

The Establishment of Identity in Eileen Chang's *Love in a Fallen City*

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Abstract

This work focuses on the phenomenon of identity in Eileen Chang's *Love in a Fallen City* to show that perception and truth are mutually exclusive. To do so, this work draws on varying examples in *Love in a Fallen City* to illustrate the Hong Kong and Shanghai archetypes of identity in the text. These archetypes derive from a non-anglophonic culture, however, by way of translation the reader is able to access the Chinese aspects of the text that reveal how individuals play the game of hide and seek. To avoid answering the question of *who* they are, individuals create personas that eventually mutate into their identity. Therefore when analysing identity, one must be able to separate the sheep from the goats.

1. Introduction

This paper explores the theme of identity and attempt to illustrate how Eileen Chang lays the foundations of her characters in the translated version of *Love in a Fallen City*.¹ To do so it will focus on the stories of “Jasmine Tea” and “Love in a Fallen City” because they present two differing archetypes. They were originally written in the 1940s and later translated into English, and portray a character who grew up within China, and one who was born in England to Chinese parents. In their respective stories, these characters make an individual set of choices as they attempt to answer the question of *who* they are. This paper argues that the idiosyncrasies of each character represent an archetypal model of behaviour. The protagonist of “Jasmine Tea” forms the Hong Kong model, whereas the protagonist of “Love in a Fallen City” forms the Shanghainese model. Some features of the Hong Kong archetype include internal otherness, family tension and the ordinariness of everyday life. The Shanghainese one, offers external otherness, trickery, and

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1 Eileen Chang, *Love in a Fallen City and Other Stories*, trans. by Kingsbury, Karen and Chang, Eileen (New York: Penguin Modern Classics, 2007)

companionship. One can think of them as separate, but in conjunction they offer a holistic impression of how Chang establishes identity through “Chineseness.”²

In addition to the two stories, *Love in a Fallen City*’s “Aloeswood Incense: The First Brazier” and “Red Rose, White Rose” are used to map out Chang’s overall framework. First, “Aloeswood Incense” depicts a British interpretation of China which allows the reader to view China from an external lens. Second, “Red Rose, White Rose” illustrates the liberties available to a Chinese in their homeland, which provides the reader with an internal lens. Third, “Red Rose, White Rose” is also used as the focal point of the final chapter because the reader can clearly envision the importance of family and home with regard to “Chineseness”. According to Meng and Noritah, “Chineseness” in *Love in a Fallen City* can be defined as a concept that “exists only in the diasporic imagination rather than in any tangible object or place.”³ Gregory Lee supposes that the “Chineseness that is sought by the exile is not a sense of cultural Chineseness, of greater Chinese that might be found elsewhere than China.”⁴ In other words, an exile regards themselves as a separate entity to the Chinese collective, and the exile’s hunger can only be satisfied with a return to their homeland. To experience the phenomenon, one must consider oneself to be on the *outside*, and others on the *inside*. In one way, a person’s Chineseness is only an individual abstraction, but in another, the term approximately summarises the sentiment of a collective longing. In such a light, the exiles are not separate because they actually can be brought into a single group with a shared communal feeling. A method to comprehend this context is to consider the Japanese concept of *uchi* (内) and *soto* (外), which respectively refer to an “in-group” and an “out-group”.⁵ These are ways in which Japanese society functions on a cultural level, and can refer to those within the country, as well as those on the outside. However, the fact each demarcation can shift indicates that the concepts are not fixed.⁶

2 Qiao Meng and Omar Noritah, ‘Pure Ethnicity in Hybridisation: A Returnee’s Quest for Chineseness in *Love in a Fallen City*’, *Ariel: A Review of International English Literature*, 45. 1–2 (Jan 2014–Apr 2014), 59–77, (p. 59)

3 Qiao Meng and Omar Noritah, (p. 59)

4 Gregory B. Lee, ‘1: Chinese Reveries, English Railings: Reimagining Twentieth-Century’, in *Chinas Unlimited: Making the Imaginaries of China and Chineseness* (2003: Routledge Curzon, London), 1–23 (p. 11–12)

5 Patricia J. Wetzel, ‘Chapter Three: A Movable Self: The Linguistic Indexing of *Uchi* and *Soto*’, in *Situated Meaning: Inside and Outside in Japanese Self, Society, and Language*, ed. by Jane M. Bachnik and Charles J. Quinn, Jr (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 73–87 (p. 74)

6 Patricia J. Wetzel, (p. 75)

In summary, it is possible to believe that one resides on the outside, but the definitions that constitute *in* and *out* are based on perception. Contrastingly, one can think of the interconnectivity of people in terms of Guanxi. Guanxi elicits that “all Chinese live in a web of social relationships.

People's family, kinship networks, work colleagues, neighbours, classmates, friendship circles and even casual acquaintances are the social communities into which they grow and on which they depend.”⁷ Thus, there exists the possibility that humans can see themselves as connected or disconnected from each other. Both of these views are key when tackling the issue of identity in *Love in a Fallen City*. Chuanqing, the protagonist of “Jasmine Tea” personifies the archetype of those who perceive themselves as exiles within the collective. Fan, the protagonist of “Love in a Fallen City” builds into the idea of interconnectivity, but his archetype suggests that one can perceive oneself as being in the collective, whilst not being in synchronisation with it.

