in its wake greater opportunities for love to flourish. Hardt’s formulation of “red love” may be taken to refer to a love that asserts itself as an alternative to love of property.

Following its inception in 1921, the Chinese Communist Party (the CCP or CPC) embraced Marxist (and Leninist) ideology and aimed for a fundamentally socialist market economy. Although over the years the party’s stance in relation to Marxist doctrine would fluctuate, frequently being a matter of vociferous contention, Chinese Marxist history has of course tended to be dominated by an emphasis on material forces rather than nebulous concepts like love. During a famous talk at a Yenan Forum in 1942, leader Mao Zedong even pilloried those who might be inclined to attach too much importance to love when he declared, “. . . it is a basic Marxist concept that being determines consciousness, that the objective realities of class struggles and national struggle determine our thoughts and feelings. But some of our comrades turn this upside down and maintain that everything ought to start from ‘love’” (“Talks”). Thankfully since that time, contra Mao’s polemic against love, certain Chinese writers, film makers, artists and others have emerged who have fearlessly portrayed a love that refuses to be thought of as secondary to any supposedly objective material realities.

In his Introduction to the collection of essays *China’s Literary and Cultural Scenes at the Turn of the 21st Century* Jie Lu argues that certain works of Chinese literature (and film) are able to convey aspects of “personal, family, and regional histories . . . suppressed by the hegemony of official history” (3). A vivid example of this can be seen in chapter one, “History in a Mythical Key: Temporality, Memory, and Tradition in Wang Anyi’s Fiction,” in which Ban Wang places Anyi’s work among that of writers for whom “fictional and imaginative elements are implicated in a historical imagination,” expressed especially through recourse to literary forms that rely extensively on the “biographical or autobiographical” (16, 17).¹ Wang Anyi does not steer clear of the subject

of love, the importance of which is indicated in titles of novels like *Love on a Barren Mountain* (1986) and *Love in a Small Town* (1986), which constitute the first two novellas of a trilogy well-known for controversially detailing extra-marital affairs in China during the Cultural Revolution and beyond. Another writer who, like Anyi, writes about love is Anchee Min. Both Min and Anyi were “sent to the countryside” and made to perform forced labour during the Cultural Revolution and both draw on these experiences in their writings.² Another Chinese writer with a predilection for the genre of autobiography and fictionalized biography is Jung Chang. Although love is crucial in the work of both Wang Anyi and Anchee Min, only in Jung Chang’s *Wild Swans: Three Daughters of China* (1991), which starts around the beginning of the twentieth century during the last gasps of the Manchu empire and ends shortly after the death of Mao in 1976, is love between couples traced across three generations. Chang’s decision to cover a broad time frame enables her to show how different forms of love manifest themselves against the backdrop of the monumental political changes taking place in China during a substantial part of the twentieth century.

Chang (originally named Er-hong), who left China in 1978 in order to study in England and, since settling there, is now considered a British writer, is most known for *Wild Swans*, which was published in 1991 and quickly became a best-seller. One of the first reviewers explained the book’s notoriety partly on the basis that it was “another damning indictment of the Communist system” (Thurston 1207). More recent scholarly responses to *Wild Swans* have focused on, for example, Chang’s dexterous and very detailed construction of a space of memory involving the interplay of a present tense Anglicized diasporic perspective and a past tense delineation of several decades of social and political turmoil in her native China (Chunhui Peng). Comfortably ensconced in Britain writing *Wild Swans*, Chang of course does not shy away from portraying the widespread devastation in her homeland, particularly during the Famine (1959-1961) and the horrifying events that stemmed from the beginning of the Cultural Revolution in 1966. It is not difficult to find studies of the ubiquitous and often “arbitrary” violence that took place during the Cultural Revolution.³ Studies of love, however, are much more difficult to find. Chroniclers of family histories or fictionalized autobiographies such as Chang ensure, through their writing, that stories involving love are not erased from Chinese Marxist history.

