

A Room of Her Own:
Hong Ying on the Verge of Artistry and
Pornography in *K: The Art of Love*

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I. Introduction

Hong Ying made a literary debut as a novelist in Taiwan in 1992 upon publishing *Summer of Betrayal* under Chinese title *Beipan zhi xia* (背叛之廈) and has gained a name as one of the most recognized feminist writers of China. Hong Ying was selected as one of the top ten popular writers by prestigious media in China in 2000; moreover, she was chosen as one of the ten best female writers by Chinese Literary Business Daily in 2001. She also received the Prix de Rome in 2005 for her 1999 novel, *K: The Art of Love* from the French Government. Along with her fame, she has been embroiled in controversy due to contentiously erotic nature of her novels. In her 1997 novel, *Daughter of the River* (*Ji'e de nü'er*, 飢餓的女兒), for example, Hong Ying openly uses resolute and sexual expression of genitals so that this work was censored three times in China. As a result, there are

four different editions of *Daughter of the River* in China now; this allows translation scholars to compare and analyze translation and style of each edition according to Lijuan Chen (27-28). She even encountered a lawsuit for libel after publishing her most explicitly erotic work, *K* (1999). Hong Ying wrote *K* based on real people including Ling Shuhua and Chen Yuan whose daughter, Chen Xiao Ying, sued Hong Ying for libel of her parents. Ms. Chen claimed that Hong Ying defamed her late parents and her mother was not a lascivious woman. This trial went on for three years and the High Court of China banned the publication of *K* under the charge of lewdness. Hong Ying, then, had to modify some of the backgrounds and characters in *K* and republish a new edition of *K* under the title of *English Lover* (*Yingguo Qingren*, 英国情人) in 2003. The English translation of this work, *K: The Art of Love* was translated based on the original work in 2002 during the libel trial. It is difficult to conclude in a few words whether having a translated work based on the original work is fortunate or not. Yet, it is opportune for the English readers to have a chance to discuss Hong Ying's daring attitude towards sexuality on the verge of artistry and pornography.

The issue of sexuality, a significant part of human life, has served as a main motif not only in Hong Ying's novels, but also in literary works in the world throughout history. For example, *Canterbury Tales* by Geoffrey Chaucer, a classic of British literature and *Arabian Nights*, a classic of the Orient both have one thing in common; that is, writers of both works derived an important motif from sexuality. In these two masterpieces, sexuality itself is not significant, but it functions as a device to extract an even more artistic motif. Connecting the motif of journey in the former and that of storytelling in the latter to sexuality maximizes poetic and narrative artistic effect respectively.

Especially in *Arabian Nights*, 1001 little tales appear around the motif of sexuality between Queen Scheherazade and King Shahryar as a large axis. The beginning of this work originates from the former queen's infidelity and sexual laxity. Scheherazade, the author of the tales and the King, the reader of the tales always make love with each other, and then Scheherazade begins a tale each night.

The union of Scheherazade and the King signifies the importance of the union of the author and the reader. That *Arabian Nights* is not depreciated as or limited to a pornographic or erotic story between a man and a woman is because Scheherazade or the author's tales are closely engaged with the motif of storytelling. Moreover, the reason for *Arabian Nights* to be evaluated as an artistic masterpiece rather than a collection of pornographic stories is that the author successfully interlocked sexuality with creative storytelling and sublimed it into an excellent motif. Thus, *Arabian Nights* may serve as a measure or standard when evaluating a literary work on the verge of artistry and pornography. *K: The Art of Love*, which has received a mixed assessment between artistry and pornography, may be evaluated as a possibly artistic novel based on how Hong Ying has sublimed the motif of sexuality into a more artistic and literary motif.

There has been a series of recent research on Hong Ying's works in both English and Chinese, but most articles merely discuss how to classify Hong Ying as a writer. Henry Y. H. Zhao divides post Mao Zedong Chinese novels into "the pre-1989 period" and "the post-1989 period" (193) based on the Tiananmen massacre as a basing point, and classifies those young Chinese female writers, who were born in the 1960s and have experienced China's Cultural Revolution, including Hong Ying as the "Young [Female] Writers" (201). He also includes her as a Chinese diasporic writer along with Yan Geling in the U.S. and Gao Xingjian, the recipient of the Nobel Prize for literature in 2000 (Zhao 204-06). Amy Tak-yee Lai categorizes Hong Ying as a Chinese female writer in diaspora for she has resided in England in company with Jung Chang, Xinran, Anchee Min and Adeline Yen Mah (1-10).

