

# Study on the Family Structure Model in Eileen Chang's Works

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**Abstract**—As a modern legendary writer with a strong aristocratic background, Eileen Chang's works have attracted much attention from the academic circles. Through the interpretation of its text, it can be easily found that its narrative implies the pursuit of paternal love; the absence of a father leads to the appearance of "fatherless" text; and the prominence of female parents is due to its "fatherless". These three factors constitute the potential family structure model in Eileen Chang's works. This family structure pattern stipulates the theme writing and character shaping of her works.

**Keywords**—Eileen Chang; family structure model; "Seeking Father"; "Without Father" text; female parents

## I. INTRODUCTION

"China's social system is the family system". [1] Family complex based on blood relationship has become a new topic often written by many writers. Modern Chinese writers are no exception. For example, Lu Xun, Ba Jin, Lao She, Cao Yu and so on, "the intense denial of family culture rationally, and emotionally unable to resist its deep temptation" [2]. Like Eileen Chang, a legendary woman writer with a prominent family background, it is even more difficult to escape the nightmare of family culture.

Eileen Chang was born in a feudal aristocratic family. Her grandfather was Li Hung-Chang, a powerful minister of late Qing Dynasty. However, for many reasons, including absence of her mother in childhood, divorce of her parents in childhood, the outbreak of the Pacific War in her youth, the breakdown of her marriage in her middle age and the death of a lonely person in another country in her old age, all her life experiences led to Eileen Chang's homeless life. From her works, it can be seen that there is always a sense of homelessness in Eileen Chang's emotional depth, and there is always a desire to belong to her family in her deep consciousness. And this desire is hidden in the bottom of her works, forming a unique family cultural psychology, which also achieves a potential family structure model in Eileen Chang's works. As an individual, this unique family cultural psychology has influenced Eileen Chang's real life; as a writer, this family structure pattern prescribes the theme writing and characterization of her works.

## II. THE SEARCH FOR THE LOST FATHER'S LOVE

Searching for absent fatherhood here refers to the "love fatherhood complex". The so-called "love father plot", Freud explained, "Girls often infatuated with their father, want to overthrow their mother, and replace their mother's status, many girls in childhood in the form of coquettish in front of their father reveal the attractive female charm and art" [3]. Therefore, the "Oedipus Complex" can be popularly defined as the complex emotion of daughter loving father and hating mother. According to Freud's research, Oedipus is a common phenomenon in children's psychological development. Every girl worships her father more or less when she is young. In fact, every little girl may have some affection for her father, but most girls will gradually reduce their attachment to her father in the process of growing up. In other words, as girls grow up, they transfer their emotions to the opposite sex of their own age, so they tend to terminate or dissolve this love complex by combining with the opposite sex of their age. And some people who can not stop or eliminate this complex will form some kind of psychological disease. Eileen Chang belongs to the latter category.

Childhood is the key period for girls to form a love-father plot, and Eileen Chang's love-father complex is also conceived at this stage. Eileen Chang was born in a declining feudal aristocratic family. Her mother Yifan Huang is a modern woman, while Zhang Ailing's father Tingzhong Zhang is a young master of a feudal family. It can be said that her parents span the old and new eras. It is precisely this that leads to irreconcilable contradictions between their parents, which has a great impact on Zhang Ailing's life and character formation.

When Eileen Chang was four years old, her mother took her sister-in-law to Europe for several years to escape the oppression of the old family. For her mother's departure, the young Eileen Chang did not miss her, but was indifferent, perhaps also had the resentment of being abandoned. As for her father, Eileen Chang has said more than once that she likes me. Although she always put some attributives in front of her, "I know he is lonely, and he likes me when he is lonely." Tingzhong Zhang, his father, had an old-fashioned literary education and would write old-style poems when he was idle. Eileen Chang was very clever from an early age and showed her extraordinary literary talent, which her father