The first section below focuses on Chang’s rendering of her maternal grandmother, Yu-fang’s story which initially in pre-Communist China fits neatly into the perspective on love in relation to property (and family) as articulated especially by Kollontai in relation to capitalism. However, as Yu Fang moves from being a concubine, essentially owned by General Xue Zhi-heng, and becomes linked through marriage to Dr. Xia signs of a different kind of love begin to emerge. Despite Dr. Xia’s age — he is in his mid-60s when their relationship begins — the “new” love that he experiences with Yu-fang may be associated with what Kollontai’s biographer Barbara Eve

Clement calls “winged Eros,” defined as a love that transcends issues concerning property and ownership and involves an “eroticism with the possessiveness removed” (qtd. in Hardt 791-92).⁴

This second form of love also plays an important role in section two which details Chang’s mother, De-hong’s relationship with Comrade Wan Yu who becomes Chang’s father. Although Chang’s father goes to great lengths to play out a role in keeping with his sometime lofty position on the Communist Party ladder and Chang’s mother served as a lower ranking party organizer, theirs is the kind of love that refuses to buckle even at a time and place where the Party leadership endeavours to do all it can to suppress it. The way that Chang describes her parents’ love also lends more support to the contention that love is always a social matter rather than simply involving two individuals.

Section three covers Chang’s turn to her own generation. Here she presents another version of love which is love as a decision. She portrays herself as deliberately recoiling from love. Chang’s thesis here is in line with the view of the German sociologist and philosopher Eric Fromm whose *The Art of Loving* was widely read in the UK and was published in 1956. Fromm writes, “To love somebody is not just a strong feeling – it is a decision, it is a judgement, it is a promise. If love were only a feeling, there would be no basis for the promise to love each other forever. A feeling comes and it may go” (44). In the late 1960s and early 70s Chang was a Red Guard, was forced to work as a peasant, became a “barefoot doctor,” and even worked briefly as an electrician. She had a number of admirers. In resisting love, she may be regarded as following not only Fromm’s claim that love is a decision but also Kollontai’s resistance to the idea that a woman should be owned by a man.

The lives of all three “Daughters of China” in *Wild Swans* may be regarded as suitable for analysis through the lens of feminist theory. This, however, is not my concern. Instead, I embrace a view espoused by Fromm when he writes, “If love is the capacity of the mature, productive character, it follows that the capacity to love in an individual living in any given culture depends on the influence this culture has on the character of the person” (65). Although there are overlaps between, for example, the “winged Eros” form of love experienced by Chang’s grandmother and Dr. Xia and later by Chang’s parents, the issues of property love and family love experienced by the grandmother are more clearly linked to socio-historic circumstances. Later, Chang’s own decision not to love is connected to her being in China and having to endure the consequences of the Cultural Revolution. The way in which different forms of love linked to cultural circumstances play a crucial role across the three generations described in *Wild Swans* reinforces the notion that love is social and, therefore, inherently political.

I. Confronting Property Love and Family Love

Chang's novel opens in 1924, when Chang's grandmother, Yu-Fang, becomes the concubine of General Xue Zhiheng, a warlord general in Peking. Just prior to this event Chang's great grandfather had cleverly created an opportunity for the renowned general to stumble upon Yu-Fang while she was praying and the chance to see her at a theatrical event where he could listen to her playing the musical instrument, the *qin*, at a specially arranged dinner. These orchestrated situations enable the General to come to appreciate not only the fifteen-year-old's "beauty" as embodied in her "lustrous skin," long black hair (30), sloping shoulders, and her bound feet (31) but also her "intelligence" and "artistic talent" (38).⁵ The General, thus, quickly proposes that she become one of his concubines.

