Klara Blum's Self-Healing through Romanticizing China in *The Shepherd and the Weaver*

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Abstract: Klara Blum's semi-autobiographical novel *The Shepherd and the Weaver (Der Hirte und die Weberin)* is read in this article as a literary project of self-healing, in which an idealized image of China compensates for the author's experiences of exile, loss and marginalization. By contrasting Blum's biography with the fictional fate of her protagonist, this article shows how the unfinished love story with a Chinese communist is transformed into a narrative of reunion and fulfillment, particularly through the novel's optimistic ending. This narrative reshaping highlights the gap between historical reality and fictional wish-fulfillment and reveals how China becomes a symbolic space of consolation and belonging.

This article argues that the therapeutic function relies on a strongly romanticized portrayal of China as a utopia where political emancipation, social justice and gender equality appear to advance together. Positive depictions of Chinese cities, revolutionary heroes and politically engaged women underline the utopian dimension of this vision, but they also draw on stereotypes and exoticizing perspectives that distance the represented China from its historical complexities. In the course of the novel, love is increasingly intertwined with political commitment: the protagonist's devotion extends from the individual man to the Chinese people and their revolutionary cause, fusing personal longing with collective hope. The analysis thus uncovers both the empowering and the problematic aspects of using the romanticized China as a compensatory space in which the author negotiates trauma, desire and the search for a new home.

Keywords: Klara Blum, socialist realism, Orientalism, China, GDR

1. Introduction

Klara Blum's novel *The Shepherd and the Weaver (Der Hirte und die Weberin)* was first published in 1951 in East Germany (German Democratic Republic) in a small print run. This semi-autobiographical novel describes – as the title's reference to Chinese mythology suggests – a sad and beautiful love story set against the backdrop of World War II and the Chinese Civil War, spanning the years 1929 to 1949. However, the novel was banned shortly thereafter by the SED regime, because the depiction of several characters and the portrayal of exile didn't align with the official political discourse. Over seventy years later, this novel has been rediscovered and republished in 2023, bringing its depiction of a remarkable cross-cultural encounter between East and West within a turbulent historical context back to public attention.

Blum was an Austria-Hungary-born Jewish writer who fled to the Soviet Union and met Zhu Xiangcheng there. Although the two were soon in love with each other, Zhu, a Chinese director of revolutionary theatre and a communist, disappeared a few months later. Since then, Blum didn't receive any message from him. Even though she went to China after the end of World War II to try to find him and spent the rest of her life there, she never saw him again. What Blum didn't know was that Zhu had been arrested on charges of espionage and died in a Siberian labor camp in 1943.

In her long search, Blum transformed her story with Zhu into a novel without knowing the truth. The differences between the novel and reality reveal her emotional projection, her expression of expectations, and her need for self-healing – particularly in the novel's ending, where the protagonist successfully finds her Chinese lover. In this sense, the creation of the novel and its embellished portrayal of the protagonist's experiences in China may have served a comforting function for the author. This article then aims to examine Blum's romanticization of China and her Western gaze in this novel, to explore how these elements contributed to the therapeutic dimension of her writing.

2. Personal Life and the Semi-Autobiographical Novel

Klara Blum was born into a Jewish family in Czernowitz, Austria-Hungary in 1904, and moved to Vienna with her divorced mother in 1913. Later, she studied Psychology and Literature at the University of Vienna, and began to publish her poems and short stories in Jewish newspapers such as *Wiener Morgenzeitung* and *Ostjüdische Zeitung* (Kenner, 2007, p. 81) during this period. Meanwhile, Blum began to reflect on Jewish culture, the challenges encountered by Jews, and the social oppression and marginalization of Jewish women (Kenner, 2007, p. 81). Since then, gender, race and class became the three topics she cared most about in her life.