Johanna Hood, however, displays the possibility of Hong Ying's work as a type of women's initiation story; Hood gives a favorable review of *Daughter of the River* in which Hong Ying has created the Chinese female identity (167-68). Li-hua Ying also makes a favorable comment on Chinese female writers in general that those writers such as Hong Ying materialize female identity through their writing on raw sexuality (210). Philip Tew claims that in *K: The Art of Love* Hong Ying

reflects her memory in “the exile” or a foreign country into Julian Bell, the protagonist of the novel (402-03). Yan-hua Chen, a critic in China compliments Hong Ying’s extreme sexual expression that not only subverts the male central system of China, but also liberates women’s potential (79). He also predicts that Hong Ying’s feministic works will vitalize the Chinese feminism currently experiencing a slump. On the other hand, Rong-hui Zhai and Yan Bao criticize that Hong Ying and Xinran’s pornographic works influenced by the western feminism may not last long (43).

Before discussing Hong Ying and her controversial novel, *K: The Art of Love* on the verge of artistry and pornography, the reason to entitle this article as “A Room of Her Own” should be mentioned. As anyone can infer the reason, the title stems from Virginia Woolf’s *A Room of One’s Own*. In the book, Woolf claims that female writers in Victorian times and those days should need their own spaces and regular income to concentrate on the writings without any interruption. This does not lead a fact that Hong Ying has created her works without her own chamber as those writers that Woolf refers to. The word, “room” in the title ought to be accepted as her “world” or “view” so that this paper intends to discuss Hong Ying with her unique world and view of writings. Most of those Chinese female writers who were born in the 1960s as Hong Ying have stopped writing poetry to focus on novels; however, she still writes poetry and essays as well as novels. As Zhai and Bao’s remark, Chinese female writers such as Hong Ying, Xinran and Anchee Min share a common characteristic that they portray joys and sorrows of life through sexual desires between a man and a woman. Yet, Hong Ying seeks to root out the spirit of age and the pain of Chinese history. In other words, she does not belong to one specific group of writers, but she is still in a process of creating her own world of writings.

What sets Hong Ying apart from other Chinese female writers is that she is the first contemporary Asian writer to resurrect afterlives of the Bloomsbury through the eyes of Julian Bell, the most beloved nephew of Virginia Woolf. There are some western writers who have written about Virginia Woolf’s afterlives in their

biofictions. In fact, Monica Latham discusses how these writers such as Robin Lippincott (*Mr Dalloway*), Michael Cunningham (*The Hours*), Sigrid Nunez (*Mitz: The Marmoset of Bloomsbury*) and Susan Sellers (*Vanessa and Virginia*) have employed Woolf's "own narrative tools and style to portray her to create her biographical fictions (354). Unlike them, Hong Ying uses her own literary skills through motifs of loneliness and storytelling along with the motif of sexuality to recreate and resurrect Julian's afterlives. The aim of this paper is to discuss two big issues with Hong Ying's *K: The Art of Love*. First, I will argue what kind of literary motifs Hong Ying has employed to sublime this novel as a work of art. Second, I will discuss how Hong Ying tries to destereotype the existing dichotomously schematized stereotyping of the east and the west.

II. The Motif of 'Loneliness' and 'Storytelling'

When reading *K: The Art of Love* without searching for deep meanings of the novel, one may depreciate it as an erotic work of lunatic love between a western man as the narrator and an Asian woman. However, *K: The Art of Love* cannot be simply defined as an erotic love story. The novel begins with Julian's death in 1937 in which he engages in the Spanish Civil War as a driver. As he dies at the hospital, he leaves a note and last words. In his last words, he can die without any regrets since he has fulfilled two of his lifelong desires. One is to have a beautiful lover and the other to take part in a war. His testament to his mother was written on September 26, 1935 in Shanghai, two years prior to his death. Along with the testament, there is a handkerchief with the oriental atmosphere on which an alphabet letter 'K' has been embroidered. This letter K contains Julian's story. Hong Ying begins this novel with Julian's testament and the handkerchief with an embroidered alphabet 'K' in Chapter 1 and employs a type of flashback following Julian's eyes from Chapter 2.