was proud of. Her father taught her to read, talked to her about literary works, and even drew up an ancient title for her daughter's childhood parody of *A Dream of Modern Red Mansions*. The absence of mother made little Aileen place all her emotions on her father, which gradually formed her love father complex. However, soon her father remarried and her stepmother's arrival destroyed Eileen Chang's comfortable family life, resulting in the destruction of her close relationship with her father. As Eileen Chang wrote in her autobiographical prose "Whisper", "My aunt told me the news of my father's remarriage, which was on a small balcony. When I heard the news, I felt that if my stepmother was in front of me, I would push her down from the balcony and let her fall to death." Imagine such a pale, thin and quiet girl, how strong her inner feelings are. She is going to push her stepmother down from the balcony and fall to death! It can be said that the fact that her father remarried made the intimate and harmonious relationship between Eileen Chang and her father change dramatically, and even break up quickly. The relationship between father and daughter deteriorated rapidly after stepmother entered the door. When Eileen Chang was 17 years old, her indifferent and authoritarian father beat her up and imprisoned her for half a year at the instigation of her stepmother, so that she almost died of dysentery. After escaping, the relationship between Eileen Chang and her father broke down completely, and her father became the pronoun of "bad" in her eyes. As she writes in her autobiographical prose "Whisper", I forcibly divide the world into two parts: light and darkness, good and evil, God and devil, which belong to my father must be bad. "Darkness, evil and devil" is the memory of Eileen Chang left by her father. This kind of hatred and hatred has gradually become a desire for revenge: "I bite my teeth and say, 'I want revenge, one day I want to revenge'." There is a saying that love is deep and hate is everything. Besides, Eileen Chang is in her most sensitive adolescence. Therefore, it is also said that Eileen Chang's "love father" is her death knot, which can not be untied in her life. Therefore, Eileen Chang can only borrow material to vent or find alternatives to continue her love father complex. In fact, many of Zhang Ailing's works in the future are to express her love for her father, not hate. It's an emotion that can't be rewarded.

In August 1943, Eileen Chang wrote a short story entitled *The Heart Sutra*. This is not a famous novel in Eileen Chang's works, but it is a novel with a very unique perspective in Eileen Chang's works. It describes a girl's psychological aberration and expresses a girl's inner feelings that love her father but can not be repaid. It can also be said that the direct evolution of Eileen Chang's love complex can even be regarded as a declaration of love for her father.

Xu Xiaohan, the heroine in the *Heart Sutra*, who is in the prime of cardamom years, loves Xu Fengyi, her father passionately and simply, and thus regards the male classmates who are in the prime of their lives as mustard. This kind of love gradually transforms from the blood love of father to the worship, attachment and love of mature men, from the father-daughter relationship of natural nature to the lover relationship, and then develops into the passionate pursuit of pure girls' attachment to mature men. Eileen

Chang herself once said, "Sometimes girls can't help tempting their fathers." In the novel, Xiaohan constantly tempts his father, hoping that his father can boldly accept and return his love. At the same time, Eileen Chang also shows her father's fantasy of love in her works. Xu Fengyi also loves Xiaohan. Compared with his daughter, he has no love with his wife. He pinned his love on his daughter. Originally, it was just a normal parent-child love, but under the temptation of his daughter, this kind of parent-child love became a love between men and women. In other words, he also fell in love with his daughter.

There is also the story in the novella *How Much Hate*, in which young family teacher Yujiayin falls in love with Xia Zongyu, the male master, but he married early, which is also the story of a young woman falling in love with a middle-aged man. Yujiayin's family background is similar to Eileen Chang's. But in reality, Eileen Chang can't let go of her subconscious love father complex, so she can't give these abnormal love in her works a reasonable and happy ending. She can only let Xu Feng-yi choose to stay with Duan Lingqing, her daughter Xu Xiaohan's classmate, to end the abnormal love in this way of Li Daitou's rigidity, and let Yu Jiayin choose to leave with tears. How could these unforgettable and moving traumas and despair not be immersed in Eileen Chang's own life experience and painful experience?

At the same time, this subconscious love-father complex eventually led to Eileen Chang searching for the ideal father all her life. In reality, she chose to combine with the older opposite sex to compensate for her love-father complex. In 1943, Zhang Ailing, 23, met Hu Lancheng, 38. This situation is a repetition of the love between Yu Jiayin and Xia Zongyu: the young woman falls in love with the older male master. Of course, Hu Lancheng is a mature man with a certain literary accomplishment, and at the same time, he is romantic. Eileen Chang fell in love with Hu enthusiastically. However, the marriage did not last long and ended with Hu Lancheng's love affair. After her divorce from Hu Lancheng, Eileen Chang went to the United States. In the United States, 36-year-old Eileen Chang met Lai Ya, 65, and they married six months later. Eileen Chang once said, "Laiya can be relied on". It can be said that these two marriages have become the realistic representation of Eileen Chang's irrevocable love complex. Therefore, it is said that Eileen Chang's love father complex created her miserable and sad life, but also created her classical novels with strange style.

