

From Abroad, with Love: Transnational Texts, Local Critiques

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ABSTRACT

In early twentieth-century China, the introduction of European romanticism not only inspired a new literary genre, but also engendered a social revolution. Romantic love was not just about the thrills of courtship and heterosociability, it was also about breaking free from the Confucian patriarchal family in order to plunge into the exhilarating realms of society and nation. However, beginning in the late 1920s, it became commonplace to lament the failure of free love and to prescribe remedies ranging from returning to the family and renouncing individualism to social service and revolutionary activism.

In this paper, I reflect on the responses to the crisis of romantic love from both the conservative and radical circles. My primary sources are three translated texts and the opinions and criticisms they elicited from among Chinese readers: *Love and Duty* by S. Horose, *The Education of Love* by Edmondo de Amicis and "Three Generations" by Alexandra Kollontai. I focus on translated texts and their reception to lend support to a mode of comparative literary analysis that emphasizes the circulation of ideas, particularly how translated texts enter into local circulation and are made meaningful in local configurations and contestations. I also hope to show that the backlash against romantic love cannot be reduced to some illiberal streak of "Chinese culture." By focusing on translated texts, I call attention to the fact that the critique of romanticism was a global discourse that brought together communitarian, nationalist, socialist, and even fascist currents of thought.

KEY WORDS

love, family, community, public, ethics, *Love and Duty*, *The Education of Love*, "Three Generations"



In European intellectual history, romanticism enshrined love as a sublime principle of life and radicalized the individual as the basic and irreducible unit of moral choice and action. Breaking with medieval modes of selfhood and sociality, it staked uncompromising and non-negotiable claims for individual freedom and autonomy.¹ In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, romanticism, no less than Darwinism and Marxism, was a key carrier of European thought to China as part of the colonial dissemination of power/knowledge across the globe. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther* (1774) and Alexandre Dumas fils' *La Dame aux Camélias* (1848), translated into Chinese in this period, are widely recognized as the founding texts of the modern romantic genre in Chinese literary history. Both novels attracted enormous followings and inspired many Chinese imitators and interlocutors.²

Ideologically, European romanticism did more than spawning a new literary genre. It also engendered a social revolution. It is common knowledge that foreign love stories inspired a whole generation of Chinese youth to rebel against the traditional Confucian family in the name of individual freedom and other universalistic ideals. The freedom to choose one's marriage partner was seen as a fundamental right in the sense that an individual, inasmuch as s/he was an autonomous moral agent, had the inalienable right to act without the deliberate obstruction from others, including parents. No ascriptively based claims were allowed to trump the voluntary expressions of the individual will. Romantic love became a two-pronged enterprise in China: on the one hand, it was about the thrills of courtship and heterosociability; on the other hand, it was about breaking free from

ascriptive ties to plunge into the exhilarating realm of public life. Two keywords, “society” and “nation,” came to define the new community for the newly awakened individualist. In this sense, the numerous stories of “free love” produced in the 1920s were less about freedom of love or marriage per se, and much less about libertarian sexual practice, than about the severance of ties with family, tradition, and locality and the forging of a national community whose claim on individual identity must override particularistic bonds.

It is not surprising, then, that changing conceptions of self and society would be negotiated in the language of love. In the mid- to late 1920s, it became commonplace to lament the failure of free love and to prescribe cures ranging from returning to the family and renouncing individualism to social service and revolutionary activism. Educators, journalists, writers as well as common readers vocally re-evaluated the role of free love in personal and social life and invariably found it problematic. Love stories in this period no longer simply ended with death, sorrow, and authorial empathy. Instead, the pursuit of “free love” was pushed to the background and its consequences now took the center stage. More and more stories depicted the betrayal, disappointment, and disillusionment that beset life after the “escape” to freedom.

In this paper, I reflect on the responses to the crisis of romantic love from both the conservative and radical circles. While conservatives wished to translate love into a communal ethic and purge all connotations of freedom and transgression from its semantic field, radicals tried to align love with collective political projects while reducing romance to a bland routine of everyday life. They were thus unlikely allies in the backlash against romantic love. My primary sources are three translated texts and the opinions and criticisms they elicited among Chinese readers. My purpose in focusing on translated texts and their reception is threefold: First, I wish to lend support to a mode of comparative literary analysis that emphasizes the circulation of ideas and that takes as its central concern the global/local dynamic as ideas travel under colonial, imperial, and transnational conditions. I read these translated texts, therefore, as the Chinese readers in the early

twentieth century would or might, using their written responses, whenever possible, as my guide. What interests me is how these texts entered into local circulation and were made meaningful in local configurations and contestations. Secondly, I want to call attention to texts that are not part of a canon (Chinese or European) and yet were once the enunciating sites of popular aspirations and the epicenters of public debates. Such texts have too long been left out of literary histories structured around masters and their masterpieces and constricted by the national literature paradigm that prevails in literary studies.

Thirdly, I hope to show that the backlash against romantic love cannot be reduced to some essentialized illiberal streak of “Chinese culture.” By focusing on translated texts, I call attention to the fact that the critique of romanticism was a global discourse that brought together communitarian, nationalist, socialist, and even fascist currents of thought. It was no coincidence that the three texts that figured prominently in the Chinese critique of love were all written by European authors. Moreover, two of these texts were introduced to China via Japanese translations. I argue that the Chinese critiques articulated both a global anxiety over the fluidity of modern selfhood and sociality and a historically and culturally specific yearning for a community of intimacy, or the *gemeinschaft*. In other words, the distrust of free love, the urge to regulate gender relations, and the desire to exile romance from the ideal republic were never just about the life of the heart, but were also about the search for an ideal form of human existence and human connection.

Love and Ethical Life

Romantic stories written in the late 1920s exhibited a nearly morbid fascination with the aftermath of the flight to freedom. Authors sought to illustrate the ephemerality of love, or its vulnerability in face of the competing claims of money, sex, rank, and power. Conservative-leaning authors, in particular, tended to depict love as a flippant game played by egotistic youths, wrecking the traditional

social order without supplying a viable new order. They also readily offered up hearth and home as the remedy of love's malaise. A novella with the telltale title *Lian'ai yu yiwu* (Love and duty) proposes both motherhood and fatherhood as redemption for despairing romantic lovers. According to the preface by Cai Yuanpei (1868–1940), chancellor of Beijing (Peking) University from 1916 to 1926, the author, who goes by the Chinese name Luo Chen, is a French-educated Polish woman. A long-time resident of Beijing, she devotes all her spare time to charity work and creative writing.³ Cai sums up the gist of the story as about the painful consequences of free love and its salvation in the fulfillment of parental duty, especially the education of children. He testifies to its uplifting effect and pays tribute to the author for her service to society.⁴

The story centers on three characters—Yang Naifan, a housewife, Huang Daren, her husband, and Li Zuyi, her lover—although, as it will become clear, this is hardly a love triangle story. The narrative unfolds chronologically and patiently, in a “naturalist style” that Cai Yuanpei clearly appreciates. As the story opens, Naifan is only fifteen, growing up in a large polygamous household riven by petty intrigues and rivalries among the concubines. Zuyi, a neighborhood boy, falls in love with her. Just as the two are becoming intimate, Zuyi is sent away to Shanghai for further schooling and Naifan is married off to the Huang family according to an engagement agreement made in her childhood.

From the pages devoted to Naifan's childhood, it is clear that Luo Chen disapproves of polygamy and arranged marriages. She gives a tender portrayal of Naifan and Zuyi's puppy love and then contrasts it to the hollow and lifeless marriage between Naifan and Daren (who have now settled down in Shanghai). The contrast effectively prepares the reader for the next dramatic turn of the plot. Bored with his loveless marriage, Daren goes pleasure seeking in the city. Naifan, on her part, showers all her affections on their two children. Then one day, while playing in the park, one of the children falls into the pond and is rescued by a gallant young man who turns out to be Zuyi. Again, Zuyi is not presented as an egotistic rake but someone fully capable of compassion and heroism. Indeed, Zuyi has kept his feeling for Naifan

all these years, amid the myriad stimuli and temptations of a metropolitan city. Naifan and Zuyi gingerly rekindle their old flame, while Daren callously turns a blind eye. But the odious looks of the servants and the limited chances for rendezvous drive Zuyi to agitate for elopement.