In terms of story, Chuanqing is a university student in his twenties, and whose family moved to Hong Kong from Shanghai. Although he is a young man, he perceives his father and stepmother as tyrants. His father remarried after his mother died, and since then, Chuanqing feels that he was born into a family that he does not belong to. Interestingly, Chuanqing's mother was forced to marry at a young age, and it is believed “among their relatives” [90] that his mother loved another. Regarding Fan, he is born to two “overseas Chinese” [122] who were unofficially married. Originally Fan's father had a Chinese wife, but once his relationship with Fan's mother began the “couple never dared go back to China, and Fan Liuyuan grew up in England” [122]. After his parents' death, Fan returns to China at the age of twenty-four and lives in Shanghai until thirty-two, which is when “Love in a Fallen City” begins. Indeed, the plot underlines the familial issues of Chuanqing and Fan, but this emphasises the characters and their choices. To deal with his past, Chuanqing clings onto the idea of his mother and his love interest Danzhu to free him from his familial burden. Regarding Fan, he attaches himself to Liusu, whom he sees as a way to remove the past and become fully Chinese.

Realistically, the outlook of both characters can be exemplified as:

“I don't understand myself – but I want you to understand me!”[140]

In conclusion, each archetypal character has their own individual way, but they really

7 Yanjie Bian, ‘Guanxi and the Allocation of Urban Jobs in China’, *The China Quarterly*, 140. (1994), 971–999 (p. 972)

standout because they rely on the external world to define them. Each character carries unhealed trauma from their childhood which has been brushed under the carpet, but instead of solving it, the characters look to others for the solution, and they therefore do not know the difference between their perceived identity and its reality.

2. Hong Kong and “Jasmine Tea”

“Jasmine Tea” is a “Hong Kong tale” [79] that represents the view that people can come from the same background but have an entirely different identity. Historically speaking, Hong Kong has been a major hub in Asia for centuries. At one time it was a collection of fishing villages, then a British colony, and later became the Special Administrative Region it is today. Chang’s story takes place in the early 1940’s during the British occupation, and before the Japanese invasion, a time when Hong Kong housed a much smaller Chinese population than it did in the postwar period. After the war, the island experienced a massive influx of Chinese from the North, which helped pave the way for its future economic growth.⁸ The relationship between the British and locals was difficult because some locals lacked an understanding of English, and others were simply unwilling to communicate with their colonisers.⁹ Efforts were made to bridge the gap in the form of the police force introducing people from Shandong into its ranks, but the sense of division still remained.¹⁰ In essence, the Hong Kong of “Jasmine Tea” contains the presence of the British, whose control is limited, and a less dominant local population, whose roots remain strong and way of life continues.

Hong Kong’s identity is truly a tedious question. In one way it is a British colony, in another it remains part of the Chinese mainland, and despite the overall picture, the city houses a population that considers themselves as Hongkongers. It is certain that the influences of the British, Chinese and Hongkongers have contributed to the overall identity of Hong Kong, nevertheless, if one chooses to focus on a particular influence, one ignores

8 Lawrence Ko Ko Ho and Yiu Kong Chu, ‘Chapter 3: Unstable Years: The Police Force during the Japanese Occupation and the Post-War Reconstruction’, in *Policing Hong Kong 1842–1969: Insiders’ Stories* (Hong Kong: City University of Hong Kong Press, 2012) 45–76 (p. 62)

9 Lawrence Ko Ko Ho and Yiu Kong Chu, ‘Chapter 2: Opening of Chaos: The Birth of the Police Force on the Island’, in *Policing Hong Kong 1842–1969: Insiders’ Stories*, (Hong Kong: City University of Hong Kong Press, 2012) 8–44 (p. 27)

10 Lawrence Koko Ho and Yiu Kong Chu, 8–44 (p. 26/27)

the other aspects. The meshing of these three elements provides the ideas of appearance, separateness, and oneness, but all come into the same equation. The proof of this comes in the first tale of *Love in a Fallen City*, "Aloeswood Incense: The First Brazier", in which Chang lays down a foundation for Hong Kong that can be applied to the textual world of "Jasmine Tea":

"From the veranda, glass doors opened onto a living room. The furniture and the arrangement were basically western, touched up with some unexceptionable Chinese bric-a-bric. An ivory bodhisattva stood on the mantel of the fireplace, along with snuff bottles made of emerald jade; a small screen with bamboo motif curved around the sofa. These Oriental touches had been put there, it was clear, for the benefit of the foreigners. The English come from so far to see China – one has to give them something of China to see. But this was China as Westerners imagine it; exquisite, illogical, very entertaining." [8]