In *K: The Art of Love*, Hong Ying portrays the story and China through "a

younger-generation Bloomsbury poet[’s]” (17) perspectives and experiences rather than the female protagonist, Lin. Some readers may raise a question that it is natural for her to use a Chinese woman, Lin’s views. Instead, Hong Ying has intentionally created an aesthetic distance from her characters in the novel while avoiding subjectification of her writings. According to Lai, in *K: The Art of Love* Hong Ying begins to keep a distance as an author from her characters by discarding autobiographic aspects of her previous novels *Summer of Betrayal* and *Daughter of the River* (69). Most western readers are unfamiliar with a third world author penetrating into the western mind; what Hong Ying has intended is to make use of defamiliarization through an unfamiliar western man’s eyes.

She does not explain whether to use ‘defamiliarization’ in the novel is her intention or not; nevertheless, in the foreword to the novel she is “trying to express . . . that sex and love are inseparable (Hong Ying, “Author’s” viii). Sex defined by Hong Ying is not an indiscreet act of pornography, but is a ritual of union between a man and a woman. She brings Julian, a western man and Lin, an Asian woman together through a motif of ‘loneliness’ and they take a spiritual journey as artists. This is a key factor in elevating this novel into an art form despite of controversy over obscenity. Julian, a poet enjoyed a freewheeling sex with several women before coming to China who still radiates confidence in having physical relationship with any woman at any time. At his welcoming banquet, he meets Lin, professor Cheng’s wife that catches his eyes. The self-assured Julian seduces her with Wuhan slang, “*Maizi bucuo* (麥子不錯)” (Hong Ying, *K: The Art of Love* 52). “*Maizi bucuo*” literally means that barley is fully or well ripe. This term may be used to describe a young beautiful woman in Wuhan. In Hong Ying’s original manuscript of *K* (1999), Julian says to Lin, “*Ni maizi bucuo* (你麥子不錯)” (40). He does not need to use the pronoun “*ni* (你),” but Hong Ying intends to show his clumsy use of Chinese. Lin shakes off his hands; however, Julian writes otherwise in his letter to his mother, Vanessa Bell, “I have *already* had an affair with K” (*K: The Art of Love* 70). He believes Lin will become his eleventh lover soon in no doubt by the time his mother receives his letter.

'K' not only serves as the title of this novel and the eleventh letter of the alphabet, but also signifies Julian's eleventh lover. To him, Lin is nothing more than an "ordinal number" (*K: The Art of Love* 70). That he has come to China is not to get an Asian girlfriend as his eleventh girlfriend; then what has brought him there? Leonard Woolf, his uncle and Virginia Woolf's husband enthusiastically supported Julian's new journey in China, claiming "China was bound to become the centre of a political storm in the coming decades" (*K: The Art of Love* 205). Julian once deludes himself that he has come to China to "alleviate the plight of mankind" (*K: The Art of Love* 206) and dedicate himself to China. What has really led him to China is nothing other than his 'loneliness.' Joseph Yosup Kim and Jung Kim find Julian's real source of Julian's escape to China from his association with the Bloomsbury that ultimately leads to his romantic failure as follows:

Julian has felt that the artists and intellectuals of the Bloomsbury have extensively asked and answered all the problems without leaving him to proclaim anything new. In order to free from the despair, he has tried to leap over a fence encircled by them. The tool to surpass their influence is ironically the romantic dream of the revolution acquired in the fence and the reality he faces outside the fence with his romantic dream of the revolution in the world is nothing more than romantic failure. (48)

Julian has come to China to find his own room to evade loneliness and romantic failure created by his mother and the Bloomsbury, which is leading to a room of Lin's own. His eleventh lover, K or Lin has also been physically and mentally lonely as she sleeps in a different room from her husband. Her 'loneliness' leads her to feel drawn to or fancy Julian, a stranger from the west.