It is at this point that the author begins to unfurl her conservative banner. She blames romantic fiction for Zuyi's single-minded determination to have Naifan for himself at all costs. Precisely because all along Zuyi has been cast in a positive light as a diligent, sensible, and steadfast young man, his downfall in the moral scheme of things must be attributed to some external agent—here “third-rate foreign romantic fiction.” She expresses wonderment at the sensation these “filthy stories” about adultery and elopement have generated among the Chinese reading public. Zuyi, she suggests, is hopelessly poisoned by these stories, and the clichéd language he uses to lobby Naifan seems lifted directly out of them: “Let us go to a place where no one knows us and where we shall spend the rest of our lives together, our two hearts conjoined into one and no one to interfere with our love.”⁵ Still, Zuyi feels the sting of guilt as he witnesses Naifan take leave of her children.

Zuyi's downfall is mirrored, in reverse, by the unfeeling Daren's redemption as the latter answers to the call of fatherhood and transforms his personal loss into the impetus behind a public campaign for education and moral renewal. He responds to his wife's desertion with superhuman aplomb. He hushes up the whispering servants, keeps gossip columnists at bay, and repels a lawyer's offer to exact the harshest revenge for him. Instead of trying to win back his wife (and becoming entangled in a triangle), he resolves to bring up the two children with a sufficient dose of freedom and inculcate in them respect for the opposite sex and the knowledge that marriage must be built on both love and duty. The turn to education is a quintessentially modern move, as power is perceived not in the negative sense of punishment or repression, but in the positive sense of discipline and (re)production.

Having tramped around for some time, Naifan and Zuyi settle down in a village at some distance from Shanghai. Their minds,

however, are so weighed down with fear and guilt that they are simply unable to relish the thrill of freedom or the bliss of love. When the news of his father's imminent death reaches him, Zuyi scurries home in the guise of a servant befitting his demeaned self-image as someone who has stolen the family's happiness and peace. His unforgiving mother turns him out unceremoniously. The blow proves too much for Zuyi. His health quickly deteriorates and he dies in a year or so, leaving Naifan and their baby daughter, Ping'er, in helpless destitution. Naifan manages to eke out a meager living as live-in maidservant for well-to-do families.

Meanwhile, Daren has risen to fame as an educator and orator. Naifan fastidiously keeps track of his public appearances and speeches and has even attended one lecture where Daren speaks on children's education as the foundation of nation-building. At another occasion, she attends a school theatrical production in which Yingguan, daughter of her marriage with Daren, has a role. Watching the children holding hands and singing in unison, Naifan is overcome with grief. The final turning point comes when a classmate of Ping'er's falls in love with her and then abruptly cuts her off upon learning of Naifan's past. Naifan decides to remove herself from Ping'er's path to happiness. She leaves Daren a letter imploring him to adopt Ping'er and Daren duly complies. Despite the difference in their class status, the author assures us, the three children have in common an education that values honesty and they soon become loving siblings. The children's affection and intimacy, at last, atone for their parents' sin of self-seeking and discordance. The story ends with the joyous note that a year later, Daren finds himself busy preparing for the wedding of Ping'er and her former school sweetheart.

The critique of free love is mounted on two fronts in this novella. First, the subplot of the elopement and its poignant conclusion function as a cautionary tale, one that is all the more powerful because the love that has inspired it is sympathetically portrayed rather than caricatured.⁶ Not only does love spell disaster for the three existing families (the Daren/Naifan nuclear family, Naifan and Zuyi's respective natal families), it also fails to maintain a semblance of

family life on its own. The fault may not all lie with love itself—social prejudice and intolerance are also to blame—but the fact that love cannot fulfill itself without injuring other, equally cherished social relations places it in a precarious position. Hegel speaks of love's contingency as its fatal limitation. By contingency he does not so much mean the notorious fickleness of the amorous heart as the lack of universality—the kind of universality supposedly embedded in “the eternal interests and objective content of human existence . . . family, political ends, country, duties arising from one's calling or class.”⁷ From the perspectives of such entities as the family and state, there is no absolute, objective reason why *this* man must love precisely *this* woman, or vice versa: “the endless stubbornness of necessarily finding his life, his supreme consciousness, precisely in this woman alone is seen to be an endless caprice of fate.”⁸ Thus in asserting one's subjectivity and freedom of choice through romantic love, one invariably runs up against corporate, institutional interests. Love's potential to upset the status quo and subject human relationships to contingency underlies the mistrust felt by even those who are sympathetic to its cause.

On the second front, although it receives a sympathetic hearing, love is not treated as an exalted cause worthy of dying for. There is no love suicide (*xunqing*) or its equivalent—lifelong celibacy or reclusion in the mountains. Naifan never entertains the idea of following Zuyi to the grave, though legions of sentimental heroines have done just that. The failure in love is no longer the end of life—indeed, life only really commences for her when romantic love has permanently receded into the past and when she has reintegrated herself into society. She quickly rallies to the task of bringing Ping'er up properly, having finally realized that the highest purpose in life for a woman is not love but motherhood, or the maintenance of an “objective” social institution—the family. Hence Naifan hesitates not a moment to take her own life when she becomes an obstacle to her daughter's happiness. We know that motherhood has firmly displaced love as what moral philosophers call a “hypergood” when a mother is called upon to die for her child in the same manner that a “woman of sentiment” is culturally

expected to die for her lover. By contrast, while fatherhood is a paramount duty for a man, he need not die for it, simply because society also prescribes a host of other roles which he must fulfill. In the somewhat improbable character of Daren, identification with ethical duty is shown to have the magical power of transforming an insensitive, unfaithful husband and an uncaring father into an enlightened and affectionate father/educator.

Love and Duty exposes love as too fragile to sustain any viable form of sociality and pinpoints a decisive cause—the desertion of ethical duty. Economic hardship and social intolerance are also allowed, but they are not seen as the clinching factors. Note that Zuyi is able to hang on to his job even in his declining state of health. As “fugitives,” Zuyi and Naifan are accepted by their neighbors with no questions asked. What wears them out so quickly is their troubled conscience—as if deep down, they never cease to censure themselves for infringing on the interests of objective institutions. Zuyi and Naifan are incapable of making the most of their newfound freedom because the guilt of deserting one’s duty seems to dampen any pleasure they may find in each other’s company. Ethics, therefore, becomes the only way out of the romantic cul-de-sac. Daren and Naifan both find redemption in performing the duties of parenthood. And the reader is invited to believe that their children, having been thus reared into proper manhood and womanhood, will be able to reconcile the ideal of a romantic marriage with its attendant ethical imperatives.

But will they? Luo Chen’s own novel offers not so much assurance as a hope, which is already more than the vast majority of romantic fiction is able to offer. Instead, story after story dramatize the crisis of love as a crisis in the basic human need for security, trust, solidarity, and permanent happiness. With few exceptions, these essential human desiderata are only achieved once romantic love has run its destructive course and the lovers have shed their delusions. Nonetheless, romantic stories continued to be written and love continued to be the keyword of social discourse. What emerged in the late 1920s and 1930s was a new, hegemonic discourse of sentiment that insistently redefined all social relationships in affective terms while

resolutely excluding romantic love from the field of discourse. In this vision, Chinese society and its institutions would be bound together by love and would never need to confront the uncertainties, agitations, and frictions of a heterogeneous society composed of discrete and desire-driven individuals. The sentimental discourse *sans* romance is thus a utopian quest for a community of intimacy, or the *gemeinschaft*, in response to the rising juggernaut of the *gesellschaft*. A translated Italian children book called *Heart* helped fan this desire among Chinese readers and it is to this novel and its reception in China that we turn next.