Adjectives such as exquisite, illogical, and very entertaining, polarise the Westerners from the Chinese in terms of appearance, mentality, and way of life. This is in keeping with history because during the colonial era, the "British administration provided a buffer that insulated the colony from the effects of turmoil on the mainland."¹¹ The worlds of the British and Chinese coexist within the same Hong Kong, but it is the British that try to transform the mutual space into something it is not. The placing of physical objects into *their* living space gives them a sense of ownership over the city, but they are just papering over the cracks. To make sense of the whole snapshot it is beneficial to consider the Buddhist idea of "impermanence".¹² The British attempt to formulate their own interpretation of Hong Kong which gives them a false sense of identity that looks externally permanent but is internally hollow. The Hongkongers do not require the façade because for them daily life is something that just happens and needs no logical explanation. By its very nature it is logic. The whole British conception becomes theatrical comedy by way of the bodhisattva metaphor. According to Garfield, the typical translation of bodhisattva in English is "*the awakened mind* or as *the mind of awakening*."¹³ The British way is so

11 Mark Roberts, 'Conclusion: The New Power Elite', in *The Fall of Hong Kong: China's Triumph and Britain's Betrayal* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1994), 305–222 (p. 318)

12 Edo Shonin, Edo, William Van Gordan, and Mark D. Griffiths, 'The Emerging Role of Buddhism in Clinical Psychology: Towards Effective Integration', *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality*, 6.2 (2014), 123–137 (p. 126) <https://www.apa.org/pubs/journals/features/rel-a0035859.pdf>

13 Jay L. Garfield, 'What is it like to be a bodhisattva? Moral phenomenology in Śāntideva's Bodhicaryāvatāra', *JLABS – The Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies*, 33.1–2 (2010), 333–357 (p. 334)

ostentatious that to the everyday person, it is impossible to be awake to the presence of the British. To a Chinese person, it can only be comedy because they are aware that objects such as bamboo and jade do not make them Chinese.

Chang's framework articulates the concept that people in the same space can have an entirely different notion of the world. "Jasmine Tea" reiterates this framework through its protagonist, Chuanqing. He is the Hong Kong archetype because he personifies the split identity of the city in individual form. He is similar to the British in the sense that he lives in his own version of reality, yet he is also like the Hongkongers in how he exists in a world of everyday logic. Thus, he is simultaneously autonomous and part of the collective. The difficulty for the reader is that Chuanqing's identity is not clear within the aforementioned framework, and the reader is not acquainted with that reality:

"THIS POT of jasmine tea that I've brewed for you may be somewhat bitter; this Hong Kong tale that I'm about to tell you may be, I'm afraid, just as bitter. Hong Kong is a splendid city, but a sad one too.

First, pour yourself a cup of tea, but be careful – it's hot! Blow on it gently. In the tea's curling stream you can see... a Hong Kong public bus on a paved road, slowly driving down a hill. A passenger stands behind the driver, a big bunch of azaleas in his arms. The passenger leans against an open window, the azaleas stream out in a twiggy thicket, and the windowpane behind becomes a flat sheet of red.

Sitting by the window was Nie Chuanqing, a young man of something like twenty. Twenty, perhaps, though he looked much older around the eyes and mouth." [79]

The narrator gradually brings the reader into the tale and integrates them within the Hong Kong picture which begins with a dialogue. The dynamics at play make the reader-narrator relationship seem like that of a Buddhist student who "directly follows a master who has attained the truth and clarified the mind," because the reader is at the behest of the narrator and must entirely rely on them for entry into this new world.¹⁴ The narrator has full mastery of the tale and its overall conception. However, the notion of a dialogue indicates that the reader and narrator talk as equals. The narrator begins talking in the first person, advising the reader before transitioning into a more passive participant in the

14 Gudo Wafu Nishijima, 'Chapter One. Bendowa: A Talk about Pursuing the Truth', in *Shobogenzo: The True Dharma-Eye Treasury: Volume I (Taisho Volume 82, Number 2582)*, trans. from Japanese. by Nishijima Gudo Wafu Nishijima and Chodo Cross (California: Numata Center for Buddhist Translation and Research, 2007), 3–30 (p.9)

dialogue that allows the reader to become an active participant. The opening is set up like a teashop with teacher and student sat at a table because the message must be received in the “sitting position” of Zazen.¹⁵ That is to say the reader is encapsulated in the story by transitioning out of their reality into the setting of the teashop, which allows for the “one-to-one transmission of the splendid Dharma”¹⁶ In this case, the Dharma is the tale, and the result of the transmission brings the narrator and reader into the same reality. It is important note that although the narrator seemingly vanishes, for the duration of the tale they are still in dialogue with the reader.

The reader must be able to separate the wheat from the chaff. In the opening, the illusion includes the bus, the teashop, and the background of Hong Kong. The reality includes the dialogue between narrator and reader, the lacklustre introduction of the protagonist, and Chuanqing's physical description. When the narrator talks of the paradoxical nature of Hong Kong, they are not just making a statement of the tale, they are also talking about the very construction of the tale itself and its protagonist.¹⁷ Chuanqing is not fully integrated because the narrator emphasises his physical features while omitting his internal thought processes. One might say that on an actual bus, one might not have such insight into another passenger's mind, but something does not add up. The narrator's description of the everyday scene overshadows Chuanqing, and he remains in the periphery, but the truth about his identity lies in what is being concealed. The tenuous physical description shows that his eyes could conceal the bitterness and sadness to which the narrator alludes. But because Chuanqing is part of the overall scene and the emphasis is on the collective rather than the individual, it means that all the other occurrences in the picture have as much relevancy as Chuanqing. Thus, the environment and protagonist are melded into one, so statements about the environment provide information of Chuanqing, and vice-versa. One can think of this in terms of “the example of nectar, which is collected by bees from different sources, but becomes undifferentiated whole when gathered together.”¹⁸ The bus reflects all the separate elements that come together