Although Blum was affected by her mother's faith in Zionism, she distanced herself from it after a visit to Palestine in 1929 that disappointed her, and joined the Social Democratic Party (Kenner, 2007, p. 81). Since then, her political stance shifted increasingly leftward, until she withdrew from the Social Democratic Party in 1933 and turned to Communism (Kenner, 2007, p. 81). Because she won a literature competition, Blum had the chance to travel to the USSR in 1934, where she stayed for the following eleven years and even received Soviet citizenship later. In 1937 in Moscow, she met the married Chinese communist Zhu Xiangcheng (朱穰丞), who "was born in an aristocratic and merchant family in Wu County, Jiangsu Province" (Lin, 2017, p. 18). Although the two soon fell in love, Zhu disappeared a few months later without disclosing any details beforehand.

Zhu turned out to be a victim of Stalin's Great Purge and died in a Siberian prison in 1943 (Kenner, 2007, p. 81). Unaware of this, Blum kept searching for information about her lover, denying the possibility of his death. Because she believed Zhu had returned to China on a political mission, she decided to go to China to search for his whereabouts. Blum left the Soviet Union in 1945 and traveled to Bucharest and Paris in search of assistance (Kenner, 2007, 81), applying for the entry permit to China repeatedly. Finally, after a long wait and persistent appeals, she received the permit in 1947 with the help of the Jewish aid committee, and took a four-month voyage by ship to arrive in Shanghai.

After arriving in China, Blum initially lived in poverty, unfamiliar with the place and people, surviving mainly through assistance from the Jewish aid committee and by doing part-time jobs. Later in 1948, she began working at the library of Tongji University in Shanghai, and was appointed in 1952 as a professor in the Department of German Language and Literature at Fudan University, before moving

to teach at Nanjing University and Sun Yat-sen University in Guangdong. Meanwhile, she constantly inquired about Zhu's whereabouts and traveled to places where he was reportedly seen. Although Blum identified with Chinese culture and obtained Chinese citizenship in 1954, as well as adopting the Chinese name Zhu Bailan (朱白蘭) using Zhu Xiangcheng's family name, as a foreigner, she was frequently suspected of being a spy during the Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1968, which made her situation difficult (Kenner, 2007, p. 83). Thus, Blum saw her Jewish and female identities as obstacles to her full integration into Chinese society (Saletta, 2022, p. 348). Although she never reunited with Zhu in her lifetime, she remained in China for the rest of her life and passed away in Guangzhou in 1971.

Blum wrote constantly in China, and her works were mainly written in German and mostly published in the GDR. Her literary genres included prose and poetry, with her most famous work being the novel *The Shepherd and the Weaver,* which is based on the story of her and her Chinese lover. This novel is named after the eponymous Chinese mythology, which tells the story of the shepherd and the weaver – a couple who live on opposite sides of the Milky Way and can only meet once a year. This novel is written with considerable literary sophistication; it's divided into five parts, with the setting constantly shifting across multiple countries as the protagonist goes into exile and searches for her lover. Blum even switches to an epistolary format in the third part, shifting between the perspectives of the couple as they express their longing for each other. Furthermore, through the speech of different characters, the author skillfully plays with German, English, Chinese, and Chinese dialects, demonstrating the multicultural nature of the protagonist's Chinese experience. This reveals Blum's deep understanding of Chinese culture and "is the very embodiment of the integration of Chinese and western culture" (Lin, 2017, p. 20) shown in *The Shepherd and the Weaver*, making it remarkably rich in both content and form.

Although this novel is considered autobiographical due to its highly personal nature, it can only be seen as a semi-autobiographical novel or a roman à clef that combines reality with fiction (Yang, 1996, p. 179). Blum tried to write a complete story from a personal perspective without knowing the true circumstances, presenting her own interpretation and projecting her hopes, which creates numerous subtle or obvious discrepancies between the novel and reality – particularly in the ending where the protagonist successfully finds her lover after eleven years. Therefore, Blum's writing can be seen as a form of self-healing, and the differences between reality and the novel's plot, along with her portrayal of Chinese experiences through her unique perspective, can serve as a medium to understand her thoughts, hopes and feelings.