The Education of Love

Edmondo de Amicis's (1846–1908) *Cuore*, first published in 1886, was one of the world's most widely read children's books in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Dedicating it to children between the ages of nine and thirteen, de Amicis described the book as "a story of a school year, written by a third year pupil in an Italian council school." Soon after its publication, it was adopted by the new compulsory state schools in Italy and since then it has appeared in hundreds of editions and has been made into a film and adapted for radio and television. Written in the wake of a newly unified Italy, the novel sought to impart the nationalist message of identity and loyalty and to promote the civic virtues of honesty, courage, compassion, and industry. As prescribed reading in school curriculum, it also contributed to the standardization of the written language of the new state. As the translator of the English edition notes, *Heart* played an important role in the making of modern Italy.⁹

Xia Mianzun (1886–1946), a noted educator and translator, translated the novel from the Japanese version and serialized it in the widely circulating *Dongfang zazhi* (Eastern miscellany) in 1923.¹⁰ The book form was published by Kaiming Books in 1926 and maintained a best selling status well into the 1930s.¹¹ Xia writes in the preface that he read the Japanese translation in three days and wept profusely. He finds very inspiring the book's portrayal of love between parents and

children, between teachers and pupils, love among friends, and love for one's native country and society at large. He calls his Chinese translation *Ai de jiaoyu* (The education of love) and explains that education is like digging a pool: People wrangle about the shape of the pool while neglecting its key element—water. Love (*qing'ai*) is the water without which education is just a dry pit. The water metaphor is a compelling one, conjuring up love's irresistible power to immerse and connect.

The theme of sentimental education fills a significant gap in the contemporary discourse on love. Intellectuals have been talking about the imperative to expand personal love to the love of society and nation since the turn of the last century, but few have been able to chart out the *terra incognita* that lies between the particular and the universal. The leap is more often asserted than demonstrated. For the first time, a story centering on school life moves fluidly in and out of the family context, and the central character Enrico makes frequent excursions into the wider community of local society that is explicitly conceived of as the nation writ small. Together, the family, the school, and the town comprise a micro-society in which Enrico traverses freely by means of a single but powerful currency—love.¹²

There are three types of texts in this novel: Enrico's journal entries (which make up the bulk of the book), his parents' hortatory commentaries, and monthly stories. The last type includes nine independent mini-stories devoted mostly to the subjects of patriotism and filial love. The journal entries proximate the sunny voice of a Pollyannaish schoolboy who has a keen eye for the ethicality of everyday life. Every entry therefore has a moral lesson to impart. The eight entries for the first month, for example, touch on basically all the major themes of the book, particularly that of cross-regional and cross-class solidarity. It is easy to infer Enrico's upper middle-class (technocratic) family background from his three-month summer vacation in the country and from his parents' conscientious effort to cultivate in him a sense of *noblesse oblige*. On the first day of school, Enrico describes the variety of people gathered on campus: "Ladies, gentlemen, local women, workmen, officials, grandmothers, servants,

all with one hand holding a child and other holding a certificate of promotion . . ." (*CBH* 13).

The theme of diversity, in particular class diversity, is repeatedly stressed throughout the book: In a modern nation-state, boys, whatever their class background, go to the same school to receive the same education and to be made into identical loyal citizens. When introducing his classmates, Enrico takes special care to identify those of working class origins: sons of a bricklayer, a blacksmith, a coalman, a railway engine driver, a vegetable vendor, and so on. The fusion of the classes is powerfully effected when the teacher, a big-hearted man with a stern face, announces to the class that he has no family of his own but "you are my family . . . and you will be my pride and joy" (*CBH*, 15). He makes a point of using kinship metaphors persistently, addressing his pupils as sons and urging them to regard one another as brothers. As the training ground of nationalist consciousness, the classroom takes on a symbolic significance of which the teacher, who represents the authorial voice in the novel, makes full use. Consider the speech he gives when introducing a new pupil from out of town while pointing to a map of Italy:

You should be pleased. Today a young Italian is entering the school who was born in Reggio di Calabria, more than five hundred miles from here [Turin]. Cherish your brother who has come from so far away. He was born in a glorious land which gave Italy illustrious men, and which gives her strong workers and brave soldiers, in one of the most beautiful parts of our country, where there are great forests and great mountains, inhabited by people of ability and courage. Cherish him so that he does not think about how far he is from the town in which he was born. Make him see that an Italian boy, no matter which Italian school he sets foot in, finds brothers there. (*CBH* 17)

To identify simply as a "young Italian" a boy from a far-flung region which not so long ago has been at war with the north is one of the first steps toward imagining the nation as a homogeneous community. The

presence of the Calabrian boy therefore serves as a living reminder of the “larger” community beyond the immediate circles of day-to-day contact.

The glue that holds the community together is the solidarity of feeling, or sympathy. A street accident takes place in which an older boy injures his foot to save a younger boy from being run over by a bus. Their mothers, one rich and the other poor, sob together in an embrace while everyone praises the courage of the wounded boy (*CBH* 16–17). Sentimental tableaux such as this, replete with poignant gestures, heart-warming acts, and edifying utterances, appear in a crushing accumulation, testifying to the strength of the emotional ties that bind the members of the educational community, teachers, pupils, and parents all included. Ordinary juvenile mischief, on the other hand, is hyperbolically condemned. The teacher berates a boy who mimics the gait of his classmate’s vegetable vending mother: “You have . . . mocked someone who is unfortunate, struck someone who is weak and cannot defend himself. You have committed one of the basest acts. Nothing could be more shameful” (*CBH* 21). Compassion for the weak and unfortunate is the express purpose when Enrico’s mother brings him and his sister along on her charity trips. In one of her hortatory commentaries, she reproves Enrico for failing to give his coins to a beggar woman holding a child: “Do not get into the habit of passing by without feeling for those in need who ask for help, especially when a mother asks for a coin for her child . . . Alms-giving by a man is an act of charity. Alms-giving by a child is both an act of charity and a caress. Do you understand? It is as if both a coin and a flower fell from your hand” (*CBH* 50–51).

Nearly everyone in the book fulfills his or her socially defined role with emotional sincerity and ethical dedication. The only delinquent boy is eventually ejected from the community and sent to prison. The ostracism of the renegade element, however, is more than compensated for by the successful reform of two derelict fathers: the violent-tempered blacksmith who is made gentle by his prize-winning son; an ex-prisoner returns to give thanks to Enrico’s teacher who used to teach in the prison school. Working-class fathers in the novel occupy

a space structurally similar to that of the pupils. Two long journal entries depict their diligence and humility at the night school. The infantilization of the workman is subtly registered in Enrico's surprise to find "all those bearded men on our benches" (*CBH* 129). In his usual observant manner, Enrico notes: "There were joiners, furnacemen with black faces, bricklayers whose hands were white with lime, apprentice bakers with flour in their hair, and there was the smell of paint, hides, pitch, oil—the smells of all the trades. Even a squad of artillery workmen in soldiers' uniforms came in" (*CBH* 128). Their teacher, it turns out, is a young lawyer—their class as well as intellectual superior. In another entry, "Night-school Prize-giving," these awkward-looking "students" receive prizes and awards at a ceremony that neatly parallels the one for their school-age counterparts. Education thus becomes a way of displacing class politics.

While most of the day-to-day happenings take place in the classroom or in the homes of Enrico and his classmates, a number of the entries depict events in public institutions such as the poor house, the night school, the school for handicapped children as well as events on the street—a soldiers' parade on the National Day, the King's arrival at the station, the town carnival. If the modern family has "satisfied a desire for privacy and also a craving for identity" by retreating from "the promiscuity imposed by the old sociability,"¹³ then the nation endeavors to draw the introvert family members out again—this time not into promiscuous sociability, but into the homogenized national community made concrete in the ritualized and civilized space of the street. The street is represented as a site where people convene as citizens, conscious of their collective identity under the state's embodied gaze, and where the national community is synecdochically enacted in parades and pageants. For example, when an infantry regiment march by on the street, the headmaster harangues the on-looking pupils: "Boys, you should respect soldiers . . . They are only a few years older than you, there are poor and rich amongst them as there are amongst you, they go to school like you, and they come from all parts of Italy. See if you can recognize them by their looks. There go Sicilians, Sardinians, Neapolitans and Lombards" (*CBH* 42). Enrico's

father makes the street the subject of an entire lecture:

Be more careful how you walk in the street. There, too, one has responsibilities. If you walk and move circumspectly in a private house, why should you not do the same in the street, which is everyone's house? Just remember, Enrico, every time you meet an old person unsteady on his feet, a poor man, a lady with a child in her arms, a cripple on crutches, a man stooping under the burden he is carrying, a family dressed in mourning, respectfully make way for them. We must respect old age, poverty, maternal love, infirmity, fatigue, death. . . .