15 In Zen Buddhism, the term 'Zazen' refers to a position of resting or meditation, see Gudo Wafu Nishijima, (p. 3)

16 Gudo Wafu Nishijima, (p. 3)

17 Edo Shonin, Edo, William Van Gordan, and Mark D. Griffiths, (p. 125)

18 Black, Brian, '1: Senses of Self and Not-self in the Upaniṣads and Nikāyas', in *Hindi and Buddhist ideas in dialogue: Self and No-Self*, ed. By Irina Kuznetsova, Jonardon Ganeri, and Chakravarthi Ram-Prasad (Oxon: Routledge, 2012), 11–28, (p. 12)

to form Hong Kong's identity, but each element represents the whole and is crucial to its creation.

While Chuanqing is crucial to the identity of the tale, tea is of equal importance. According to Sea Ling Cheng, herbal tea is "an important part of Cantonese folk medicine."¹⁹ Moreover, her research shows that "tea shops in Hong Kong society have played many a role that contributes to its people's health conditions, social cohesion, and cultural identity."²⁰ Tea expresses the folkloric dimension of Canton; Chuanqing is the living expression of the early 20th century Cantonese zeitgeist. The conception of tea allows the reader to analyse the protagonist in terms of health, cohesion, and identity, which reflect the overall state of Hong Kong in the text:

"He lived in a big mansion. Within the few years of their moving here from Shanghai, all the flowers and trees that had once filled the yard had wilted, died, or been cut down, and now the sun beat down on a desolate scene." [84]

The wilting of the flowers and trees implies the overturning of a once summery and optimistic mindset. This despair comes from the fact he has been "trampled on" [87] by his father and stepmother. Indeed, when the narrator talks of Chuanqing's aged eyes, it is because Chuanqing carries the despair of his domestic life with him. If one considers that the eyes are a window to the soul, one can grasp that the protagonist's health and cohesion with his environment are in question. Chang flips the warmth of a domestic environment into a cold, lifeless void, which shows that Hong Kong has become empty for Chuanqing. Hence, if Hong Kong is empty for the character, further proof of the emptiness of the character's reality comes in the public sphere of school:

"At school, people gave him the cold shoulder, and since he knew he wasn't liked, he stayed away from others." [81]

Home allows the reader to access Chuanqing's *inner* environment, whereas the school provides an individualised picture of the *outer* world. In both, he is completely separated, which suggests that the environment can change, but the reality of the character remains the same. Thus, the perspectives of *inside* and *outside* become interchangeable. Confucianism and Guanxi offer the view that a person's identity intertwines with their surround-

19 Sea Ling Cheng, '3: Back To The Future: Herbal Tea Shops in Hong Kong', in *Hong Kong: The Anthropology of a Chinese Metropolis*, ed. by Grant Evans, and Maria Tam (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1997), 51–73 (p. 51)

20 Sea Ling Cheng, (p. 51)

ings, hence Chuanqing sees himself and his surroundings as empty.²¹ The difficulty for the character lies in his belief that he is separate from his environment. Chuanqing believes his environment is desolate, and everyone else's is vigorous, which is why Hong Kong "is a splendid city, but a sad one too." [79] Nonetheless, the symbiotic relationship between Chuanqing and the city suggests that the cultural identity of Hong Kong is misshapen.

This paper suggests that the metaphor of tea provides the solution to the identity of Hong Kong. Jasmine tea pertains to the collective consciousness and Cantonese folk medicine, which allows it to be a solution for the collective. When the narrator warned the reader of the "hot" [79] tea that needed to be cooled, they were alluding to a catharsis of the collective through the individual. The unfolding of the story can be conceptualised as the digesting of medicine because Chuanqing and the body politic are choleric elements that need to be cooled.²² By way of the tale and its processes, Chuanqing shall realise that he is not separate from his environment, which reharmonises him with the collective, allowing it to heal:

"Herbal tea' is in fact not a literal translation – in Cantonese, it is called *lèuhng cháh* – 'cooling tea'. The name denotes its perceived effects of eliminating too much heat in the body according to the Chinese medical system."²³

At first, Chuanqing's identity appears tedious, but he is the Hong Kong archetype because he represents an individual and community that finds itself on the *inside* and the *outside*. He has as much importance as other Hongkongers, but his separation makes him stand out. His struggles reflect the cultural identity of Hong Kong in how it tries to stand out, but the importance is that the city has its own uniqueness that is not dependent on China or Britain.