3. Double Burden During the Exile

During the exile, which Edward Said describes as "the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home" (Said, 2001, p. 173), the protagonist Hanna Bilkes' life, economic situation and psychological state are all in an unstable condition. In this period, Hanna's inner suffering stems predominantly from the double burden, namely the loss of both her home and her beloved. Although losing her home leaves her uncertain about where she belongs, she later finds a new sense of belonging in love. For Hanna, her lover Tschang Nju-Lang becomes a lifeline and an emotional anchor.

However, with the disappearance of this lifeline, Hanna experiences an even more devastating blow than before. Thus, Hanna persistently searches for Nju-Lang without giving up and makes every

effort to reach China, immersing herself in the environment that shaped his identity and life experiences. This can be seen not only as proof of her steadfast love for him, but also as evidence that he represents the sole remaining meaning in her unstable and drifting life.

3.1 Loss of Home

A comment by Hanna's friend Markus sketches a clear outline of her life: "There is no normal emigrant life." (Blum, 2023, p. 87, translation mine). On one hand, Hanna faces an endless bureaucratic nightmare, constantly dealing with tedious official documents, including visas, passports and various permits, which remind her again and again that she's only a visitor in this country. On the other hand, there is also "barely disguised xenophobia" (Blum, 2023, p. 154, translation mine) in the leftist political groups whose political stance is close to Hanna's. For example, George Montini spreads rumors about Hanna everywhere and is "described as a scheming antisemite who wants to render Hanna jobless, isolate her from her friends, and even drive her to suicide." (Franck, 2023, p. 285, translation mine)

However, facing the severe and widespread antisemitism in Europe at that time, Hanna often finds herself at odds with other Jews, because some Jews also discriminate against Eastern European Jews (Ostjuden) – migrants distinguished by their cultural and traditional differences from German Jews, such as Yiddish language and religious rites (Olszewska, 2013, p. 312). For example, Hanna describes Mr. and Mrs. Bergmann, themselves of Jewish descent, as having "a matter-of-fact contempt for Jews, especially for Eastern European Jews." (Blum, 2023, p. 172, translation mine) Even after Hanna arrives in China, she is insulted by other foreigners as a "man-crazy Chinese whore" (Blum, 2023, p. 179, translation mine) when they discover her partner is Chinese. From this, it's evident that Hanna is always in a state of isolation and helplessness, only trying to appear strong outwardly. This conforms to Julia Franck's description of the author: "Blum experiences herself as an outsider everywhere." (Franck, 2023, p. 287, translation mine).

In the context of exile, the loss of home often shakes one's sense of identity, since home is not only a physical space but also a carrier of memory, language, culture, and belonging. Yet Hanna, as a member of the Jewish diaspora, doesn't identify with Judaism. She once even separated her ethnicity from the religion, saying: "I am a Jew by nationality. [...] I am not religious at all." (Blum, 2023, p. 253, translation mine). This causes her to be viewed as an outsider everywhere she goes, and thus she has long been unable to find her own sense of belonging and lacks a sense of security. From this, it's clear that exile worsens Hanna's situation, forcing her to leave her familiar and accustomed place of residence, turning wandering into the norm.

Nevertheless, exile is also an opportunity to reshape one's identity, because it is "life led outside habitual order. It is nomadic, decentred, contrapuntal" (Said, 2001, p. 186) – this enables the creation of new meanings and the reexamination of old ones. For Hanna, this is realized when she follows Nju-Lang's footsteps to China and immerses herself in Chinese culture for an extended period.

3.2 Loss of the Beloved

Hanna and Nju-Lang's love is rooted in their shared negative experiences, as seen in one of their conversations: "Your people have much to suffer." / "Yours no less." (Blum, 2023, p. 253, translation mine). Because they both deeply empathize with each other's experiences and ideals, despite being

together for only three months, they become each other's most intimate soulmates and develop an unbreakable lifelong bond. This is evident in the way they continued, almost without interruption, to confide their thoughts and record details of their lives for each other in their diaries over the eleven years following their separation, despite not knowing one another's circumstances, whereabouts, or whether they would ever meet again in this lifetime. Their relationship thus transcends ordinary romance, becoming a source of spiritual support for both. This makes the "mythological atmosphere" (Saletta, 2022, p. 356, translation mine) feel natural to the novel, and the use of a title drawn from Chinese mythology elevates the poignant beauty of their love into something enduring and cross-cultural.