In the 1920s when conditions in China were still to some extent feudal, despite the CCP's instigation of its new democratic revolution, it was still customary for the suitor and his concubine to undergo a formal ceremony in which they would kowtow both to tablets of Heaven and Earth and to each other. After this ceremony, General Xue and Yu-Fang live together for only a week, followed by a separation of six years. Chang describes her grandmother as having naively believed that she loved the General. (41) This love, however, may be thought of as resembling that which Marx writes about when he declares, "If you love without arousing a reciprocal love, that is, if your love does not as such produce love in return . . . then your love is impotent and a misfortune" (183). Yu-Fang also of course fails to recognize or refuses to recognize that her relationship with the General has always had its origins in money. Chang's great grandfather had taken substantial financial risks — even going so far as to rent a theatre and have an opera performed — to nudge the General in the direction of acquiring Yu-Fang as a concubine. Had the plan failed, he could easily have become bankrupt; but as General Xue begins to lavish great gifts — known as a "bride price" — on Chang's great grandparents, it quickly becomes clear that the plan is succeeding.⁶

Surely the main bond between Chang's grandmother and the General has always been money. In fact, this bond has never been between concubine and general, but rather between the two men: the General and Chang's great grandfather.⁷ More evidence for the idea that money, not love, is the catalyst for this particular narrative is provided by the fact that after Chang's great grandfather pays the price to bring about the formal union between his daughter and General Xue and receives financial recompense for his efforts, he goes on to gain a promotion, becomes quite rich and even acquires what had been one of his primary goals: more than one concubine of his own (57-58). Yu-Fang can thus be considered a mere pawn in a money-centred game initiated by her father. Just as she has no say in whether she will become the General's concubine — "The only way to say no and be taken seriously was to commit suicide" (39) — as soon as she becomes a concubine she finds herself having to follow societal mores encapsulated in maxims like "a woman was not supposed to complain" and "a good woman was

not supposed to have a point of view at all” (45). After the kowtowing ceremony, the General is able to treat his new concubine as he pleases, but she hardly has the right to speak. Chronically dependent on the general, especially because she has no independent means, Yu-Fang’s situation is the epitome of female subordination deplored so much by Kollontai.

Eventually Chang’s grandmother manages to escape and return to live with her parents where she might avail herself of other opportunities to find love. This culminates in the appearance of Dr. Xia who visits her after she suffers a nervous breakdown. Chang writes, “When he [Dr Xia] first walked into her room, he was so struck by her beauty that in his confusion he backed straight out again and mumbled to the servant that he felt unwell” (60). This may sound like conventional *eros*, carnal and subjective, but after Dr Xia composes himself and returns, Chang’s grandmother finds herself for the first time in the company of a man who is willing to listen to her expressing her troubles and aspirations. This opening-up is, however, absolutely one-sided. There is no sign that the man reciprocates by sharing his own troubles with Yu-Fang. Dr. Xia and his much younger patient, according to Chang, quickly “fell in love” (60). As she enters into marriage, Chang’s grandmother upholds a belief in keeping with Manchurian culture, that a wife is generally expected to keep her lips sealed: “Traditionally, an important way in which a woman expressed her love for her man was by agreeing with him in everything [...]. She was so contented with Dr. Xia that she did not want to turn her mind even slightly in the direction of disagreement” (84). This subservient attitude toward the male suggests that she has not entirely recovered from the need for a woman to be deferential to the male/husband which she experienced to a far greater degree in her previous role as concubine.

After falling in love with Dr. Xia, Chang’s grandmother finds herself having to confront an even more serious immediate difficulty as the couple soon found themselves in conflict with most of Dr. Xia’s extended family. This is essentially for two reasons. The eldest of Dr. Xia’s three sons indicates that he (and his brothers) cannot tolerate the thought of having a stepmother younger than themselves, and more importantly of a much lower social status (as a former concubine), to whom, according to Manchu tradition, they would have to bow down every morning and night (61). The brothers and their wives are also very perturbed by the age difference. For them the thought of kowtowing to such a young woman is humiliating and absurd.⁸ The other and surely more compelling reason for the family members’ strident opposition to the union involves the question of property and inheritance. “The relatives feared that my grandmother,” writes Chang, “might lay her hands on Dr. Xia’s wealth, as she would automatically become the manageress of the household as his wife” (63). The family is essentially accusing Yu-Fang of “property love.” If she marries Dr Xia, she may not only acquire ownership of the family property but also have considerable authority over the rest of the immediate family.