Always ask a child alone and crying what is the matter. Pick up for the old man the walking-stick that he has dropped. If two children are fighting, separate them. If it is two men, move away so as not to be present at the spectacle of brutal violence which offends and hardens the heart. If you should pass a bound man between two policemen, do not add to the crowd's cruel curiosity. He might be innocent. . . .

Take a good look at the streets and the town you live in. If you were suddenly sent far away tomorrow you would be pleased to have them clearly in your memory, to be able to travel through the town in your thoughts. Your town, your own little country which for so many years has been your world . . . Get to know it in its streets and its people. Cherish it—and when you hear it abused, defend it. (CBH 126–127)

To a Chinese reader, the idea of cherishing the street must have been refreshing. In May Fourth fiction, the street is a place of danger, cruelty, and penal spectacles. It conjures up images of decapitated corpses, pilloried prisoners, voyeuristic crowds, predatory gangsters, venal policemen, sly beggars and a host of other unpalatable characters. Compared to the home, the street is a morally inferior space; the feelings and ethics that prevail in the former can hardly be extended to the latter. Old age, poverty, maternal love, and death all possess dignity in the domestic realm, but rarely when they are on display in public.

Moreover, since the turn of the last century, the city street, crisscrossed by rickshaws and horse-drawn carriages, has joined the theater, park, teahouse, and opium den as a public recreational venue, spawning “a culture of display and observation.”¹⁴ De Amicis’s novel also pits its conception of the street against this new culture of play and display.

In his magisterial study of the “fall” of public life, Richard Sennett credits Rousseau for lending so much force and eloquence to the discourse of the sin city. Ever since Rousseau, it has become a cant that the city, with its cosmopolitan culture and sociability for its own sake, spells the corruption of *moeurs* (manners, morals, beliefs). In the context of non-functional socializing, people who have come together as strangers make up their identities by manipulating their appearances and derive pleasure in losing themselves in playacting. The pursuit of fame—by means of impostures, conventions, and manners—becomes an end in itself and people come to depend on others for their sense of self. City life thus fosters the presentation of self rather than the representation of the self. For Rousseau, for the nineteenth-century bourgeoisie, and for those of us who still live in Rousseau’s legacy, the only place congenial to the representation of the self is the private sphere. The family and home, then, would come to be regarded as a refuge, a place of warmth, true feeling, and existential authenticity. It would become a yardstick with which we measure and condemn the public world of streets, clubs, cafes, and parks, with their idle, transient crowds—very much the antithesis of hearth and home.¹⁵

The literary public sphere that arose in early twentieth-century China was therefore from its inception saddled by the paradox that it was a public sphere born to celebrate private feelings and private selves.¹⁶ Its most fundamental values are modeled on family life rather than on street life—as its prototype was in eighteenth-century Europe. What Enrico’s father’s peroration (quoted above) does is remoralize and relegitimize the street. Here, the street is not to be a place where strangers congregate to gawk, imitate, or gossip, and where the pursuit of reputation overruns the pursuit of virtue. Instead, it is made continuous with the home—it is “everyone’s house”—and domestic virtues are to be fully operational there. De Amicis’s novel is thus

among the earliest to show the Chinese that the street can be transformed into a place where poverty, infirmity, and death command sympathy and respect rather than contempt or voyeurism, and where violence is shunned rather than cheered on. The street, in short, is the extension of home. Rather than a place of decadent and showy theatricality, it is to be the stage on which strangers recognize each other as “compatriots” and recognize the town as their “own little country.” In transposing the code of the family to that of civic conduct—making way for the weak and the burdened, picking up the walking stick for an old man, mollifying a crying child—one ritually traverses the passage from the personal to the universal.

The Education of Love took the Chinese reading public by storm. Effusive praise from readers (who were apparently mainly adults) steadily flowed to the house journal of Kaiming Books since its inaugural issue of 1928. Like the translator, readers invariably speak of their tear-stained reading experience and point to the variety of love portrayed in the book as the source of its power. Judging by the way some readers carefully describe the materiality of acquiring and reading the book, one might say that it has achieved nearly cult status. Wu Chengjun tells us that he purchased a copy of *The Education of Love* with his last remaining cash and finished reading it in sixteen straight hours. He shed floods of tears while reading it and then threw himself onto the bed weeping with utmost abandon. He forgot hunger and all else.¹⁷ Chen Xiangqing says that s/he shared the translator’s emotional reaction to the book. In particular, s/he came close to wailing audibly while reading the monthly story “From the Apennines to the Andes” about a little boy’s six-thousand-mile journey in search of his lost mother.¹⁸ Lin Zhenshu tries to outperform the translator by claiming that while Mr. Xia cried for three days over this book, s/he cried for four days.¹⁹ Zhang Zhongping tells us that s/he read over and over again the monthly story “The Little Florentine Scribe” about a filial boy, and that his/her handkerchief was so soaked with tears that the water wrung out of it filled up a bowl!²⁰ Ouyang Qing declares that he is ordinarily not an emotional person, but this book struck a deep chord in him. And he believes that it can return all those who have

strayed from the path of love back to its proper track.²¹

Readers also reported how their lives had been magically transformed by the book. One reader confesses that he has never before read a book word by word and from cover to cover. He has a sickly constitution and is always depressed. Nothing had been able to stir his numb nerves until he read *The Education of Love*, which he completed in one sitting. It helped him conquer his illness and his soul has since regained its innocence. He now writes down these garbled words to pay homage to the book and “may it touch every soul in this world.”²² He goes on to say that de Amicis uses true love (*zhengqing*) to teach us how to be human and that true love is the love between teachers and pupils, parents and children, laborers and capitalists, gentlemen and plebeians, the love of the living for the dead, citizens for the nation, and the love between friends.²³ The usual taxonomy of love in the social discourse of the 1920s focus almost exclusively on domestic relationships and makes only vague gestures towards “society” or “nation.” Here, however, society/nation is always imagined in its components—along the axes of class, region, occupation, or life itself (living and dead). This litany is repeated again and again by readers, pointing to the central appeal of the book—that is, its insistence on calling attention to an array of social cleavages only to erase them methodically and symbolically with an infinitely adaptable discourse of love.

By dint of writing a children’s book, de Amicis is able to furnish a model of affective discourse that excises romantic love and its attendant gender politics. The only context in which gender difference is allowed to be an organizing principle is the domestic sphere where it is neutralized into complementary gender roles. When the night school is over, Enrico sees “many women in the street with children in their arms waiting for their husbands” (*CBH* 129). Apparently only fathers require (re-)education to become better citizens. Indeed, even Enrico’s own parents demarcate their roles clearly along the gender line. The hortatory commentaries written by his father usually urge civic virtues and patriotic sentiments, while the ones by his mother speak softly of the need for sensitivity, sympathy, and respect. When Enrico expresses gratitude to everyone towards the end of the school year, he calls his

father “my first teacher, my first friend” and his mother “my beloved, my blessed guardian angel.” He thanks the former for sound advice and sustenance, and the latter for sharing all his joys and sufferings (*CBII* 240).