3. Shanghai and "Love in a Fallen City"

"Love in a Fallen City" illustrates how people can come from different backgrounds and have a similar identity. To do so, the tale intertwines the cities of Shanghai and Hong

21 Pak-Hang Wong, 'Dao, Harmony and Personhood: Towards a Confucian Ethics of Technology', *Philosophy & Technology*, 25.1 (2012), 67–86, (p. 74)

22 Jay L. Garfield, (p. 341)

23 Sea Ling Cheng, (p. 52)

Kong, as well as the characters of Fan and Liusu to drive a Shanghainese narrative.²⁴ The main themes of the narrative are superiority, the concealing of identity, and Chineseness. In principle, the story elicits these themes through the Shanghainese worldview that there are “only two categories in China, Shanghainese and the bumpkins.”²⁵ That is to say, the Shanghainese of the text see themselves as superior, and non-Shanghainese as inferior. Interestingly, Fan also carries this air of superiority despite not being Shanghainese, which links back to Chang’s framework in “Aloeswood Incense: The First Brazier” and “Jasmine Tea”. The framework in question shows how the British and Chuanqing are ingrained with their surroundings, but internally feel separate. However, the difference with Fan is that he knowingly conceals himself within his environment because he feels externally separate. It can be thought that the British and Chuanqing only fool themselves, but Fan’s function as an exile is to fool others. Thus, the Shanghainese archetype exemplifies the forging of individual identity to the detriment of others:

“SHANGHAI’S clocks were set an hour ahead so the city could “save daylight,” but the Bai family said: “We go by the old clock.” Ten o’clock to them was eleven to everyone else. Their singing was behind the beat; they couldn’t keep up with the *huqin* of life.” [111]

In keeping with a Shanghainese worldview, the Bai family ostracise themselves from their surroundings. This separation is physical because the family are creating their own microcosm within the macrocosm of Shanghai, and it is temporal in how they abide in their *own* timeline. Furthermore, they consider *their* timeline to be in keeping with the way of “Old China” [9], which infers that those outside of the family have abandoned the old way. Indeed, this is only a perception, but it proves that superiority can only be created from the belief that others are inferior. Yet, the illusion of separation breaks when one considers the allusions to singing and the *huqin*. A *huqin* belongs to a group of fiddles, and in the text, it portrays a musical oneness between all Chinese that overrides differences.²⁶ Culturally speaking, the *huqin* represents the grand total of the epochs of

24 Jessica Tsui Yan Li, ‘2. From Page to Stage: Cultural “Inbetweeness” in (New) Love in a Fallen City’, in *Eileen Chang: Romancing Language, Cultures and Genres*, ed. By Kam Louie (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2012), 33–48, (p. 46)

25 Hai Yu, ‘The Shanghainese People and the City of Shanghai’, *Global Urban Studies: グローバル都市研究*, 9 (2016), 17–30 (p. 18)

26 Lawrence Kramer, ‘Chapter One: Classical Music and Its Values’, in *Why Classical Music Still Matters* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 1–34 (p. 16)

“Old China” with which the Bai family identifies.²⁷ But, ironically in believing they have sole access to that culturalness, they are in fact the ones who are out of tune with the musical oneness, not others. Above all, the narrator clarifies that the melody of life is always being played in the present moment, and everyone is a maker and listener.

The Bai family by definition are a collective, but they are akin to the British and Chuanqing because they are trapped within their own fantasy. On the one hand, Chuanqing feels inferior, and on the other, the Bai family feels superior, but it all comes down to a choice. If one chooses the way of the individual, one loses the group aspect, and, if one chooses the way of the group, ones lose one's individuality. The difficulty is that individuality and group mentality are not fixed, they are in constant fluctuation and depend on their relative context:

“Liuyuan headed toward the door again, taking Liusu with him. Liusu couldn't understand much English, but she had followed their expressions. Now she said, with a smile, “I *am* a country bumpkin.” [137]

Liusu Bai, a character who was divorced and taken back in by her family. Through her life, she experienced marriage, divorce, and a return to family, thus, her identity changes from group to individual, and back again. While being courted by Fan in Hong Kong, his acquaintance indicates that she does “not seem like someone from Shanghai” [137]. This view is expressed to Fan, not Liusu, due to her lack of understanding of English. In this moment, she becomes a Shanghainese *outsider* within an English setting, which is why she recognises herself as a bumpkin. Due to being Shanghainese she understands the bumpkin demarcation, but the experience of being a bumpkin only materialises when she is taken out of Shanghai and put into an English-speaking environment. In reality, Liusu is equal to others in the scene, however her inability to keep up with the rhythm of the English means she feels mentally separated. Therefore, although she is with Fan, it proves that group and individual mentalities can instantaneously change.

Fan and Liusu are courting because of their intention to marry. Initially the Bai family wished to wed Fan to Liusu's younger sister as they saw him as the “perfect son-in-law” [122] to initiate into their ranks. The family chooses the younger sister to represent them instead of Liusu because of her prior divorce, which makes her a “soiled flower” [127], but

27 Lv Qinyan, ‘On the Description of Cityscape in Novels Written by Zhang Ailing (Eileen Chang)’, *BCP Social Sciences & Humanities*, 14 (2021), 322–329 (p. 327)

despite the family's intent Fan chooses Liusu. For the reader and characters, Fan's identity is a paradox because he is simultaneously the ideal match and a "playboy" [123]. In his recent years, he has treated women as "mud under his feet" [122], which creates that impression that perception and reality can be worlds apart:

"His tone did not seem sarcastic, and she noticed that when the two of them were alone together, he was a perfect gentleman. For reasons she failed to fathom, he was a model of self-restraint when no one else was around to see, but when people were watching, he liked to take liberties. Was this just a peculiarity? Or was he up to something? She couldn't quite figure it out." [138]

Evidently, Fan chooses his persona based on his audience. He can perform the role of playboy or gentleman, but the problem is that the reader has to rely on the narrator and other characters. When Fan speaks, he only gives minimal information away because he remains in persona to the reader. The writer purposefully conceals his identity from the reader and characters to play a game. Liusu grasps that Fan is playing a trick, although she does not understand why, and similarly, the reader must be aware a trick is being played on them, and why. Indeed, the overall trick is like a magic show inasmuch as the magician knows it is a trick, and the audience should understand it's a trick, yet the illusion persists. The illusion does break once the trick has been figured out, but the importance is in the fact that everyone plays along with the illusion. For the writer, the revealing of Fan's identity ends the illusion, but another layer to the mystery is that Liusu is also playing a game with Fan:

"“You have all these little gestures, and a romantic aura, very much like a Peking opera singer.” Liusu raised her eyebrows. “An opera singer -indeed!” she said sarcastically. “But of course it takes more than one to put on a show, and I've been forced into it. A person acts clever with me, and if I don't do the same, he takes me for a fool and insults me!” When Liuyuan heard this, he was rather crestfallen.” [144]

As a gameplayer, Liusu definitely holds her own with Fan. Both wish to marry, but they do so at each other's expense. Fan wishes to marry because it would allow him to realise his societal notion of Chineseness. Liusu, however, desires to marry to escape from the Bai family. In short, the only thing the two have in common is that they are playing a game with each other. Liusu is more subtle, and Fan is "aboveboard" [148], but the cracks in both of their facades eventually show. The truth of Liusu is shown when she realises she is a bumpkin, and Fan becomes outwardly crestfallen and is made out to

be a joker, which makes him become like a “chou”.²⁸ In Peking Opera the role of “chou” is that of the fool, and can be played by any gender from any walk of life:

“Such characters can be all kinds of people, from emperors, princes and high-ranking officials to peddlers, servants, and soldiers, to scholars, farmers and traders. They can be old and young, male or female. They can be deaf, blind or lame. And they can be kind-hearted, evil, loyal or treacherous.”²⁹

In “Love in a Fallen City”, this tends to suggest that Fan does not play an individual role, instead, he plays an archetypal role. Although the Peking Opera is not Shanghai-ese, Fan performs this act in a Shanghai-ese manner. That is to say he acts in a way that he perceives to be superior, and that makes other people bumpkins. Intriguingly, Fan elects to conceal his identity by outwardly becoming Chinese, although internally he feels inferior due to being an *outsider*. The role itself is important, but the fact Fan chooses to enact it in this manner means he represents the Shanghai-ese archetype. Fan is like the Shanghai-ese Bai family in how he creates his own faux reality, but the difference is the family are a collective. Fan wishes to create his own collective by coaxing others into his reality which gives him the illusion of power. Thus, he plays the game because winning signifies that the overseas Chinese can outsmart the everyday Chinese person. Fan is able to deceive others because he blends into his environment, and as a Chinese, he appears to possess the same thinking as others. Indeed, the Chinese environment gives him the tools needed for him to manipulate the web of relationships and sculpt his own identity:

““Don’t forget that you’re in China now,” Zhenbao said with a smile. Jiaorui finished her tea in one swallow, stood, and spat the leaves over the railing. “In China, you have Chinese freedoms: you can spit on the street if you want.”” [276]

This extract from Chang’s “Red Rose, White Rose” elaborates on the liberties that Fan would not have had in England. The China of the tale provides Fan with the ideal stage and a large audience, but the maintaining of the act requires constant environmental awareness. In every moment that Fan goes out in public, he walks onto the stage.³⁰ He

28 Chengbei Xu, ‘Performing Art’, in *Peking Opera* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 51–68 (p. 54)

29 Chengbei, Xu, (p. 54)

30 Gregory B. Lee, ‘4: Paddy’s Chinatown or The Harlequin’s Coat: A Short (Hi)story of a Liverpool Hybridity,’ in *Chinas Unlimited: Making the Imaginaries of China and Chineseness* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2003), 79–112 (p. 83)

must constantly watch himself, so he does not slip up and reveal his inferiority. As stated, the protagonist does slip up when he reveals his concealed emotions to Liusu, but this just shows his humanity. His fear is that others would see him as “someone from another world” [144] and does not want to become labelled as an exile. He is willing to act as a playboy but is not willing to feel the pain of ostracisation again. Hence, it shows that he will go to any length necessary to manipulate his environment because that gives him his identity. In conclusion, Fan acts in accordance with the expectations of the Bai family, which is why they see him as a perfect son-in-law, although, Fan is only borrowing an identity. In conclusion, his continual act is an individual interpretation of Chineseness which shows that he is more bumpkin than Chinese, and it is in this way that he becomes the Shanghainese archetype.