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But this woman in his arms had spent so many years of her lonely life in these freakish exercises; her sole consolation came from this Daoist cult. Her

years of girlhood and her married life must have been marred by physical and spiritual solitude—thirty-five years, and she would be thirty-six this year. Julian knew better than most people what loneliness was, and what kind of individuals suffered from it. . . . His continuing sense of isolation—he had never lost it—explained, in part, why he had come to the Far East, and why he felt drawn to this Chinese woman. His loneliness, her loneliness—they were both scared of loneliness and craved each other’s care. He still remembered the acute despair that enveloped him as a child, when cried to no avail, failed to attract attention even from his mother and was left to gaze blankly at the ceiling, at the shadows thrown by the furniture in the room and at the grey sky outside the window. (*K: The Art of Love* 126-27)

In the above passage, Hong Ying sets the root of Julian’s loneliness as the absence of mother figure in his childhood. Initially, Lin considers her husband as the source of her loneliness to fancy Julian; however, the root of her loneliness is lack of her mother from her childhood. Lin introduces her autobiographical story to Julian in the novel in which her mother dies on the way to exile. Lin’s source of loneliness originates from the absence of her mother rather than her husband. Hong Ying, thus, brings in the root of these two characters’ loneliness as the absence of mother figure and connects them in the common motif of loneliness. In *Summer of Betrayal* (1992), she uses the absence or “inability” (Hood 170) of father figure as a motif to mediate patriarchy. Hong Ying as an author and artist often employs the absence of father or mother figure as a source of a motif.

She does not hesitate to describe Julian and Lin’s intercourse and their naked bodies candidly. For example, she uses sexual expressions of cock, semen, pubic hair, vulva and clitoris without any reserve whatsoever. This novel certainly gives the readers erotic impression, but its core is not sex but Julian and Lin’s spiritual journey and exploration as an author and a reader to each other. As Scheherazade begins her tale upon making love with the King, Lin suggests a possibility to Julian to become an author and a reader to each other. She asks Julian, “You want to see my life? Or do you want me to see your life?” (*K: The Art of Love* 36) In *K*, the word, “*zizhuan* (『自傳』)” (Hong Ying 21), which actually means autobiography, is

appeared instead of “life.” What Lin tries to share is her autobiography with Julian and wants him to do the same with her. The word, “*zizhuan* (『自傳』)” from the original manuscript has the sign, “『』,” which is used to indicate a title of a book in some Asian languages including Chinese and Korean. For example, Hong Ying’s *K* may be expressed as 『K』. In fact, Lin later sends her autobiographical novel to Julian. A novel with several tales in it such as *Arabian Nights* is called a ‘frame story.’ As Lin’s autobiography is framed in Julian’s journey in China, Hong Ying’s novel emerges as a frame story. Moreover, the physical and spiritual union between a man and a woman implies the union of an author and a reader to each other in the novel as Hong Ying has intended.

To help Julian’s lectures at Wuhan University, Lin begins to audit his literature classes. One day he teaches excerpts from his aunt’s masterpiece, *To the Lighthouse* using the concept of “stream of consciousness” (*K: The Art of Love* 40), but none of 40 students do not understand his lecture and he loses the thread of his argument. Then, Lin as a reader to his autobiography asks Julian if he knows any of the characters in the Woolf’s novel. Julian was eighteen years old when the novel was published. He knows all the characters in the novel in which Woolf portrays each character’s eccentric nature.

He had immediately recognized Mrs Ramsey’s eight children as Grandma Julia’s, his mother’s siblings—the Stephens—just as he also recognized their encounters with love and death. And he knew that what Virginia wanted to say was that art could overcome the encroachments of old age. So he used this understanding in his talk on the novel, and the lecture ended with his students showing as much enthusiasm as their Chinese reserve would allow. (*K: The Arts of Love* 40)

Rather than a commentator of his aunt’s novel, Julian discusses the characters from the novel as an author of his autobiography to Lin and the students and receives somewhat enthusiastic response from them.