De Amicis’s Rousseauian vision creates much dissonance among his Chinese readers as they turn to examine their own world. The scope of self-critique is at once personal, institutional, and national. Lin Xuexiang confesses that as a father and teacher he has never faithfully performed his duty. The novel makes him burst into tears in remorse.²⁴ Han Yongxin reflects on the non-existence of sentimental education in his childhood. Not only were his parents illiterate farmers who paid no attention to his upbringing, China’s primary school system is in truth the guillotine of ideas and feelings, where teachers and students are utter strangers to one another. The Italian school teacher’s precious words to his pupils—“you are all my children”—pain him a great deal. Moreover, the book makes him feel more acutely than ever how cruel and mean the average Chinese are—they are a people who know no such thing as “love.” No Chinese would care a straw about an old beggar dying of hunger and cold on the roadside.²⁵ Another reader condemns the Chinese publishing industry for tirelessly churning out stuff about “free love,” “pessimism” and whatnot. “With this sort of culture [being constantly fed to the public],” he questions, “how can our nation divert the fate of being vanquished?”²⁶ His view is shared by Cheng Luding who complains about the double reign of darkness by the “school of love” (*lian'ai pai*) and the “school of revolution” (*geming pai*) in the literary scene. Books that celebrate love between parents and children, between teachers and pupils, and among compatriots are too few.²⁷ Chen Xiangqing also laments the rarity of books like *The Education of Love* that can serve as people’s lifetime companions and spiritual guides. He remarks: “We all believe that the Four Books and Five Classics are sacred texts; but how can their contrived words compare with the flow of genuine emotion [in *The Education of Love*]? We cannot but feel embarrassed.”²⁸ A couple of readers recommend making the novel the required reading for all citizens as the secular equivalent of the Bible.²⁹

The power of the novel is such that readers find love a compelling metaphor even where it is supposed to be lamentably absent. In a sardonic tone, Wu Chengjun takes stock of the kinds of love that are found and not found in China: "In contrast to the world of love as depicted in the book, 'we' have only romantic love (*lian'ai*) and nothing else. Of course in schools we have the 'love' of student movements; among family members, we have the 'love' of quarrels; between capitalists and laborers, we have the 'love' of exploitation and resistance; between people and the state, we have the 'love' of indifference; among friends, we have the 'love' of wining and dining; between the rich and the poor, we have the 'love' of enslavement; and lastly, we also have the 'love' of hatred by citizens for prisoners. All these 'loves' beyond love have made China hopeless! And *The Education of Love* is our cure! We should deem it our Jesus Christ, our God, the hope of our souls' regeneration."³⁰

What is striking about these commentaries is the ease with which the vocabulary of "class"—capitalists and laborers—is used alongside the more familiar social categories of family, friends, the rich and the poor. One reader singles out motherly love and the capitalist's love for the working classes as his/her favorite themes.³¹ Class does occupy a prominent place in de Amicis's novel, but primarily as a stand-in for all social differences that can be erased by the soothing strokes of virtuous sentiment and charitable deed. In addition to the night school scene of class amity and the usual injunction of pity for the poor, a number of journal entries and hortatory remarks are devoted to the subject of respecting manual labor and laborers—often by recourse to patronizing mannerisms and euphemisms. When Enrico's classmate the "little bricklayer" (son of a bricklayer) comes to visit and soils the sofa with his workman's jacket, Enrico's father prevents Enrico from wiping off the dirt in the little boy's presence. The father explains that work does not make one dirty: "Never say about a workman coming from his work, 'He is dirty.' You must say, 'He has signs and traces of his work on his clothes'" (*CBH* 57–58). At the end of the school year, Enrico realizes that only he and a few boys will be able to go on to the next level of schooling while the majority of his classmates will start work. He

becomes dejected about the prospect of never seeing “so many good and dear companions” again. His father seizes on the opportunity to lecture him:

Why “never again,” Enrico? That will depend on you . . . [You and they] will stay in the same town, perhaps for many years. Why, then, will you not see one another again? When you are at the university or the academy you will go to visit them in their shops or workshops. . . .

You see, men from the higher social classes are the officers, and workmen are the soldiers of work; but in society as in the army not only is the soldier no less noble than the officer, for nobility depends on work and not on earnings, on worth and not rank . . . Cherish, then, and respect above others amongst your friends the sons of the soldiers of work . . . Remember that almost all the blessed blood which redeemed our country flowed from the veins of those who laboured in the fields and workshops.

Swear that if entering a railway station forty years from now, you recognize your old friend Garrone with blackened face, in engine-driver’s clothes . . . ah, but I do not need you to swear. I am sure that you will climb on to the engine and throw your arms round his neck, even if you are a senator of the realm. (*CBH* 175–176)

For readers long haunted by the paralyzing “barrier” between the narrator and his childhood playmate in Lu Xun’s “My Old Home,”³² this passage perhaps brings closer to them the hope vaguely suggested in the latter text’s famous ending. What de Amicis promises is the possibility of an intimate community marked by a concordance of purposes rather than by barriers, rifts, and antagonisms. Class is important as a way of organizing society according to the division of labor. It is to be seen as part of the naturalized social order, essential for the efficiency and discipline of a society modeled on the army. But it must not regulate consciousness—our “feeling and courtesy”—and it must not become the basis of identitarian politics or the fault line of social conflict. Enrico must go out of his way to renew friendship with

his working-class schoolmates not in spite of, but because of, a firm recognition of their divergent class backgrounds. The simultaneous acknowledgment and disavowal of class difference serves to superimpose an intimate community bound by ties of family, place, and everyday ethicality onto the modern society structured by economic and contractual relationships.

Class was not a strange concept to the Chinese reading public in the late 1920s. Socialist theory had been in the air since the May Fourth movement and had come to shape the conceptualization of society. Prasenjit Duara calls attention to the historical intertwining of class and nation in the sense that class was a trope that constructed “a particular and powerful representation of the nation”—either the nation as an international proletariat or the nation as a community expurgated of the undesirable classes.³³ According to Michael Tsin, members of the ruling Nationalist Party (the Kuomintang) also sought to remap the republican polity with the new social category of “class,” using it to signify a flexible axis around which a cohesive national community could be imagined: “A reified ‘society’ intimately inhabited by different ‘classes’ was thus elevated to the center of the public discourse.”³⁴ It seems that the readers of de Amicis’s novel were very much drawn to this understanding of society. Their tireless recitations of the litany of loving relationships betray an unmistakable yearning for a reintegrated society, a society in which the classes would behave literally like members of a family: Teachers would regard students as their own children, lawyers would give evening lessons to smelly workmen, and state senators would embrace black-faced engine-drivers.

The Love Game

If the conservatives gravitated towards the sentimental solution of banishing romantic love from the republic of virtue, progressives took a more conciliatory approach perhaps because many of them had turned to radical politics via a literary career of writing romantic fiction. While they did their share of chronicling love’s many failings, they also

engaged in debates centering on such questions as: What was love's place in collective political movements? Will the new society forged by the revolution have any space or use for romantic love? Once again, the answer seemed to come from abroad. The text in question is a short story called "Three Generations" by the Russian author Alexandra Kollontai (1872–1952).³⁵

A vaguely autobiographical story, "Three Generations" caused a big stir in Soviet Russia, catching the attention of Lenin and sought after by every youth league member.³⁶ The story traces the changing attitude towards love from the grandmother's generation (representing pre-revolutionary Russia), the mother's generation (Russia in the throes of the revolution), to the protagonist Zhenya's generation (post-revolutionary Russia). Rejecting both her grandmother and mother's views of love as antiquarian, Zhenya tries to chart anew an erotic life compatible with the brave new world in which citizens like herself who are wholeheartedly devoted to post-revolutionary reconstruction cannot afford the luxury of romance. In order to meet her sexual need—something that has been unleashed by the revolution—she enters into a series of casual relationships with men. When she becomes pregnant, she simply undergoes an abortion in order not to interrupt work. Trouble only arises when her mother finds out that one of her paramours is her stepfather. Feeling sorry for her distressed mother, Zhenya seeks guidance from an older female Bolshevik who is equally at a loss as to what rules should govern gender relations in an emancipated society.³⁷

"Three Generations" was introduced to China via the Japanese leftist critic Hayashi Fusao (1903–1975), whose article accompanies the translated story in *Xin nǚxing* (The New Woman) and helps frame its reception among the Chinese readership. Hayashi sets out to clear the "confusion" (presumably among his Japanese readers) surrounding the story, particularly the words and actions of the young heroine Zhenya. According to him, Kollontai is forging a new morality for an emerging social class endowed with new emotions and new ideas. For her, the conventional institutions governing sex relations—marriage, prostitution, and free love—are not conducive to the happiness and

health of the human race: Marriage protects private property; prostitution murders love; free love is too uncertain. Before socialism is fully realized, must people be content with the loveless embrace of husband and wife, commercial sex, or free love's air bubbles? The answer is no and the alternative is "love game" (*lian'ai youxi*) as practiced by Zhenya: "Love game dispenses with selfishness, possessiveness, and jealousy. It requires a pure soul, a delicate heart, psychological restraints, mutual respect and caution. . . . It prevents us from becoming the slaves of desire. It is neither a stirring tragedy nor a foolish comedy. It is beautiful and brilliant and it harms no one."³⁸ Hayashi then goes on to discuss Kollontai's distinction of public worth and private pleasure. For Kollontai, love is a private matter. We should judge a person's worth not with reference to his or her sex life, but according to his or her work, talent, and usefulness to society. What one does in one's private sex life does not concern the rest of society as long as one does not transgress broad social boundaries.