In a later very animated discussion which leads to Dr. Xia beating his eldest son with his walking stick, this son even takes out a pistol and shoots himself, hoping that an action so extreme in nature might induce his father to come to his senses and call off the wedding (65). This melodramatic gesture, from a Marxist perspective, can be seen as primarily motivated by money or “property love”. The squabbles over property in Dr. Xia’s household thus smack of the capitalist system which Marx (as well as Engels) and Kollontai had found so abhorrent. Rather than leading to the calling off of the wedding, the young man’s shooting of himself serves to widen the rift between Dr. Xia and his immediate family. Following Chang’s grandmother and her daughter’s move into Dr. Xia’s house, the family’s hostility toward these newcomers becomes evident, for instance, when Dr. Xia’s grandchildren are found to have bullied the little girl to the extent of even pushing her down a well. Dr. Xia then opts for a complete break from his own family. Taking Chang’s grandmother and mother with him, he leaves the house after giving all of his land to his eldest son’s widow, his medicine shop to his second son, and the house to his youngest son (73). After also providing for his servants, he (along with his new wife and the child) leaves the home, moving, in terms deployed by Marx, from “propertied” to “unpropertied” status.⁹ Before leaving the house, Dr. Xia asks his new wife if she has any objection to being poor. “If you have love,” she replies sentimentally, “even plain cold water is sweet” (73). Perhaps by forsaking property and opting to rent a mud hut (74), this husband and wife are placing themselves in a position to better understand the relationship between money (or lack of money) and love. Perhaps for property love they substitute “winged Eros,” involving what Clements, as quoted earlier, termed an “eroticism with the possessiveness removed” (qtd. in Hardt 791-92).

One way that love and money may resemble each other, as suggested by Hardt and Antonio Negri in *Commonwealth* (2009) is that both require inventiveness (180). In the mud hut heavy stones have to be laid on the corrugated iron roofing to prevent the roof from being blown away by the wind. Extreme poverty exacerbated by the reality that much of the locally produced food is consumed by the Japanese troops based in Manchuria and large quantities are sent back to Japan means that Dr. Xia, his new wife, and adopted daughter eat mainly “acorn meal [...] which tasted and smelled revolting” (75).¹⁰ In the evenings they play cards inventing a new ritual: “[...] if Dr. Xia lost, my grandmother would smack him three times, and if she lost, Dr. Xia would kiss her three times” (75). Despite the hardships, for Chang’s grandmother, “this was the happiest time of her life,” especially because she believed herself to be loved: “Dr Xia loved her [...]” (75).¹¹ Love, for Yu-Fang, thus accompanies being poor and “unpropertied.” Another way in which money and love resemble each other, as suggested by Hardt, is that both have the power to create social bonds (“For Love or Money,” 678-80). Following the move to the mud hut, Dr. Xia and Chang’s grandmother draw people together as, for instance, when neighbours come to perform in or watch old Manchu performances containing improvised songs often involving stories about their husbands (77-

78). A cloud, however, still hovers over the couple's relationship. This is most apparent during the Mid-Autumn Festival, the festival of family union. Chang explains that the word for "union" in Mandarin corresponds to the word "round" (97). Neither Chang's grandmother nor mother are allowed to use this word in front of Dr. Xia because it triggers in him the memory of the break-up of his family and especially his eldest son's suicide.

After Chang's mother forgets the taboo against using the word "round," a domestic crisis ensues in which Chang's grandmother screams to her husband: "Go back to your sons and grandsons!" and later complains quietly to her daughter that "she and Dr. Xia could never be completely happy with the heavy price they had paid for their love." She embraces the little girl saying, "she was the only thing she had in her life" (98). The figurative "heavy price" may suggest that Chang's grandmother is now beginning to grasp the connection between money and love, specifically how money takes the place of love (as in the origins of her relationship with General Xue). By calling her daughter a "thing" she also implies that one day, like her mother, the little girl will likely grow up to become an object to be passed, for the right price, from one man to another. Dr. Xia has paid the price for walking away from his entire family. His new small family unit can never erase the memory of and his emotional tie to his previous family.¹² Although his "winged Eros"-based love for Chang's grandmother has brought with it a sense of greater alienation from his old family, this of course does not mean that he never feels alienated from the new family.