That evening Julian visits Professor Cheng and Lin’s house and Lin hands him

one of Xu Zhimo's (徐志摩) books of poetry. As Julian remembers Xu who used to study abroad in England, Professor Cheng and Lin talks about Xu's life of studying abroad in 1923. According to them, Xu admired the Bloomsbury group and was invited to one of their parties; however, Julian's mother and her peers in the group complained his boring nature and never invited him back again. Cheng tells a tale about Xu's affections for Katherine Mansfield so that he made a call at her house. Mansfield asked Xu if he had ever translated a Chinese poem; she expressed her strong conviction that only Chinese could properly translate Chinese poetry. That was their first and last encounter between them since she died of pneumonia a month later. Cheng continues to boast of his wife that Xu predicted Lin would be the Mansfield of China. Although this novel is based on a small dose of facts and filled with figments of Hong Ying's imagination, Ling Shuhua, a model for Lin, was recognized as "the Chinese Katherine Mansfield" (Stansky and Abrahams 201). According to Peter Stansky and William Abrahams, "[Julian's] aunt Virginia had somewhat ambivalent feelings about [Mansfield]" (201) whereas Julian in the novel tells she considered Mansfield "vulgar and sentimental" (*K: The Art of Love* 47). He, indeed, is not fond of the writer and does not want to professedly wind his way into Lin's affections. As Julian expresses his displeasure with Xu, Lin smiles and shows a landscape on the wall that Roger Fry once gave Xu as a present. Xu, then, asked her to hold it in trust. The painting serves as an evidence for a close friendship between Fry and Xu that proves Xu did not falsely represent himself as Fry's student. Julian cannot acknowledge their relationship since he has held Fry in high estimation. He, then, provokes Lin, asking how Xu was in bed. Unconsciously he takes her hands to his genital, but she shakes off his hand. Up to this point, it appears that he has interest in her one-sidedly.

Nevertheless, Lin pays a visit to Julian next day. He refuses her to come into his house, but she waits for him to come out for four hours in the rain. She invites him to Beijing, saying "I can't stay in Wuhan any longer, so near to you, . . . I'm going to Peking. I'll wait for you there" (*K: The Art of Love* 79). Then, the next morning Julian receives a fat envelope by mail containing her address in Beijing

and a novel in English in her own handwriting. She has enclosed a short letter that instructs him to read her novel on a train to Beijing to relieve his boredom. Lin, who asked him to talk about Julian's autobiographical story on the characters in *To the Lighthouse* in his class two days ago, is now requesting him to be her reader as an author. Julian has physically lured Lin, but she is an independent individual who can be a reader and an author on her own.

For a little while, Julian hesitates to accept Lin's invitation, but he reserves a train ticket to Beijing at Hankou Station before the winter break. On the day leaving for Beijing, it is a busy Sunday so that it is difficult to get to the train station in time. Since Julian is eager to see Lin, he offers a rickshaw boy one more yuan if he gets to the station in time. He finally arrives at the station ten minutes prior to the departure time and opens the envelope containing Lin's novel again. Her English writing is beautiful and he sinks into her story. Her autobiographical novel is an initiation story of a girl who was born into an abnormal family. The protagonist of the novel, the girl's father has a wife and eight concubines and her mother is his fourth wife. She has to call her biological mother "Fourth Aunt," but calls her father's lawful wife "Mother" (*K: The Art of Love* 85). The girl's biological mother was an adopted daughter of one of the four wealthy people in Guangzhou. The girl's father went to inspect Guangzhou upon the king's order and was given a well reception at her mother's family. He fell in love with the girl's mother at first sight and makes a formal proposal of marriage to her although she was twenty five years younger than him. Since she was an adopted daughter of the family, the family accepts his marriage proposal.

The father disregards his wife and other concubines, but only shows his affections for the girl's mother. As a result, there is a constant enmity among his wife and concubines; moreover, even their children get caught into a fight. Since she is significantly younger than other half brothers and sisters, she is not in position to help her mother. Thus, the girl and her mother have to endure hard times. Her father has become very close to the reformists; as a result, all of his properties are attached by the conservatives when the reformists are brutally

suppressed by them. Moreover, he is exiled to the desert in Chinese Turkestan. Among his wife and eight concubines, her mother is the only one who is willing to accompany him to the desert and her father desires the same. Their journey to the exile is quite perilous so that her father and mother die on the road. In the family, which has just lost the father, its central figure, family feud and stealing among the family members continue and they eventually sell their mansion. The story ends with scattering of the family and leaving the girl alone.

Loneliness has led Julian to China who also discovers the root of Lin's loneliness from her autobiographical novel: that is the absence of mother figure. Even though she clearly had her biological mother, she couldn't call her 'mother.' Instead, she was placed in an awkward situation where she had to call her father's wife, 'mother.' The basis of her loneliness is not asexual relationship with her husband but the absence of mother figure from her childhood. Julian reads the novel in one sitting and is fascinated by another side of Lin. He has never experienced "a peculiar mixture of realism and sentiment" (*K: The Art of Love* 86) from her novel. Lin as "the protagonist and author of the story" (*K: The Art of Love* 86) stimulates Julian's curiosity as a reader even more.