Nju-Lang leaves Hanna to return to China to assist the Communist Party's liberation work, though he can't reveal details to others due to the sensitivity of his mission. He attempts to reverse his own fate and that of his compatriots, while Hanna holds complex feelings about his departure – although it's emotionally painful, she rationally accepts it. This is emphasized again at the novel's ending, when Hanna finds Nju-Lang in China, but they can only spend one night together. After that, Nju-Lang must return to his post, and Hanna not only accepts this, but doesn't complain at all. This shows that the two are also "passionately bonded with a shared cause of fighting for the freedom, democracy and betterment of human beings" (Lin, 2017, p. 19), making this novel reflect a sense of value where collective interests take precedence over individual interests.

Furthermore, Hanna's search for Nju-Lang and Nju-Lang's involvement in the Chinese Communist Party's liberation mission unfold in parallel and in mutually reinforcing, positive directions, suggesting an inseparable connection between individual and collective destinies. In the end, Hanna finds Nju-Lang, and the Chinese Communist Party successfully establishes the new China, which not only reflects the socialist realism prevalent in the USSR and the GDR during the Cold War – an artistic style that portrays reality and ideals through a socialist lens (Saletta, 2022, p. 354) – but also makes this poignant love story more magnificent, imbuing the story with an idealistic quality that resonates with its mythological elements.

4. China as the Promised Land

Given her difficult life, Hanna tries everything she can to reach China, hoping not only to find Nju-Lang, but also to find salvation. In the novel, based on the oppression both she and Nju-Lang have experienced and their shared pursuit of freedom, Hanna identifies with his perspective and adopts it, projecting her love for him onto his love for China and his passion for the liberation mission. Thus, her love for Nju-Lang is transformed into love for China and Chinese people. Therefore, China becomes the symbolic "Promised Land" for Hanna, which is evident in her changed mood after arriving in China and in how she describes her experiences and surroundings.

However, these descriptions are not neutral, but strongly influenced by many personal factors, displaying obvious beautification and romanticization. Such portrayals simultaneously reflect the author's expectations and emotional projection, through which she gains a sort of comfort. This makes China in the novel more than just a geographical entity; it becomes a symbolic spiritual realm carrying multiple meanings of freedom, salvation and love. As Ester Saletta writes: "In Klara Blum's literary texts, therefore, there is no real China, but rather a fantastic, imagined land that can only be experienced as if in a dream. The author often interweaves these two dimensions." (Saletta, 2022, 358, translation mine)

4.1 Experiences as a Foreigner

The novel's descriptions of China and Chinese cities are mostly positive. Shanghai is described as "the modern city resplendent with technological progress" (Blum, 2023, p. 258, translation mine), while Beijing is called "the most beautiful city on Earth" (Blum, 2023, p. 226, translation mine). Moreover, despite Hanna experiencing various setbacks after arriving in China, when someone asks her whether she regrets going to China, she still says: "In my heart, a great contentment is fulfilled." (Blum, 2023, p. 226, translation mine) And then she adds: "Because I came to China." (Blum, 2023, p. 226, translation mine)

It's important to note that Westerners at that time didn't enjoy a good reputation in China, because against the backdrop of the Chinese Civil War, the ruling Kuomintang government, which represented authority, corruption and bureaucratic capitalism, was backed by the USA. As a result, Westerners were generally viewed in Chinese society as oppressors, exploiters and colonizers, and thus despised by many Chinese people. In this context, the novel features white characters calling Chinese people an "inferior race" (Blum, 2023, p. 17, translation mine) and "yellow monkeys" (Blum, 2023, p. 262, translation mine), denigrating Chinese beliefs and customs, while Chinese people call them "white devils" (Blum, 2023, p. 27, translation mine). Therefore, Hanna's Western identity not only fails to advantage her in China but becomes a liability, as it renders her suspect as a potential spy and thus discourages others from offering help.