II. Love as Social rather than Private

Comrade Wan Yu (who will become Chang's father) first meets De-hong (who becomes Chang's mother) in 1948, just before the establishment of the People's Republic at the end of the Kuomintang-Communist Civil War giving the CCP almost unlimited power. When Wan Yu first lays eyes on De-hong he sees her as "pretty and feminine, even rather coquettish" but is also impressed that as a student leader she has given orders to men (168). She in turn is pleased that he looks more like a poet than a person actively involved in guerrilla warfare, for which he has even appeared in wanted posters. She is especially impressed by his "excellence as a speaker" (168). Chang tells us that the two "fell in love" while on a group expedition to a small town called Harbin, notable for "its Russian mood of lingering pensiveness and poetry" (169). Comrade Wan, however, has to wait for official permission from the Jinzhou Party Committee to even talk about love" (*tan-lian-ai*) with his bride-to-be (170). As well as presenting obstacles to couples wishing to marry and have children, the Communist Party was also gradually taking over the traditional role of "family head" (172).¹³ The need for permission from the Communist

Party in order to even be able to talk about love and proceed toward marriage is of course a sign of the invasion of the state into every aspect of individual lives.

Chang's parents marry in 1949, the same year which sees an end to the Kuomintang-Communist war and the establishment of the People's Republic of China. After the wedding, the married couple are subjected to constant surveillance, are not permitted to live together, and are allowed to only sleep together one day a week (Saturdays). Any break in these rules is considered a sign that individuals are pledging allegiance to "Romantic love" before allegiance to the Party. Chang's father is much more prone than Chang's mother to towing the Party line. He does not seem to mind that everything "private" becomes "political", which has a direct impact on his relationship with his wife. In various situations when Chang's mother encounters difficulties because the authorities see her behaviour as at odds with Party ethics, she finds her husband, as she sees it, putting party-interest before her. "She," writes Chang, "gave a space to the private; my father did not" (185). Her father says quite simply, "You have to obey the Party even if you do not understand it or agree with it" (180). Their differing views on these priorities cause friction in their relationship, which reaches its acme when Chang's mother resuscitates her relationship with a Kuomintang Colonel. Hui-ge is a good-looking young man whom De-hong had been fond of prior to marrying Comrade Yu, although she always suspected that behind his befriending of her lay "political motives", especially his wanting to get information to the Communists, related to his supposed disillusionment with the Kuomintang (142). Years later, following a siege and Communist take-over in Jinzhou, Chang's mother learns that Hui-ge has been arrested. She begins to visit him in prison and even appeals on his behalf to a person in authority, Yu-wu, who in his report, will suggest that in passing information over to the Communist side Hui-ge may have been motivated by love for De-hong (176). Chang's mother thus finds herself in a situation where not only can she not prove that she and Hui-ge had not been in love, but there also appears to be evidence to the contrary (176). During one of her prison visits, as she and Hui-ge realize that time is running out, "They wept together, sitting in full view of the guards with a table between them on which they had to place their hands." Chang writes, "Hui-ge took my mother's hands in his; she did not pull back" (181). When Chang's father hears about these meetings, he especially objects to the holding of hands, pointing out that "Since the time of Confucius, men and women have to be married, or at least lovers to touch in public . . ." (182). For the Communists, a man and woman holding hands in public is a clear signal that they have put their private love before their love of the Party.