Like Lin's autobiographical story, Hong Ying as an author presents *K: The Art of Love* unclear boundaries of what is real and what is sentimental. When Julian meets Lin at her father's mansion in Beijing, he asks her, "[h]ow much of that story you gave me is taken from your life?" (*K: The Art of Love* 88) Likewise, Hong Ying's readers may ask her the same question how much of the novel reflects on real Ling Shuhua. "So you see, not all my story is true. I put a lot of true things in, but I left more out," (*K: The Art of Love* 88) replies Lin. This is Hong Ying's answer to her readers for how much of her novel is real and sentimental. Through the use of loneliness and storytelling, Hong Ying has sublimed this so-called 'a pornographic novel' or 'an infidel story' into artistry beyond the physical union of a man and a woman as they are united as an author and a reader to each other like Queen Scheherazade and King Shahryar in *Arabian Nights*.

III. Hong Ying's Attempt to Destereotype in *K: The Art of Love*

Hong Ying has succeeded in framing Julian and Lin's tales in the frame of 'Julian's journey in China' and sublimating the novel into a work of art, which has received mixed reviews from critics on the border of artistry and pornography. She, furthermore, employs motifs of loneliness and storytelling to unite Julian and Lin as an author and a reader to each other. In *K: The Art of Love*, Hong Ying keeps an aesthetic distance from her characters in the novel as she narrates China through Julian's eyes and experience. What she intends to do is to make use of 'defamiliarization' through a foreign man's perspectives. Since she does not develop this novel through a familiar Chinese woman, Lin's eyes, she tries to destereotype the dichotomously defined east and west for the first time unlike her previous autobiographical novels. Hong Ying warns her reader not to make a mistake in stereotyping the east as she claims "K[Lin] does not represent a typical Chinese, or indeed Oriental, woman, and anyone trying to use the novel as a guide to Eastern romance is seriously deluded . . . If there is any message that emerges from this book, it is that stereotypes are not only foolish but can actually prove a snare for those who propagate them" (Hong Ying, "Author's" vii-viii). She shows general errors in stereotyping a soft and submissive oriental woman and a strong western man through Julian in which Julian realizes the westerner's general impression on China as a filthy and miserable country is just one face of "many different Chinas" ("Author's" vii). Lastly, Hong Ying presents a possibility of union between an author/reader within the novel and her reader as the third participant as she breaks from the union of an author and a reader in such work of art as *Arabian Nights*.

Julian's errors in stereotyping the west and China are dichotomous or binary schematization of the masculine west and the feminine east, active man and passive woman, and the colonizing west and the colonized east. Julian is a young man with a liberal view of love as an heir of the Bloomsbury that he believes sex and love can stand alone. As he calls Lin 'K' meaning his eleventh lover, he is brimming

with confidence in sexually colonizing her at any time. However, he is perplexed by Lin's active invitation to Beijing. His first mistake is to stereotype her as a passive oriental woman who he has objectified her as someone to conquer. Since women have been objects of sexually colonizing to Julian, he concentrates on his pleasure rather than physical union through love. Lin, who has mastered "the Art of Love" (*K: The Art of Love* 101) in one of Daoist's sacred books, *Jade Chamber Classic* (*K: The Art of Love* 100), helps him experience a sexual awakening who learns true physical union from her. When he asks her if a woman takes a man's "inner energies" (*K: The Art of Love* 102) through "the Art of Love," she replies as follows:

So you think I'm sucking your life from you, do you? You have to understand, the Art of Love is a form of mutual nourishment, the joining of yin and yang. Once a man has learned the Art of Love, he benefits too. (*K: The Art of Love* 103)

Her husband, Professor Cheng only believes in western education and progress so that he considers this oriental principle as one of mere "Daoist superstitions" (*K: The Art of Love* 102). Lin, in fact, tried "the Art of Love" out on Cheng, their union ended as a total disaster and he was laid up with illness for a month.

That Lin succeeds in assisting Julian, a western man to awaken "the Art of Love," is essential in understanding the relationship between the east and the west. She helps him realize that the east is not an object of conquer and the east and the west are companions in pursuit of harmony and beauty. In *Orientalism* (1978), Said criticizes that missionaries and travelers from the west have used an slice of their inaccurate knowledge of the east—just one aspect of "many different Chinas" according to Hong Ying—as a discourse (195). Said also presents a possibility of equal union of the east and west in his book like Hong Ying. He reveals his impartial attitude even more clearly in *Culture and Imperialism* (1993).