However, as Ester Saletta writes, "despite this factual and realistic situation, Klara Blum continued to idealize China, because China was the country of her beloved" (Saletta, 2022, p. 358, translation mine). Hanna adopts an anti-imperialist and anti-colonialist perspective and chooses to stand with the Chinese people, thereby taking a fundamentally different position. Furthermore, although the protagonist doesn't consider herself one of the "bad Westerners", she doesn't complain about the unfair treatment she receives from those Chinese who fail to make this distinction. Thus, for Hanna, China becomes like a paradise in formation, offering the prospect of liberation from the suffering and pain she has experienced all along.

Although Hanna adopts a perspective that opposes Western capitalist exploitation and is even self-critical, deriving comfort from this stance, traces of the Western gaze remain. This is evident in Hanna's positive portrayal of many Chinese characters, especially Nju-Lang. He then "embodies the new, ideal hero and revolutionary. He is intelligent and full of ideas [...]. He is universally beloved, educated, athletic, and multilingual" (Saletta, 2022, p. 355, translation mine). Furthermore, Hanna describes Mee-Tssjing, Nju-Lang's wedded wife, as possessing an "ageless perfection" (Blum, 2023, p. 195, translation mine), and further characterizes her in this way: "Her evenly ageless face expressed a measured warmth, her evenly ageless limbs a measured grace." (Blum, 2023,p. 200, translation mine)

The praise of Chinese characters in the novel encompasses not only exoticization but also stereotypical representation. This is especially evident in its focus on Chinese characters' eyes and the repeatedly emphasized "slanted eyes" (Schlitzaugen). For example, in this description of a little girl on the street, there is actually no need to mention the shape of her eyes at all: "A little, slant-eyed girl, seven or eight years old, dragged a stool out onto the street and decorated it with some large, brightly violet flowers." (Blum, 2023, p. 253, translation mine) Thus, it can be said that although Hanna identifies with China and the Chinese people, she paradoxically others them at the

same time, because this kind of viewpoint, as a performance of power, means that the way Chinese people are viewed is determined by the Western subject, and through such praise, unequal cultural power is reinforced.

By portraying most people and things in China in a positive and idealized light, the protagonist is placed in a setting reminiscent of a Wonderland. Through projecting her own emotions onto Hanna, the author may find a sense of comfort and healing; yet such writing, infused with exoticism, ironically makes her complicit in Western exploitation.

4.2 Emancipatory Character Inherent in Chinese Society

Among the novel's various positive depictions of China, the most important is the emancipatory quality inherent in Chinese society, because it is this quality that drives the plot, draws the heroine to China, and allows her to find fulfillment through her experiences there. This emancipatory dimension aligns with Hanna's communist convictions and is primarily manifested through the portrayal of the oppression endured by Chinese workers and ordinary people, emphasizing the injustice and poverty they face.

Therefore, in addition to Westerners in China, the Chinese bourgeoisie is also largely depicted negatively in the novel, characterized as cold, arrogant and opportunistic. For example, the author has Nju-Lang say: "Rich people are not Chinese." (Blum, 2023, p. 12, translation mine) And then he adds: "The rich are a nation of their own." (Blum, 2023, p. 12, translation mine) Among these rich people, one of the most representative characters is Madame Tang, Nju-Lang's mother-in-law. She is the "daughter of one of Beijing's most prominent families" (Blum, 2023, p. 10, translation mine), placing her in the aristocratic class of old China, living in a luxurious house "with the golden-purple dragon before the gate" (Blum, 2023, p. 11, translation mine). However, when confronted with Hanna's desperate search for refuge, Madame Tang refuses, claiming that the rooms are all occupied and waving her away.