The argument for maintaining a personal space that is closed off to public scrutiny echoes the familiar bourgeois defense of individual liberty. But more precisely, the personal space is permissible because it no longer matters. In the socialist utopia, public life takes on ever-greater significance and individual identity is to be hitched solely to one's role in the collective project. Nonetheless, as history tells us, the socialist public does not voluntarily circumscribe its boundaries so as to reserve a space of autonomy for the individual; indeed, the "public" under socialism is hardly meaningful for lack of a meaningful counterpart—the private. Kollontai's novel, then, does indeed retain a vestige of the bourgeois valuation of the private, even if the private no longer carries any moral valence. Note that the language of morality has very nearly vanished in the novel. In its place is the language of work that measures an individual's utility to society. In the instrumental discourse of revolutionary reason, personal morality becomes irrelevant so long as the activities that sustain the biological processes do not diminish one's ability to serve socialism. Moreover, love's irrelevancy is the byproduct of progressive history: in the transition to socialism, love must be replaced by love game just as the capitalist

mode of property relations must be replaced by the collective ownership of property. Love is specific to a time and social class, contrary to the familiar claims about its universality and eternity; so its passing is merely a matter of historical inevitability, not a sign of moral decay.

Such a message meshed well with the radical critique of love issuing from a group of increasingly vocal anarchist intellectuals. They denounced love as a bourgeois conceit and sought to disentangle sex from the imbricated discourse of love, family, morality, and social order. They did so by reducing all contact between the sexes to the accidental, impulsive, and purely biological act of sexual intercourse. Once sex was devoid of social significance, it was then free to be free, so to speak. In the post-capitalist future, there would be only “sexual friendship” or “human love” between the sexes. Only then would sexual liberation be truly realized.³⁹

Kollontai, not being an anarchist, does not present a blueprint for sexual liberation. However, in proposing love game as the rule of private life for the socialist era, Kollontai is also seeking to dislodge sex from moral discourse. She holds up the scenario that individual identity will automatically align with revolutionary work, rather than with the demands of the heart or pleasures of the body. In the story, Zhenya’s sexual gambols seem to run a parallel, as opposed to crisscrossing, course with her revolutionary work. Conflict only occurs when she breaks (if only symbolically) the incest taboo and threatens to unravel the mother-daughter relationship, thus transgressing basic social boundaries. At this point, however, the story is, despite itself, drawn onto the familiar terrain of family moral drama, bringing the unsettling implications of love game closer to the readers and allowing them to critique it in moral terms.

Several readers’ letters to the editor are printed in a subsequent issue of *Xin nüxing* and they are overwhelmingly critical of the idea of love game. A reader named Zhu Mei informs the magazine that she is not in the least persuaded by Kollontai or Hayashi. She forthrightly rejects love game as being no different from fooling around (*wannong*): “Only hardcore Marxists are capable of this kind of lowly game.” The

revolutionary writers who condemn romantic fiction and poetry as bourgeois reactionary literature are blind to the emotional troubles of young men and women. Little do they know that the slogan "Down with imperialism" does not resonate nearly as much as do anguished *cris de coeur*.⁴⁰ Without engaging the specifics of the story and the essays, this reader's response seems to be directed at radicalism in general for promoting sexual irresponsibility and for denying the validity of love.

Another reader, however, takes Kollontai's story on its own terms and objects only to its applicability to China in the evolutionary scheme of things. He first outlines the different outlooks on love of the three generations of women:

1. Grandmother—love in the age of bourgeois liberalism is characterized by possessiveness and notions of individual rights.
2. Mother—love in the transitional period is characterized by the body/soul dualism, the complications of love triangles, and the sense of responsibility.
3. Zhenya—love in the new era becomes a private game, simple, expansive, and irresponsible.

His point is that China is still in Stage One—that of the grandmother—or perhaps not even there yet. "How many young people are still facing ruination in the tomb of love?" he asks.⁴¹ The stage argument does not directly challenge Kollontai's theory of love; instead it dismisses its relevance by postponing it to an indefinite future. This line of argument is given an ironic twist by another reader who observes that the three generations actually live in the same time-space in Soviet Russia. He finds in China an analogous situation: Here, motor cars and wheelbarrows, electric lights and oil lamps, cement and steel buildings and mud huts exist side by side. If people can tolerate such material disparities, surely their views of love, too, can span several generations. Actually, the chaos is much worse in China where there are "perhaps four or five generations' views of love!"⁴² The author looks unfavorably upon what Ernst Bloch has called "the synchronicity of the non-synchronous."⁴³ But there seems also to be a sense of

resignation in the face of accelerating modernity and its disregard for unevenness and incongruity. If motor cars and wheelbarrows can share the avenues of Shanghai, why not the divergent views of love attributed to different generations who nonetheless share the same time-space of modernity?

A reader named Chen Zuiyun, however, refuses to recognize the issue of synchronicity by making an explicit case against the cult of contemporaneity (*shidai xing*). In his view, Zhenya does not represent a new era, for there is no essential difference between her and the notorious Empress Wu Zetian (625–705) who had gigolos galore. Chen raises a four-point critique of Zhenya: 1) She refuses to acknowledge that she is in fact in love with her stepfather. 2) The revolutionary period is a temporary transitional period. Its mores cannot be held as universal. 3) It is terrible that Zhenya has no sympathy for her mother. Since she has other boyfriends, why must she go after her mother's lover and hurt her feeling so? 4) Pursuing pure carnal gratification rolls back evolution to the bestial stage.⁴⁴ The implicit criteria against which Zhenya is judged are the liberal principles of uniting body and soul and reconciling love and sociability. But even if spontaneous sex is acceptable, it is historically specific and therefore cannot become a universal imperative. With little empirical knowledge of Soviet Russia, few Chinese were in a position to make point-by-point comparison of the two societies. But if the readers' responses are any indication, the assumption is that the Chinese are far from ready to copy Zhenya's example.

Another readerly strategy is to insist on reading love into Zhenya's erratic sexual relationships with men. The reader cited immediately above, for example, believes that love can exist objectively with or without the agent's knowledge. One letter purports to be the record of a conversation between two lovers and the female voice suggests that Zhenya is very much in love with her stepfather: "She says she is willing to have sex with any man whom she finds 'appealing' [*zhongyi*]. What's the difference between being lovable and appealing?"⁴⁵ Hong Jun, a veteran of the social debates on love, also seeks to reinsert love into Zhenya's sex games: Human beings are

emotional creatures who desire union with those they admire. Zhenya and her stepfather are evidently very fond of each other. Who would believe that it was not love? It matters little what she thinks herself, just as no warlord would admit that he was a warlord. So her story is not enough to prove the truth about free sex or love game.⁴⁶

That the readers of "Three Generations" insisted on reading love back into free sex seemed to be a response to the possibility that without love and its promise of ethicality and its exculpatory potential, Zhenya's near incestuous behavior was just too outrageous to contemplate. This forms a stark contrast to the responses to *The Education of Love* where the readers were thankful that the author had found a powerful way to talk about love without serving up yet another mawkish love story. They responded viscerally to the seduction of a *gemeinschaft* in which people remained in perpetual childhood vis-à-vis the tutelary state and in which the risks and dangers of free sociability were eliminated. Inherently associated with free sociability, love can find no conceptual foothold in the world of *The Education of Love*. *Love and Duty* essentially makes the same point: since love invariably runs up against the interests of objective institutions, ethics is necessarily predicated upon its sublimation.