4. Hide and Seek, the “Red Rose, White Rose”

“Jasmine Tea” and “Love in a Fallen City” illustrate how people can play the game of hide and seek with regard to identity. Chuanqing and Fan function within their respective worlds, but the identity they show to the world is different from the one they conceal. Chuanqing may wear the face of a young Hongkonger, and Fan wears any he deems appropriate, but neither can run indefinitely. Indeed, both archetypes are exiles in the text because they do not fit within the collective notions of family and home offered in the stories.³¹ They therefore play hide and seek and conceal themselves within their own delusions because they do not wish to come to terms with who they are.

This final chapter borrows from *Love in a Fallen City's* “Red Rose, White Rose”, which helps in deconstructing the two archetypes. “Red Rose, White Rose” establishes that there are two women in every man’s life, one which is red, and the other, white, to show how one can identify with the external at the expense of the self:

“Maybe every man has had two women - at least two. Marry a red rose and eventually she’ll become a mosquito-blood streak smeared on the wall, while the white one is “moonlight in front of the bed.” Marry a white rose, and before long she’ll be a grain of sticky rice that’s gotten stuck on your clothes; the red one, by then, is a scarlet beauty mark just over your heart. But Zhenbao wasn’t like that; he was logical and thorough.

31 Julia Ching, ‘Chapter Three: The Problem of Man’, in *Confucianism and Christianity: A Comparative Study* (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1978), 68–111 (p. 97)

He was, in this respect, the ideal modern Chinese man.” [255]

In Chinese art, flowers are symbolic of beauty and bring the “experience of nature” to those who look upon them.³² The rose itself is the experience of nature, however when one places an accompanying adjective such as white or red in front of rose, it becomes less about the experience and more about the perception. When one removes the notions of men and women, a red rose signifies a romanticised image that later becomes insignificant in comparison to the white, and the white rose represents an unreachable desire that gnaws at the beholder. The phrase of “moonlight in front of the bed” [255] that describes the white rose is the “first line of a Li Po poem known to every schoolchild in China; the moonlight makes the poet think of his distant, beloved home.” [321] And although it is known to most Chinese, it is necessary to assume that each reader will have a different sentiment as shown through these translations:

“Nostalgia”

“A splash of white on my bedroom floor. Hoarfrost?

I raise my eyes to the moon, the same moon.

As scenes long past come to mind, my eyes fall again on

the splash of white,

and my heart aches for home.”

—— Translated by Weng Xianlian³³

“Quiet Night Thoughts”

“Moonlight before my bed

Could it be frost instead?

Head up I watch the moon

Head down I think of home”

—— Translated by Zhao Zhentao³⁴

32 Richard M. Barnhart, ‘Yün Shou-p’ing and the Art of Flower Painting’, in *Peach Blossom Spring: Gardens and Flowers in Chinese Paintings* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1985), 81–92 (p. 86)

33 Miao Gao, ‘An Analysis of Cultural Untranslatability with Eight English Versions of Jing Ye Si from with [sic] Experiential Metafunction’, at the ‘4th International Conference on Arts, Design and Contemporary Education (ICADCE 2018)’, *Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research*, 232. (2018), 349–356 (p.350)

34 Miao Gao, (p. 350)

The relevance of each translation to this paper lies in how they articulate the feeling of exile. Regardless of their accuracy, the choices made by each translator reflect an individualised experience. If one looks at the red and white roses of Chuanqing and Fan as reflections of their sentiments, then the colour of the rose becomes unimportant because their choices portray what each protagonist seeks and hides. Thus, the conception behind each character's choice of rose portrays their identity. The first and second chapters provide the overall outline, but the Hong Kong and Shanghai archetypes underline the attempt by the exile to create a space within the collective. Fan attempts to deceive everyone with the hope of bringing them into his space, and Chuanqing isolates himself from the collective. Ultimately, both do create their own space, but they lose their "personhood" in the process.³⁵ For Chuanqing, his exile began with the death of his mother that led to her becoming his white rose:

"He had a strange feeling, though, that the sky would soon be dark... that already it was dark. As he waited all alone by the window, his heart darkened along with the sky. An unspeakable, dusky anguish... Just as in a dream, that person waiting by the window was at first himself, and then in an instant he could see, very clearly, that it was his mother. Her long bangs swept down in front of her bowed head, and the pointed lower half of her face was a vague white shadow." [89]

Like the translations of Li Po, this extract portrays the unreachable desire of the seeker.

Chuanqing's mother appears the object of desire, but it is the protagonist's wish to create a home that is hidden in plain sight. The character perceives his deceased mother to represent home, but he only clings onto an image of an image. Consequently, he places his subconscious desire for home onto his deceased mother, which means that his image of home is also deceased. Therefore, his interpretation of home is unattainable, and the absence of his mother gnaws at him eternally. For Chuanqing, his red rose, Danzhu, is also unattainable. He professes to love her, but he also subconsciously projects his mother onto her too, which turns a human into a frustrating abstraction:

35 For Yunxiang's definition of personhood see Yan Yunxiang, 'Egoist Individual, Moralistic Self, and Relational Person: A Tripartite Approach to Changing Chinese Personhood', *UCLA - Center for Chinese Studies: A talk by anthropologist Yunxiang Yan, director of the Center of for Chinese Studies, about the cultural construction of personhood in Chinese culture in light of the national pursuit of modernity and globalization, podcast*, UCLA, 2 March 2017, <https://www.international.ucla.edu/ccs/article/172913>