What partly animated my study of Orientalism was my critique of the way in which the alleged universalism of fields such as the classics (not to mention historiography, anthropology, and sociology) was Eurocentric in the extreme, as if other literatures and societies had either an inferior or a transcended value. (Said, *Culture and Imperialism* 44)

In his criticism, he does not condemn imperialism, but emphasizes on the “integration and connections” (Said, *Culture and Imperialism* 61) and mutual understanding and coexistence of the east and the west.

Instead of Julian, Lin’s husband, Cheng becomes an obstacle to pursue the coexistence of the east and the west. With his firm belief in western education, he regards the western man a “gentleman” (*K: The Art of Love* 234) and Chinese an uncivilized race. In a way, he is a very narrow-minded person. After witnessing his wife’s affair with Julian, he says to Julian in anger “[y]ou are not a gentleman” (*K: The Art of Love* 234). Julian informs him of the true nature of the Bloomsbury group in which there is no gentleman. He tries to correct Cheng’s inaccurate view of the western world. Cheng, however, does not understand Julian since what he has learned about British culture exists only in “books” (*K: The Art of Love* 234). Moreover, he does not recognize his stereotyping of the west only exists in books.

Julian was also biased against China before that it was not only uncivilized, but poor and filthy. He, however, divests himself of such preconceived notions when he visits an “opium house” (*K: The Art of Love* 139) in Beijing. He once watched a documentary on China, which displayed awful and dirty opium houses. This is an example of how English travelers informed English viewers of only fragmentary aspects of China and developed it into a discourse of the east. Yet, the opium house that Julian experiences is fancy, graceful and spacious; moreover, rooms are comfortable with perfect lighting. He realizes this opium house is a beautiful and relaxing place unlike those places filled with dirty opium addicts that he saw on the documentary. Julian and Lin smoke three opium pipes together. As he finishes the second one, he listens to imaginary voices, “a choir of angels” (*K: The Art of Love* 140). After the third pipe, he liberates himself as if he soared into the sky.

As Lin performs fellatio on Julian, he suddenly remembers parts from an English version of *The Golden Lotus* written in the sixteenth century that he translated into Latin.

As she caresses his glans penis with her tongue, she turns it up and down between her lips. . . . She takes the penis softly to her cheek and receives it in her mouth. She embraces the hole and stimulates it with her tongue. As she continues to caress his penis hard, his semen endlessly pours into her mouth and she slowly swallows it.

Caput mentulae lingua sua titillabat, et inter labra sursum deorsum volvebat . . . Mentulam in genas mollivit et in os recepit. Foramen titillabat et lingua nervum provocabat. Labris firme continuit et molliter movit . . . et continuo in os mulieris exit semen quod tarde sorbuit. (K: The Art of Love 141)

In the original Chinese version of *K*, a sentence is missing in the above passage which begins with “*mentulam ad sua labra adposuit*,” which may be translated as ‘she takes his penis to her mouth’ in English (*K* 147). Hong Ying does not hesitate to use explicit and sexual expressions such as penis, but she never uses the word, “fellatio” even once in the novel. Instead, she indirectly portrays those women performing fellatio “flute-playing women” (*K: The Art of Love* 141). Her narrator, Julian considers fellatio a lustful act performed only by lewd Chinese women from the sixteenth century and further believes it as a type of last taboo or *jinring* (禁令; Hong Ying, *K* 148) meaning prohibition. Since fellatio is the last taboo or prohibition for Lin to break, Hong Ying describes it metaphorically. In *K: The Art of Love*, Nicky Harman and Henry Zhao translate *jinring* to “inhibitions” (*K: The Art of Love* 142) or something unfamiliar. As Lin breaks out of her inhibitions or unfamiliar territory, both Julian and she experience the “sublime” (*K: The Art of Love* 142) nature of love. This is the moment for Julian to realize that fellatio is an act for “any woman [of] ancient or modern . . . could enjoy” (*K: The Art of Love* 141). Harman and Zhao translate this part “[s]o any woman—even any Chinese woman, ancient or modern—could enjoy doing it,” but in *K* Hong Ying

emphasizes the fact that fellatio is every woman's *benlai de benneng* (本来的本能; Hong Ying, *K* 148) meaning inborn instinct. This part may be rephrased or retranslated as "so any woman—even any Chinese woman, ancient or modern—could enjoy doing it as if it were her inborn instinct." In other words, this is the moment of sexual epiphany for Julian that fellatio is every woman's inborn instinct. Furthermore, it becomes an 'uncanny' point of his life.