"Three Generations" also follows this logic of opposing love to ethics, except that it allows love a separate existence as an everyday routine, devoid of moral and political significance. The author is obviously far more interested in the implications of the quotidianization of love than in the vicissitudes of collectivism. In reintroducing the family moral drama, Kollontai seems to admit that no human action can be permanently swept off the realm of the ethical. To her Chinese readers, Zhenya's commission of virtual incest and her untroubled conscience testify to the reprehensible consequences of exiling love from the ethical; and nothing should justify the emotional costs of the estrangement between mother and daughter. The critique of love by rendering love an amoral force thus backfires. *The Education of Love* succeeds where "Three Generations" fails in promising an intimate community in which the ties of kinship are made continuous with the ties of citizenship and in which the collective enterprise

flourishes on the basis of everyday ethicality rather than at its expense.

In "Three Generations," Zhenya's love is entirely consumed by revolutionary work and she scarcely has any feeling left for her mother, let alone her collection of makeshift sex partners. The novel conjures up a world of political zealotry and instrumental reason that leaves the reader yearning profoundly for a sense of the ethical and the human. Readers reared on romantic fiction, as if by reflex, fall back on the exalted discourse of romantic love. Their invocation of love is thus as much a tribute to love itself as an attempt to assuage the anxieties of pure instrumentality. Love for them stands for the enduring and inexorable ethicality of human relations in general. They are comforted by the idea that Zhenya does in the end feel for her mother and that her outrageous behavior can be explained by her even-greater love for her stepfather, who is, after all, just another man to her. The readers would rather read the novel as a cautionary tale about the perennial conflict between desire and morality rather than as an exploration of a new way of organizing identity and sociability. They refuse to accept the scenario in which ethics is subsumed under instrumental, collective projects and in which the portions of human life that do not fit into these projects are to be a mechanical process, devoid of meaning and significance.

Conclusion

Of the three solutions to the crisis of romantic love offered by the three translated texts, *The Education of Love* seemed to have struck the strongest chord among the Chinese readers. The intimate, transparent community that the Chinese readers of *The Education of Love* embraced rather resembles the republic of virtue as envisaged by Rousseau. In *Lettre à d'Alembert sur les spectacles*, Rousseau opposes the introduction of French theater to his ideal city-state, Geneva, convinced that theater fosters conceit by privileging the presentation of self over the authentic self. Instead, he proposes *fêtes*, or dancing festivals in the open air, as a means of obliterating the inimical separation between actors and audience. As David Denby puts it, "the

fête constitutes a social ceremony which will combine moral and political rectitude and individual spontaneity in a totally transparent, public form."⁴⁷ The republic of virtue, as a true body politic, must be both the subject and object of its own celebration. Rousseau articulates it in the latter half of *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, where he projects Clarens as a miniature society in which hierarchy and happiness are reconciled.⁴⁸

The ending of Luo Chen's *Love and Duty*, too, projects a domain (parenthood) in which desire coincides with ethics and social acceptance is chosen over the marginality of free love. Even more remarkably reminiscent of Rousseau's Clarens is de Amicis's Turin. Little Enrico, his family, and his schoolmates engage in a variety of public activities such as carnivals and prize-giving ceremonies in which everyone has a part to play. There is no theater-going and idle curiosity is discouraged. As Enrico's father understands well, the spectacle of violence "offends and hardens the heart." When there is an event that resembles a spectacle, e.g., the march of the infantry regiment, the book takes care to stress the identity and hence interchangeability between the soldiers and the spectators (the pupils). Or when the King descends upon the town station, the narrative dwells on the mutual gaze, signs of recognition, and handshaking between him and a veteran soldier. In the micro-society of Turin, individuals are integrated into social groups which are in turn integrated into the body politic: the prisoner is reformed and reinserted into the family and local society; the hot-tempered father is made to renounce violence; even the lonely chimney-sweep is given an award at the night-school prize-giving ceremony. Here, hierarchy and inequality are neutralized by charity and the valorization of manual labor. Everyone has a fixed place in the body social and conflict and change are synonymous with immorality and chaos: "The state of happiness must be permanent."⁴⁹ And the only way to achieve permanent and universal happiness, as Rousseau sees it, is to make virtue reign.

Thus did Chinese readers in the late 1920s and early 1930s become captivated by a book that spelled out the reign of virtue for them by showing how social cohesion could be achieved through voluntary love, rather than through the violent process of revolution or

the messy process of exercising the offices of citizenship. As one reader of *The Education of Love* puts it, “if only we could all love each other and our hearts were united, our politics would get on the right track and all our personal and social problems would be easily solved.”⁵⁰ It is true that Chinese society did not evolve into a republic of virtue as these readers envisioned it. The conservative promotion of family values and communitarianism would become subordinated to a radical politics that mobilized class precisely as an identitarian principle and that sought to render love/sex as a mechanical routine incapable of contesting the affective, moral, and ideological supremacy of violent revolution. But all three textual clusters discussed here—the transnational texts and their localizations—would be able to find traces of themselves in the People’s Republic that came into being in 1949. It was a republic of virtue of sorts, or rather a totalized, intimate community in which duty defined desire and “revolution” hegemonized human existence and human connection.

NOTES

¹ David Denby, *Sentimental Narrative and the Social Order in France, 1760–1820* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994); James M. Hembree, *Subjectivity and the Signs of Love: Discourse, Desire, and the Emergence of Modernity in Honoré d’Urfé’s L’Astrée* (New York: Peter Lang, 1997); Irving Singer, *The Nature of Love; vol. 2, Courtly and Romantic* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1984); Robert C. Solomon, “The Virtue of (Erotic) Love,” in *The Philosophy of (Erotic) Love*, ed. Robert C. Solomon and Kathleen M. Higgins (Lawrence: UP of Kansas, 1991) 492–518.

² Rey Chow, *Woman and Chinese Modernity: The Politics of Reading between West and East* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1991); Ying Hu, *Tales of Translation: Composing the New Woman in China, 1899–1918* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2000); Haiyan Lee, *Revolution of the Heart: A Genealogy of Love in China* (Stanford: Stanford UP, forthcoming); Leo Ou-fan Lee, *The Romantic Generation of Modern Chinese Writers* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard UP, 1973).

³ In her preface to the expanded second Chinese edition, Luo Chen (a.k.a. S. Horose), who could not write in Chinese, thanks Zhao Zuxin, translator of

the first edition, and Tom Tao, translator of the second edition, for their help. She notes that the book has also been published in English under the title *Love and Duty* and in French as *La Symphonie des Ombreichinoises* (“Zaiban zixu,” 1933). There were at least two more Chinese editions between 1934 and 1939. It was made into a successful film in 1931 by the director Bu Wancang (1903–1974). I have not been able to locate readers’ comments on this novel.

⁴ Luo Chen, *Lian'ai yu yiwu (Love and duty)*, trans. Zhao Zuxin, Xiaoshuo shijie xuankan (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1924).

⁵ Luo Chen 24.

⁶ For instance, Naifan and Zuyi’s out-of-wedlock daughter, Ping’er, is said to be exceptionally beautiful and intelligent because she is the offspring of true love.

⁷ G.W.F. Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, trans. T.M. Knox, 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1975) 566–67.

⁸ Hegel 567.

⁹ Edmondo de Amicis, *Cuore: The Heart of a Boy*, trans. Desmond Hartley (London: Peter Owen/UNESCO, 1986) 5–6. Subsequent citations from the English version will use the abbreviation *CBH* followed by the page number(s).

¹⁰ The title of the Japanese translation is *Ai no gakkô* (The school of love). In 1910 the Commercial Press published an abridged translation by Bao Tianxiao under the title *Xin'er jiuxue ji* (Xin'er goes to school) (I am grateful to Gang Xu for information about this earlier translation.)

¹¹ A bestsellers’ list in 1931 records a sales figure of 10,768 for the novel and 3,891 for its sequel. The figures for the others on the list are all below three thousand (*Kaiming* 31, 1931). Between 1926 and 1949, Kaiming Books brought out approximately 40 editions of *Heart* (and about 26 editions of the sequel). There were at least 7 other versions put out by different publishers and their translators. The latest Chinese editions came out in 1998 from Hebei renmin chubanshe (PRC) and in 1996 from Shidai chuban gufen youxian gongsi (Taiwan).