"He hated her, and yet what use was his hate? It was as utterly ineffectual as he was. If she loved him, he would have power over her, he could subject her to all sorts of subtle psychological tortures. That was his only hope for revenge." [104]

The character feels frustrated because of the torment he has experienced at the hands of his father and stepmother, and the isolation he feels at school and home. His lust for power comes from being under the tyranny of his father in what can be considered a "subject-ruler" relationship.³⁶ Chuanqing wishes to feel empowered so that he no longer feels like the powerless subject. Essentially, it is in this sense that the red rose becomes the "mosquito-blood streak smeared on the wall" [255] that was described in "Red Rose, White Rose". To add, it is not only Danzhu, but also every internal frustration the character has felt that has become the smear on his external environment. Chuanqing hopes that Danzhu can be "a new everything" [105] for him, but he holds the loss of his mother in one hand, and the gaining of power in the other, which means he is caught between the two roses. Thus, the more he clings to either rose the more he plays hide and seek with himself. In short, the character's roses conceal his need for sanctuary and hope.

Regarding Fan, the "father-son" relationship is the keystone that holds his other relations in place.³⁷ Fan's father took on a second wife while overseas, and Fan takes after his father by becoming a playboy. The difference between father and son is that the father marries twice, whereas Fan chooses to not commit. He chooses to not commit because he is the result of his father's lack of commitment to his first wife. Therefore, it can be said that Fan chooses to outwardly appear like his father, but inwardly is unlike his father. Fan's attitude towards women changes when he meets Liusu because he sees her as the white rose that will allow him to access his Chineseness. However, the character has been playing the game of hide and seek for so long that he is unable to abandon his ways. The character actively seeks Liusu, but he conceals his otherness in a great act. Being a playboy is part of the act, but the overall role derives from his fear of being considered lesser by Chinese standards. Therefore, Fan's red rose is his otherness, and it is a burden he carries with him in every waking moment. Like Chuanqing he becomes caught in a web of his own making. On the one hand, Fan is unable to abandon the game of faces, and on the other, he has a genuine unconscious desire to be with Liusu:

"I don't care if you're good or bad. I don't want you to change. It's not easy to find

36 Julia Ching, (p. 96)

37 Julia Ching, (p. 96)

a real Chinese girl like you.” [135]

Fan’s interpretation of a real Chinese girl and his otherness can be considered delusions that push the character away from his personhood. By assuming Liusu is authentic, he implies his own lack of genuineness, and by deceiving others, he is only deceiving himself. Over the course of time each action taken entrenches Fan further into the delusion without him even knowing. The meeting of Liusu places him at a crossroads where he is able to detach himself from the conceptions of his desires, however he continues to hold onto both roses. The conclusion looks foregone, but the intervention of the Japanese in Hong Kong seems to twist fate:

“Here in this uncertain world, money, property, the permanent things – they’re all unreliable. The only thing she could rely on was the breath in her lungs, and this person who lay sleeping beside her. Suddenly, she crawled over to him, hugging him through his quilt. He reached out from the bedding and grasped her hand. They looked and saw each other, saw each other entirely.” [164]

With Fan and Liusu placed in mutual danger the masquerade between them ends. In a single moment both their realities merge, which transforms their relationship from cat and mouse to “friend and friend.”³⁸ The two were incompatible because each individually lacked harmony that led to a disharmony between them. Inadvertently, the chaos of the invasion created an involuntary bond that neither could have achieved of their own volition. In other words, the destruction of the Hong Kong stage causes Fan to sever his connection to his two roses. And the removal of the façade paves the way for the characters to establish their new identity as husband and wife in Shanghai.³⁹ Hence, Fan’s roses conceal his desire for oneness and love.

5. Conclusion

Liusu described Hong Kong as a “city of hyperboles” [131]. In essence, *Love in a Fallen City* is an entire world of overexaggerated truth, but the hyperbole shows how one’s identity is tied to the surrounding environment. “Jasmine Tea” illustrates what happens when one creates a buffer from one’s surroundings, “Love in a Fallen City” portrays what happens when one chooses to blend into one’s surroundings. Ultimately, the desires of

38 Julia Ching, (p. 96)

39 Pak-Hang Wong, (p. 73)

both characters are unattainable, but by making them so Chang illustrates that perception is an abstraction. The combination of both archetypes shows that diaspora can be experienced by those on the *outside* and the *inside*. However, the notions of *outside* and *inside* are only relevant if one identifies with that illusion. If one buries oneself in the illusion, one will be caught in a world of one's own making that is contrary to reality and one's true identity.⁴⁰

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40 Gregory B. Lee, (p. 80) recollects the death of his grandfather, his family's reaction and the influence that the death had on the his life: "My grandmother was not just remembering the dead but trying to 'make contact' with the dead, and my own involvement in Chinese studies for the past twenty-five years in a sense has been an attempt to make contact with the same dead-man, to the know the things he did not tell me, to find the answers to the questions I did not know to ask"

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