



Changing Identities of Chinese Women As Reflected In Wild Swans Three Daughters of China

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Abstract- The paper describes that the constructions of masculinity is dominant, realistic and physically powerful, while femininity is docile, emotional, pathetic and weak. Additionally, logic of the dominant masculinity means repression of sentiments and subservient femininity is the encouragement of explicitly uttered emotions. It analyses the viewer or the interaction partner is underprivileged of the appropriate emotional messages and the implied information that hampers the possibility for “emotional convergence” within close relationships (man-woman). “Emotional convergence” in man-woman associations means related emotions, the same feelings, opinions and behaviour that guide to smooth and healthy family relationships. This study states that women convey extra rational behaviour than men, in spite of their emotionality. And, even at times of emergency they demonstrate an incorporated character that aids in compulsory the relationships and culture. On the other hand, men repress their emotions and interrupt relationships, themselves having collapsed due to the unconstructive environmental events. The theory is tested with the help out of the characters from the novel Wild Swans by Jung Chang. The political milieu of India’s Emergency period the China’s Cultural Revolution in Wild Swans, provide as the negative agonistic relations that inculcate the emotions like terror, resentment, hostility, distress, unease, and expectation in the characters. In addition, the political moves and the adjacent rules work to dislocate the relationships and families, consequential in disgust, dissonance and turmoil within the society. The women in the novel, namely, Yufang, Dehong and Chang demonstrate more sensible emotionality (not just being affecting) than the men like Yang, General Xue and Wang in Wild Swans. Instead, the study finds that women as contrasted to men efficiently handle their emotions, yet at times of disaster. When women not succeed to display such personality of rational emotionality, it is not just the breakdown of one individual but of the whole family and the next generation. Therefore, however defined as “fragile”, “weak” and “pathetic”, women are undeniably sturdy and they hold the accountability of an entire generation.

Keywords: Gender, Patriarchal practice, feminist theory, identity, relationship.

In the modern world marked by hostility and dissonance, sentiments recline in the milieu as the cause and consequence of those sadistic situations, within the public and private sphere. Violence in the political levels activates emotional reactions in the individuals, who being a part of societal and close relationships commence sentimental reactions within the household “homes”. In similar vein, violence at “homes” forces the individuals negatively, who due to an explosion of emotions spoil in violent activities. These emotions,

which link the micro worlds and the macrostructures, have to be addressed clearly. Explaining the aggressive social and confidential surroundings with the theory of TenHouten (2007), the study substantiates the requirement for reasonable emotionality of the self and rational emotional expression within relationships, for a melodious co-existence and pleasant society.

Accomplishment of rational emotionality in personality and relationships is a mindful endeavour that necessitates the aptitude to determine and decipher the emotional expressions for the emotional messages they completely express. Consistency in emotionality, specifically, is a means and end progression functioning to a needed aim with the deliberation of others' wellness. On the other hand, according to TenHouten's Affect-Spectrum theory, rationality within emotionality is impracticable when the societal and domestic environment is negative. In his terms, merely within an affirmative agonic (social, power-based) and hedonic (close, communal-based) kindred (and societies), a personality build up into an emotionally incorporated, optimistic self. On the differing, with negative agonic and hedonic relations occur terrible misanthropists. Presented with violence in both social and domestic domains, recognizing expressively integrated individuals turn into a challenge. Merely with integrated and satisfied individuals, who could work towards their aim with the apprehension of others could a nonviolent coexistence in the world be maintained.

On the other hand, if a constructive hedonic environment is continued in spite of the negative agonic relations, the children uncovered to such domestic close relationships grow healthy character structure and emotional organization that establish their contemplation process and ultimately their behaviour. In other words, even the emotions linked with loss and disappointment could elicit social support and social bonding due to the affiliation and supplication tendencies. These tendencies are a result of understanding and inferring others reactions, which happen with rational emotionality. But such positive close or hedonic relations are also challenged by the power-based gender relations. The prescribed social norms have placed on men and women the gender constructions, which in fact, pose a threat towards the attainment of rational emotionality. Jung Chang situates herself within her family. Except for a brief and superficial mention about Chinese political life at the end of the text, Jung Chang does not include experiences that can significantly connect her concerns with the interests of the nation. What she stresses throughout the narrative is her individuality.