¹² Franco Moretti takes a determined Foucauldian approach to this novel. For him, the diary framework represents a “panopticon open to the rigorous gaze of authority”; the school is a place where the pupils learn to assimilate the values of patriotism not out of “inner conviction” but through “sheer fear of

authority.” “Parade, medals, mayors, flags, little martyrs of Italian Independence and Good Kings wink at us from every page. De Amicis’s patriotism is explicit, crude, and above all vigilant” (*Signs Taken for Wonders: Essays in the Sociology of Literary Forms*, trans. Susan Fischer, David Forgacs, and David Miller, rev. ed., London: Verso, 1988: 165). I find this reading rather at odds with the pattern of reception among Chinese readers. As I try to argue in this section, Chinese readers, beginning with the translator, responded most strongly to the theme of sentimental education. To be sure, love in this novel is inexorably bound up with duty and much of the mechanism of sentimental education involves panopticon-style surveillance and discipline. As Moretti perceptively points out, this is a book in which fathers and male teachers—as authority figures—never die and in which “family and school are superimposed in a single, escape-proof disciplinary structure” (Moretti 166). Moretti’s reading points to the dark underside of the republic of virtue of which Chinese readers seemed little aware or deliberately ignored.

¹³ Philippe Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life*, trans. Robert Baldick (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1962) 412.

¹⁴ Alexander des Forges, “Street Talk and Alley Stories: Tangled Narratives of Shanghai from *Lives of Shanghai Flowers* (1892) to *Midnight* (1933)” (Diss. Princeton University, 1998) 24.

¹⁵ Richard Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1992).

¹⁶ Haiyan Lee, “All the Feelings That Are Fit to Print: The Community of Sentiment and the Literary Public Sphere in China, 1900–1918,” *Modern China* 27.3 (2001): 291–327.

¹⁷ Wu Chengjun, “*Ai de jiaoyu*” (The education of love), *Kaiming* 1.8 (1929): 451–52.

¹⁸ Chen Xiangqing, “Zai tan *Ai de jiaoyu*” (Revisiting the Education of love), *Kaiming* 1.8 (1929): 461–62. This reader’s name and those of a few other readers are gender-ambiguous.

¹⁹ Lin Zhenshu, “Du le *Ai de jiaoyu* yihou” (Upon reading the Education of love), *Kaiming* 1.8 (1929): 459.

²⁰ Zhang Zhongping, “*Ai de jiaoyu* duhuogan” (Thoughts on the Education of love), *Kaiming* 30 (1931): 11–12.

²¹ Ouyang Qing, “*Ai de jiaoyu* duhougan” (Reading the Education of

love), *Kaiming* 30 (1931): 10–11.

²² De Xin, “Du *Ai de jiaoyu*” (Reading the Education of love), *Kaiming*, 1.1 (1928): 31–33.

²³ De Xin 33.

²⁴ Lin Xuexiang, “*Ai de jiaoyu duhougan*” (Thoughts on the Education of love), *Kaiming* 30 (1931): 9.

²⁵ Han Yongxin, “Du *Ai de jiaoyu*” (Reading the Education of love), *Kaiming* 1.8 (1929): 453–54.

²⁶ Lin Zhenshu 459.

²⁷ Cheng Luding, “Wo suo ai du de shu” (My favorite books), *Kaiming* 1.11 (1929): 623–624.

²⁸ Chen Xiangqing 462.

²⁹ He Jiajun, “*Ai de jiaoyu duhuogan*” (Thoughts on the Education of love), *Kaiming* 30 (1931): 12–13; Jiang Wenrui, “*Ai de jiaoyu*” (The education of love), *Kaiming* 36 (1931): 15.

³⁰ Wu Chengjun, “*Ai de jiaoyu*” (The education of love), *Kaiming* 1.8 (1929): 451–452.

³¹ Sangjie, “Du le *Ai de jiaoyu*” (Upon reading the Education of love), *Kaiming* 1.8 (1929): 457–58.

³² Lu Xun, *Selected Stories of Lu Hsün*, trans. Yang Hsien-yi & Gladys Yang (New York: Norton, 1977) 54–64.

³³ Prasenjit Duara, *Rescuing History from the Nation-state: Questioning Narratives of Modern China* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1995) 12.

³⁴ Michael Tsin, “Imagining ‘Society’ in Early Twentieth-century China,” in *Imagining the People: Chinese Intellectuals and the Concept of Citizenship, 1890–1920*, ed. Joshua A. Fogel and Peter G. Zarrow (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1997) 226.

³⁵ “Sandairen de lian’ ai,” *Xin nüxing* (The new woman) 3.9 (1928). The author was a prominent figure in the Russian Revolution and had held a series of high-level posts in the Soviet regime before she fell out of Stalin’s favor. A radical feminist in her time, Kollontai led a controversial private life and wrote both theoretical treatises defending women’s rights and fiction exploring women’s conditions in Soviet Russia (Cathy Porter, “Introduction,” in *A Great Love, by Alexandra Kollontai* [New York: Norton, 1981]). Her essay “Weilai shehui zhi jiating” (The future of the family) was translated into Chinese by

Shen Yanbing (a.k.a. Mao Dun) and collected in *Jiating yu hunyin* (Home and marriage [original English title]), vol. 29 of *Dongfang wenku* (The Eastern compendium), a series compiled by the Eastern Miscellany Publishing House (Dongfang zazhi she) and published by the Commercial Press (Shanghai, 1923). Beixin Books (Beixin shuju) published a collection of her essays under the title *Lian'ai yu xin daode* (Love and new morality, trans. from Japanese by Wang Fuquan and Shen Duanxian), which, according to an advertisement, includes a special preface by Kollontai addressed to “the men and women of new China.” Kollontai’s love trilogy, *Love of Worker Bees* (to which “Three Generations” belongs), was mentioned in the debate, but it is not clear if “Vasilisa Malygina” (known in English as *Red Love*) and “Sisters” were also translated into Chinese.

³⁶ Cheng Yinhong, *Cong doushi dao huaping—Su E nü gemingjia Keluntai de gushi* (From fighter to flower vase—the life of the Soviet Russian revolutionary Kollontai) (2000 [cited 2001]); available from www.sixiang.com.

³⁷ Alexandra Kollontai, *Love of Worker Bees*, trans. Cathy Porter (Chicago: Academy Press Limited, 1978).

³⁸ Hayashi Fusao, “Xin ‘lian’ai dao’ —Ke-lun-tai furen de lian’ai guan” (The new ‘way of love’ —Mrs. Kollontai’s theory of love), *Xin nüxing* 3.9 (1928): 1033–1051.

³⁹ See H. Lee, *Revolution of the Heart*, chap. 4.

⁴⁰ Zhu Mei, “Lian’ai de xianzai yu jianglai” (The present and future of love), *Xin nüxing* 3.12 (1928): 1373–1375.

⁴¹ Yao Fangren, “Guanyu ‘Sandai lian’ai’ de fenxi guancha” (An analysis of Three generations), *Xin nüxing* 3.12 (1928): 1363–1370.

⁴² Fuyuan, “Women jiang you ziji de ‘Sandai lian’ai’” (We will have our own Three generations), *Xin nüxing* 3.12 (1928): 1399–1400.

⁴³ Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke UP, 1991) 307.

⁴⁴ Chen Zuiyun, “Gexing benwei de lian’ai” (Egocentric love), *Xin nüxing* 3.12 (1928): 1407–1413.

⁴⁵ Sun Fuxi, “‘Sandai de lian’ai’ de erren de tanhua” (A dialogue on Three generations), *Xin nüxing* 3.12 (1928): 1401–1406.

⁴⁶ Hong Jun, “Ziyou xingjiao yu lian’ai youxi” (Free sex and love game), *Xin nüxing* 3.12 (1928): 1379–1383.

⁴⁷ David Denby, *Sentimental Narrative and the Social Order in France*,

1760–1820 (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994) 109.

⁴⁸ Denby 103–104.

⁴⁹ Carol Blum, *Rousseau and the Republic of Virtue: The Language of Politics in the French Revolution* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1986) 72.

⁵⁰ Lin Zhenshu 459.