Some years later, during a visit from Chang's grandmother, Chang's mother learns of Hui-ge's execution by firing squad (229). Yu-fang emphasizes not so much the fact that she had to pay undertakers to give him a proper burial, but rather the reproaches she received from Communists in the neighbourhood who saw her as being

sympathetic toward “a criminal” (230). Rather than centring on the bond between De-hong and Hui-ge, Comrade Yu’s jealousy focuses on the idea that the grandmother had always preferred Hui-ge to himself as a potential match for her daughter. Comrade Yu does not doubt his wife’s feelings for him, but laments his mother-in-law’s preference for Hui-ge. This bringing of the mother-in-law and Hui-ge into the picture reinforces the notions that love is not simply about two individuals and that bonds between husbands and wives should be regarded as social rather than individualistic.¹⁴

Moreover, love within a couple may be conceived of as “red love” and seen to become even more tangibly social and political when it is understood to involve not just individuals but behind these individuals also particular ethnic or political groupings. Dr. Xia and his family were Manchurian while Chang’s grandmother Han Chinese. Chang’s mother and father became Communist at different times. As the Kuomintang are defeated by the Communists, Hui-ge is branded a “counter-revolutionary.” Tribal or political affiliation then adds another layer of complexity to negate the simplistic picture of love involving simply the two members of a couple.

III. Love as a Decision

In *Wild Swans* Chang invokes the traditional and universal notion of “falling in love” for both prior generations. Her grandmother and Dr. Xia are described as having quickly fallen in love (60), and Chang writes from her grandmother’s perspective when the latter declares that “love can make even cold water sweet” (73). Chang writes similarly about her mother and Comrade Yu when she observes, “Love was the only thing that mattered to these two revolutionaries” (174). For both generations of parents, love is portrayed as a feeling, as instinctive as it is irrepressible. When Chang writes about her own life in China, however, she indicates that it is possible to resist such impulses. She describes, for example, how in 1966, the year of the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, she and a group of other young women find themselves in Peking staying in a drama school along with several young men, the Red Guards. The men suggest taking a trip to the zoo. The girls however decline, insisting they want to “stick to making revolution” (420). Offered food by the Red Guards — apples and toffee-coated water chestnuts — the girls reciprocate by washing the young men’s clothes. Chang writes, “I even washed their underpants, but nothing sexual ever entered my mind. I suppose many Chinese girls of my generation were too dominated by the crushing political upheavals to develop adolescent sexual feelings” (421).¹⁵ Another girl received a love letter from a young man and immediately wrote back calling him “a traitor to the revolution” (422).

At this point the CCP seems to have had the power to instigate sexual repression — not only in the case of young women but also of course young men. Chang gives further examples from her own past, especially when

she begins to fantasize about a young man, Bing, descended from “high officials.” One afternoon when she visits her gravely ill grandmother in hospital she finds herself looking longingly out of the window at Bing arriving on his bicycle. “My heart started to leap, and my face suddenly felt hot” (523), writes Chang; and she describes how she found herself surreptitiously and frantically checking her reflection in the window. She recalls that to look into a real mirror in public would be to “invite condemnation as a ‘bourgeois element’” (523); but then she states,

Up to now, I had shunned any love relationship. My devotion to my family [...] overshadowed every other emotion. Although within me there had always been another being, a sexual being, yearning to get out, I had succeeded in keeping it locked in. Knowing Bing pulled me to the brink of an entanglement. (524)

Young Chang does not allow herself to cross over to physical intimacy either with Bing or another admirer, Wen.¹⁶ Chang even blames herself for being distracted by her feelings for Bing and/or Wen at the moment of her grandmother’s death and resolves “never to have a boyfriend again. Only by self-denial, I thought, could I expiate some of my guilt” (545). Later when working briefly as a would-be electrician and as she develops feelings for a co-worker, Day, she realizes that she is “very attracted to him” (597). They share a passion for classical Chinese poetry. They spend countless hours together, working around the hours they spend working in the factory. One day Chang finds out that the young man’s father had worked for the Kuomintang as an officer and then spent time in a labour camp. (598). She writes,

During the four months of our acquaintance, the word “love” had never been mentioned by either of us. I had even suppressed it in my mind. One could never let oneself go [...]. The consequences of being tied to a “class enemy” like Day’s were too serious. Because of the subconscious self-censorship *I never quite fell in love* with Day. (my emphasis; 599-600)

Surely, Chang could just as well have written, “I chose not to allow myself to fall in love with Day” — just as she had decided not to quite fall in love with Bing or Wen. Despite her repeatedly implying earlier that falling in love was an instinctive and irrepressible feeling, suddenly she points to the idea that love is a decision. She decided that she simply did not have to love a young Red Guard, Bing, Wen, Day, or any other man. With Bing she stepped back from the brink of an entanglement. With Day, the late discovery that he is on the wrong side politically in her mind retrospectively justifies the decision she had already taken not to fall in love with him.