She reiterates that she is criticised for a lack of collectivistic concern, which, however, she includes as a testimony to the repression of individuality and the suppression of freedom. Despite the intensive awareness of herself, she integrates her own story into the story of her family as represented by her mother and maternal grandmother. She packages her individual self as a familial self. She identifies her self within the framework of familial relationships. She is a daughter of her mother and a granddaughter of her maternal grandmother. These three women constitute a familial story of three generations of Chinese women. Therefore, *Wild Swans* in a strict sense is a combination of two biographies and one autobiography. She chronicles the stories of the three generations of women.

She turns their lives into a single story by constructing continuity and coherence within the mother-daughter stories. Following William James's notion of 'empirical self' (James 1950[1890], 291), Jung Chang's grandmother and mother are her extended selves. They all contribute to Jung Chang's sense of self. Therefore, *Wild Swans* can be read as Jung Chang's autobiography, through which she expresses herself. James argues that '[t]he Empirical Self of each of us is all that he is tempted to call by the name of me' (James 1950[1890], 291, upper case and italics in original).

The Dutch psychologist Huber J. M. Hermans explains that James's concept of 'empirical self' suggests a distinction between the 'I' and the 'Me'. The 'I' is the self-as-knower who has a sense of sameness through time, a feeling of individuality, and who can reflect on the experience and exercise subjectivity. The 'Me' is the self as-known. The implication of the 'Me' extends to those that the 'Mine' includes (Hermans 2001, 244). James states, a man's Self is the sum total of all that he CAN call his, not

only his body and his psychic powers, but his clothes and his house, his wife and children, his ancestors and friends, his reputation and works, his lands and horses, and yacht and bank-account (James 1950[1890], 291, upper case and italics in original).

In other words, the sense of self is conceptualised not only by observing the 'Me' as an individual entity but also by integrating all the sources that could be accounted as the 'Mine'. Based on this theory, Jung Chang's grandmother and mother serve as the indispensable sources drawn by Jung Chang to build her own sense of self. From the perspective of personal relations, by narrating her mother and grandmother's stories, Jung Chang locates her self within her familial connections.

Her self is interpersonally and relationally represented in terms of the social understanding of the self (Brewer and Gardner 1996, 84). With reference to her mother and grandmother, *Wild Swans* undoubtedly portrays the familial self of Jung Chang. This ready self-identification within the familial system reflects the legacy of where the self is placed within a hierarchy in Chinese culture: the nation, family, and individual. Jung Chang's account begins with Chang's grandmother's life. She grew up from being a girl in a feudal family to become a concubine, and later a doctor's wife (instead of continuing her fate as a concubine). Chang's mother spent her girlhood in a Japanese colony, joined in the Chinese revolution for the construction of a new China, and became a member of the CPC. Jung Chang, born in the new China into a highly ranked official family, grew up during the Cultural Revolution. At the age of twenty-six, she migrated to the UK. Jung Chang's leaving China for the UK concludes the narrative. By telling the story of three generations of Chinese women, Jung Chang intends to paint a picture of the life of all Chinese women who lived through the years 1909 to 1978. In this period, China experienced drastic political and social change. Keeping her eye on this national history, Jung Chang carefully considers its link with her familial history. In this way, she constructs the sense that these three women represent all Chinese women in the twentieth century. She thus paints her family's history on the vast canvas of China's modern history. For Western readers, who mostly had a limited knowledge of China, the ostensible authority of an autobiography imbued Jung Chang's version of modern Chinese history with authority too. Western readers were willing to accept the facticity of her accounts. It is of no wonder that she is praised in the West for her 'narrative honesty' (see for example Allardice 2005; Thurston 1992, 1207).