As Julian's stereotype of an opium room, which he used to think of a horrible space, has disappeared, it becomes a strange, yet familiar place. In this uncanny space, Lin and Julian experience an unfamiliar act of fellatio and they finally realize and achieve the sublime nature of love that Hong Ying wants her readers to commune with them. This moment is a type of 'sexual epiphany' in which Lin motions a maid to come toward them. The maid has been watching their act of love as she has "cleared the smoking set from the bed" (*K: The Art of Love* 142). As the three bodies are rolling side by side, the union between two people is sublimated into a dance of three people. As Julian and Lin, an author and a reader to each other, now attempts to commune with the maid, the third participant through physical union, Hong Ying invites her readers to join the two people as their third participant. Certainly, this novel is not a hyper fiction or techno fiction, which allows both an author and readers to freely write and edit. However, Hong Ying with many faces as "many different Chinas" ("Author's" vii) want her readers to involve in Julian and Lin's act of love at any time.

IV. Conclusion

As expected, Julian's destereotyping of China is not a complete success. After Cheng witnesses his affair with Lin, he decides to go back to England. This is not a moral decision, but it is close to his western arrogance towards Chinese.

She knew that he was no less racist than any of the other Westerners in China. The only difference was that he was unwilling to recognize it. He still had a deep-seated contempt for the Chinese, even for the one he loved so madly. His decision that morning to cut himself off from her in that way was typical of his European arrogance. (*K: The Art of Love* 238)

Hong Ying presents the reason why Julian and Lin's love continues to elude is not because it was an affair, but Julian has not overcome his attitude based on the cultural superiority of western civilization.

In summary, Hong Ying still stands on the verge of artistry and pornography, but what makes her novels, especially *K: The Art of Love*, artistic is her message that the east and the west are not disparate spaces. Instead, the east and the west should harmoniously coexist. She sublimates the east, which could have been a horrible and prohibited place, into an uncanny or strange yet familiar place through the eyes of an unfamiliar westerner. Nevertheless, her portrayal of physical love is psychologically painful. Even though Julian and Lin sublime their sexual desire through their physical union and spiritual union as an author and a reader to each other, they face a drastic result of a death on a battlefield and a suicide respectively. Their unavoidable pain comes from so-called social taboo that they have violated. In her novel, Hong Ying suggests the east as an object of understanding and coexistence rather than that of conquer and lust, which should be a companion to the west to pursue harmony together. Yet, Hong Ying's *K: The Art of Love* eventually ends as a tragedy in which the east and the west have not reached to the sublimated state of harmonious companionship due to Julian's cultural superiority.

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Abstract**A Room of Her Own: Hong Ying on the Verge of Artistry and
Pornography in *K: The Art of Love***

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Hong Ying has received mixed reviews from critics on her 1999 novel, *K* whether it is an art work or pornographic novel. The aim of this paper is to examine the artistic nature of *K* based on valid criteria for a novel to be artistic. *The Arabian Nights*, a masterpiece fulfills several requirements to be an art work while using the motif of sexuality as an axis along with the motif of storytelling. Before Queen Scheherazade tells King Shahryar a story, they always make love. There are one thousand tales framed in the novel that Scheherazade presents to the king. Its author employs the motif of storytelling around the motif of sexuality into a piece of art. Hong Ying's *K* shares similar artistic traits to *The Arabian Nights* where she uses the motif of sexuality along with the motifs of loneliness and storytelling to make it artistic. It is also a frame story where Julian and Lin serve as an author and a reader to each other. Hong Ying narrates the novel through an unfamiliar western man to achieve 'defamiliarization' and keeps her aesthetic distance from her characters in the novel. These literary attributes transcend *K* from a mere pornography to a work of artistry.

■ **Key words** : Hong Ying, motif of sexuality, motif of storytelling, motif of loneliness, defamiliarization, Virginia Woolf

Received October 14, 2015

Reviewed October 30, 2015

Accepted November 10, 2015