Here Chang may be regarded as writing in line with Fromm's contention that love has to be more than a feeling, at least if it is to endure, because feelings may be fleeting. When Chang indicates that during the Cultural Revolution when she was working as an electrician or having to do forced labour in the countryside and so on she was at least free to decide whether to love a particular person or not, she implies that this was a political decision because it involves an exercise of power: her power over young men. Furthermore, the decision to allow oneself to fall in love with one person implies not allowing oneself to fall in love with another, whether that be one other or many others. The fact that Chang portrays an individual (herself) as having the option to love X, Y, or Z reinforces the point that like the other forms of love examined here — property love, family love, winged Eros-based love, red love — love as a decision entails the idea that love can never be restricted to the personal because it is always grounded in the social and political domain.

Notes

¹ Ban Wang focuses in particular on Anyi's novel *Song of Unending Sorrow* which draws heavily on personal experience.

² See especially Min's memoir, *Red Azalea* (1994).

³ The Cultural Revolution has frequently been compared both to the Holocaust and to Stalin's purges. See White and Law 4. Hong Yung Lee is cited in White and Law 18.

⁴ For the original citation see Clements 227.

⁵ In turn, Yu-fang is not immune to the General's physical attraction, although this is compounded by his rank in the army: "his handsome, martial demeanor" (39).

⁶ On the role of "bride price" in the culture of concubines, see Bruggner and Regglar who also make it clear that such arrangements were often made "without any regard for existing emotional ties" (267, 265).

⁷ The arrangement between the two men can also be regarded as a throwback to the capitalist system as described by Kollontai. "The trade in women's flesh," writes Kollontai, "is in keeping with "the whole bourgeois way of life [which is] based on buying and selling" (263-64).

⁸ Reinforcing the prospect of deep shame, one member of the family even quotes an old Chinese maxim, "A young wife who has an old husband is really another man's woman" (62).

⁹ Note, however, that when Marx called for the complete abolition of private property and referred to "communism" as "the positive expression of the overcoming of private property" (146), of course he did not have in mind people, who while still alive, simply passed on their property to their descendants.

¹⁰ The inventiveness required in times of poverty is described in much greater detail in chapter xii, "Capable Women Can Make a Meal without Food."

¹¹ Noting that Sigmund Freud used to describe love as "a social organ," Hardt prefers to think of it as a muscle. ("For Love or Money" 680). Developing the muscle requires effort. In *Wild Swans* both during the brief but very challenging time spent in Dr. Xia's household when Chang's grandmother has to interact with extended family and then the years of poverty (although Dr. Xia still able to find work as a doctor is able to gradually pull them out of poverty), Dr. Xia and Chang's grandmother may be regarded as presented with an excellent opportunity to develop this muscle.

¹² This emotional tie to kin also may be regarded as co-existing with ownership. Dr. Xia has three sons. No matter what the external circumstances, the three sons and one daughter from his first marriage are always in a sense his. On love of kin, see Hardt, "Red Love," 788.

¹³ This is in keeping with Kollontai's writings about the need for people to rid themselves of nostalgia for the traditional family.

¹⁴ Chang's father refuses to be jealous regarding any supposed feelings that his wife may have had for Hui-ge because he seems to understand that the affections of a wife do not have to be exclusively directed toward her husband. His avoiding jealousy is also in line with the CCP's disdain for petty domestic squabbles.

¹⁵ This of course does not apply to all the young women. Chang recalls one who had an affair, became pregnant, and then hanged herself because she was unable to face the shame.

¹⁶ Chang's holding back from physical intimacy does not in itself mean that she is totally immune to "Winged Eros," especially as conceived by Hardt as "a love beyond property, regardless of whether sex is involved" ("Red Love," 792).

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