However, although autobiographies are popularly regarded as authoritative, their 'true claims' might not withstand scrutiny. As Mobo Gao argues, Jung Chang's 'historical' writing is merely a personal account within the veil of historical facticity. Moreover, her rendition of Chinese history aligns with Western anti-Communist rhetoric (Gao 1995, 52–54). As Gao argues, Jung Chang 'makes the lives of the three women all the more tragic because what underlies it is the fact that every Chinese takes the miserable history of China for granted' (Gao 1995, 52). Because *Wild Swans* became a bestseller in the West, Western readers too took the 'miserable history' of China for granted. But this ostensible 'miserable history' is more complex and varied than Jung Chang allows for. The external world beyond Jung Chang's family, against the entire history of three generations, is monolithically oppressive and hostile.

As a reviewer commented, *Wild Swans* is 'a rich, moving account of the lives of three ordinary, yet extraordinary Chinese women,' living through 'the warlord period, the war with Japan, the civil war, and the establishment of the People's Republic of China through the Cultural Revolution' (Goldman 1995, 914). Jung Chang shows that, despite living different lives in different historical moments, these three women share the same personal courage in their struggle for survival.

Their stories respectively represent the progressive phases of Chinese women's liberation from feudalism, Communism to Western liberalism. Her grandmother's life as a concubine and suffering from 'bound feet' are the tokens of feudal China, which represent the physical and spiritual oppression that Chinese women suffered in feudal China. Her mother is portrayed as a mother busy with work and allowed little time to care for herself and her children. Despite this, she is still criticised for a lack of collectivist concern. And, what is more, much blame comes from her husband, a Communist official who abides strictly by CPC

regulations. She lives with both physical and emotional constraints in Communist China. As for Jung Chang herself, she is deprived of personal freedom and the right to continue her regular schooling during the Cultural Revolution. It is only in the West that she discovers who she really is and finds happiness. Jung Chang's leaving China for the UK signifies the thorough liberation of Chinese women. Chinese women's salvation is in the West.

This theme, that the hope of Chinese women's liberation rests in the West, is epitomised in the metaphorical title *Wild Swans* and implied in the Chinese translation of the title (hóng). By elaborating different connotations of 'wild swans' from Chinese and Western linguistic and cultural resources, Jung Chang constructs the representation of a Chinese woman who escapes China and realises self-fulfilment in the West. In the English expression, the modifier 'wild' conveys the connotation of 'freedom.' Together with 'swan,' 'wild swans' evokes an image of nobility and gracefulness, with the instinct for the pursuit of freedom. Using 'wild swans' to allegorise the three women indicates their excellent individual qualities and their aspiration for freedom.

However, the English version of the expression does not contain the implications of Chinese women seeking their liberation by moving from China to the West and the superiority of Western societies over Chinese society. In this case, the Chinese title meets these ends. In the Chinese cultural and linguistic context, not only refers to a kind of large water bird, it also bears cultural significance.

There is a household Chinese saying: ' (yànquè yān zhī hóng hú zhī zhì). ' It means 'how a sparrow knows a giant swan's grand ambitions.' This saying comes from a fable. As is a migratory bird, it flies great distances to a new place every year. (passerine birds) are not migratory birds and do not fly great distances. They have no idea about the significance of 's flight and laugh at thinking it is stupid. responds to the laughter saying 'how a finch understands a swan's ambition?' Chinese people often quote this saying to express their personal ambitions that cannot be understood by ordinary people. By allegorising the self as, Jung Chan implies that she flies to the West where she realises her ambition of self-fulfilment, and her personal success in the West symbolises that Chinese women's liberation is to be found in the West.

The above discussion reveals that Jung Chang constructs her narrative following Western autobiographical conventions so as to assert her subjectivity. In doing so she also appeals to Western anti-Communist rhetoric. But meanwhile she proclaims narrative authority by means of constructing the familial self, and setting her family's history in the context of China's history. By elaborating the linguistic and cultural resources of the West and China, she allegorises herself as a 'wild swan' recognised by Western readerships, and as to impart some oriental flavour to Western audiences. The composite of Jung Chang's self in *Wild Swans* demonstrates Jung Chang straddling Chinese and Western cultural and literary traditions.

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