In addition, the novel incorporates many female experiences, integrating gender issues into the discourse of China's liberation and making them part of the vision of an ideal New China. For example, Tzai-Yün, Nju-Lang's sister-in-law, is depicted as a suffragette, who "gave a lecture in the students' association on the heroines of Chinese history and stirred her listeners to a fever pitch, especially through her vivid portrayal of the medieval Amazon Mu-Lan and the republican martyr Tssju-Dshing." (Blum, 2023, p. 28, translation mine) Besides, although Mee-Tssjing is willing to greet her husband "with an old-fashioned but very graceful bow" (Blum, 2023, p. 18, translation mine), she makes it clear: "I'm not some modern Shanghai doll who dances around just to please a man." (Blum, 2023, p. 30, translation mine) This emphasizes women's free will and presents a fusion of traditional virtues with modern progress.

Through this, the author challenges China's traditional gender norms, not only criticizing women's subordinate and dominated status and highlighting their "right to independence" (Blum, 2023, p. 73, translation mine), but also allowing women to assert their self-worth and contribute to the revolution even in such a turbulent era. These characterizations and thematic choices clearly reflect the author's concern for women's rights. Through her writing, she constructs China as an idealized realm moving toward freedom in both gender and class, creating a fictional comfort zone aligned with her own values.

On this basis, Hanna witnesses the growing power of this emancipatory character, as the Chinese Communist Party gradually drives back the Kuomintang, and she shows a sense of fulfillment and "euphoric optimism about the future" (Saletta, 2022, p. 356, translation mine). She is once described in this way: "Overcome by weakness, Hanna crouched on the windowsill. She no longer felt insult or despair." (Blum, 2023, p. 255, translation mine) As the course of the war becomes clearer, the novel's depiction of certain events grows increasingly romanticized. For example, in a parade celebrating a Communist victory, which Hanna describes as a "vivid dream world" (Blum, 2023, p. 255, translation mine), the author renders the scene with a luminous and finely artistic style, combining auditory and visual elements to create an effect that is dreamlike, almost surreal:

> "The gong beats, the drums, and the singing came closer. [...] Village girls, adorned with silk headscarves, balanced two baskets of flowers or fruit on each end of a long pole, and on each pole sat translucent blue birds made of tragacanth. The colors of the flowers, the fruit, the birds, and the headscarves harmonized like the tones of a melody." (Blum, 2023, p. 253, translation mine)

Besides, there are Tanagra figurines in the parade, including "a blond worker; a Negro farmwoman; an Asian student with a white turban; an Indian child with a feathered crown" (Blum, 2023, p. 254, translation mine). [1] These symbolic figures, representing oppressed peoples from various countries, gather together in a display of the international solidarity envisioned in Communist ideals. This lively and dreamlike depiction, combined with the critiques and praises mentioned earlier of different subjects and values, not only aligns with communist propaganda, but also signals the long-awaited realization of ideals. This romantic and richly detailed narrative style is similarly employed in Hanna's dream before she reunites with Nju-Lang, in which she envisions the mythological figures Dshe-Nü and Nju-Lang, with various animals building bridges for them:

> "Amid the night sky hovered a small, lively canopy of colors: large magpies, black and white with magnificent feathered tails, brownish golden pheasants, and magically blue kingfishers. Birds of every size and kind formed a bridge with outstretched wings. Their calls whirled together in a symphony." (Blum, 2023, 265, translation mine)

As Hanna finally reunites with her lover and the vision of a New China gradually becomes reality, the novel comes to a close. Through this perfect resolution, the author uses the novel to fill the gaps of disappointment in real life. Although her romanticized depiction of China serves a self-healing function, the hope it reflects extends beyond her personal fate to encompass a higher level of social engagement. This allowed the author to find a new spiritual foothold in China and a renewed sense of belonging among Chinese people. Witnessing her lover's success in the liberation movement, as well as the emancipation of the Chinese people, provides her with a form of comfort and strength she has never experienced before, while her interest in Chinese culture helps her rebuild a solid spiritual home.

5. Conclusion

Blum's *The Shepherd and the Weaver* is clearly marked by its historical moment, acquiring a distinctly political dimension due in no small part to the author's left-wing orientation. Against this backdrop, however, China functions less as a concrete historical reality than as a site of projection through which Blum processes experiences of loss and marginalization. The image of China thus

becomes an instrumentalized space of (self-)healing, subordinated to the author's own needs. Although such functional appropriations of China are not uncommon in 20th-century German-language literature – as can be seen in Karl Kraus' *The Wall of China (Die chinesische Mauer)*, Max Frisch's *The Chinese Wall (Die chinesische Mauer)*, Bertolt Brecht's *The Good Person of Szechwan (Der gute Mensch von Sezuan)* etc. – it is precisely this disregard for China's lived realities that lies at the heart of orientalist critique.

In line with Edward Said's concept of "imaginative geography" (Said, 2003, p. 49), the image of China in Blum's novel is not depicted as an objective entity but is instead constructed in relation to the West and organized within a binary opposition. Thus, what emerges is a Western-dominated "representation" (Said, 2003, p. 118) of China. From the viewpoint of reception, this is especially problematic due to the "textual attitude" (Said, 2003, p. 92) of Westerners – namely the tendency to approach the East primarily through texts and travel writings rather than through direct social engagement, which reinforces the unequal power relationship between East and West and continues to deny China the ability to speak for itself, resulting in a systematic process of othering. This distortion is especially apparent in the way the protagonist acknowledges the hostility of Chinese people toward Westerners but simultaneously disregards its implications by assuming that she herself doesn't belong to the category of Westerners perceived as unfriendly or exclusionary. Such an attitude makes her appear either enclosed within a self-referential imaginary or affected by a significant cognitive bias – this becomes even more striking when considering the author's actual experiences in China. However, it is only through this contrast with the West that China can assume its compensatory and therapeutic function for the author.

Furthermore, love is presented as a powerful sentiment that aspires to transcend cultural and national boundaries, but the novel simultaneously demonstrates that such transcendence is never socially neutral. The relationship between the European Jewish woman and the Chinese man appears at first to confirm the universality of love, since it emerges across differences of language, culture and historical experience. However, Hannah remains marked as a racial and cultural outsider whose affection for Nju-Lang is inseparable from a romanticized vision of China. Meanwhile, Nju-Lang is positioned as a representative of the Chinese people, for whom political and class struggle must take precedence over personal fulfillment. As a result, love is gradually displaced from the private sphere into a political one, culminating in Hannah's acceptance that her devotion belongs not only to the man she loves but also to his people and their historical cause.

This transformation reveals a gendered asymmetry as well, since it is Hannah who bears the emotional cost of renunciation and converts personal loss into moral or ideological affirmation. Therefore, the novel doesn't suggest that love truly overcomes cultural, racial and social divisions. Rather, it shows how love is reconfigured and absorbed by these very divisions, functioning less as a force of emancipation than as a medium through which unequal power relations are made meaningful and emotionally sustainable. This dynamic depends on the romanticized vision of China: for China to fulfill its role as a compensatory space where the author can process experiences of loss and marginalization, it must remain idealized. The self-healing project thus necessitates this romanticization, revealing how the novel's engagement with China is ultimately subordinated to the author's own emotional and ideological needs rather than grounded in recognition of Chinese social reality.

Notes

[1] This translation follows the original German text verbatim. The original is as follows: ein blonder Arbeiter; eine Negerbäuerin; ein asiatischer Student mit weißem Turban; ein Indianerkind mit einer Federnkrone.

AI Usage Disclosure

AI-based tools were only used for language proofreading and grammar checking. All arguments, analyses and contents of the article “Klara Blum’s Self-Healing through Romanticizing China in *The Shepherd and the Weaver”* are my own work. No AI tools were used for content generation or interpretation.

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