In writing, father-seeking behavior can also be understood as Eileen Chang's attempt to construct an ideal family order in the text. In *Jasmine Fragrance*, Eileen Chang portrays a hero with feminine temperament and two father images with different personalities in the same time and space, Nie Jiechen and Yan Zhongye. In his imagination, he denied Nie Jiechen, the father who gave him many traumatic experiences in reality, but full of fantasies about his mother's ideal, ambitious and knowledgeable lover before marriage, and began his spiritual journey to find the ideal father in his imagination. It can be said that the desire to find an ideal father is Nie Chuanqing's desire, but also depends on Eileen Chang's own search and pursuit of paternal love.

From the psychological point of view, Eileen Chang's writing fulfilled her desire to revenge her father in imagination. She projected the discontent, irony and unrequited resentment towards her father in reality on the portrayal of her father's image in the text, forming another feature of her novel family structure pattern, that is, the writing of "father-less text". This is also the expression of Zhang Ailing's traumatic experience caused by her indifference and autocracy to her father in reality. It contains a huge psychological gap between her strong dissatisfaction with the name of "father" and her desire for the ideal father image, which is hard to give up in her heart. It is reflected in the text that her father is absent.

### III. WRITING OF "FATHERLESS TEXT"

Ms. Chen Xiaolan wrote in her work *Feminist Criticism and Literary Interpretation* that women's literary creation often denies patriarchal rights and patriarchal families in the form of "vacancy". In other words, female writers deny the rationality of the existence of fathers by conceiving the absence of fathers, the destruction of the image of fathers, the disappearance of patriarchy and the accompanying death of patriarchal families. [4] In the novel creation of Zhang Ailing's *Legend*, a large part of the story narration is carried out under the condition of "fatherless" text. Generally speaking, this writing strategy of "fatherless" text presents two aspects.

#### A. Father Killing Strategy

In Eileen Chang's novels, "paternity killing" first manifests itself as "conceiving the absence of fathers" killing the image of fathers, banishing male parents out of the text in absentia, and using female parents as spokesmen of patriarchal discourse, such as Old Lady Jiang in *Jin Suo Ji*, Old Lady Bai in *Love in a Falling City*, and so on. In Her representative work "Chenxiang-the first incense stove", in the famous chapters such as *aloes* and *frangrances* — the second incense stove, there is no father from the beginning to the end, or there are only a few words which are reproduced by others. In short, the absence of the presence is only a simple symbol, which means that a male parent loses his due status in the patriarchal society. The absence of these male parents reveals Eileen Chang's writing strategy of deliberately constructing the "fatherless" text environment, and also means her resistance and rejection of patriarchal consciousness.

#### B. Castration Strategy

That is the destruction of the image of father, in other words, castration and castration of fathers. This image of "castrated father" exists in a large number of Zhang Ailing's works. Heroism and creativity in traditional patriarchal society not only disappear from them, but also highlight the image of triviality, incompetence, excessive gambling and irresponsibility. Under the patriarchal culture, the corrupt and absurd life habits are all concentrated on them. They are no longer the creators, guides, supporters and backbone of history, even unable to maintain their own lives. They can only rely on women to live. For example, Mr. Zheng in

*Flowers* is a husband and father who depend on women, and Jiang Jize in *Jin Suo Ji*. The No.5 Master in *Xiao Ai* is all such images of fathers. It can be said that the destruction of the image of father is more convincing in opposing patriarchy than in conceiving the absence of father. This destruction of the image of father is manifested in the following different forms. One is the destruction of the external body. Destroying the traditional male image of the tall and brave father is manifested by incomplete body or complete loss of mobility, of course, loss of authority as a father. For example, in *Jin Suo Ji*, Jiang Erye lost his ability to move because he suffered from bone tuberculosis. In the novel, there is no positive description of him in the whole passage. He only appears in other people's speech and becomes an object that is said and despised. Qiqiao described him like this: "Look at your second brother like that, is he still a person? He can also be seen as a person. "Sitting up and sliding down the spine is not as tall as my three-year-old." He lost his dignity as a male parent and became an object of contempt by women. Compared with the strong and brave male image in traditional culture, such a weak state of bone tuberculosis naturally has a strong irony. Moreover, these descriptive words are all from the mouth of women, and their tragic satire has a touching effect. This Jiang Erye, portrayed by Eileen Chang with dramatic irony, can be regarded as the representative of the "castrated" father in Eileen Chang's works.

The second is mentally disabled. This is the most common image of "father" in Eileen Chang's works. In traditional Chinese ideology and culture, father not only represents a man's blood status in the family, but also all the privileges in social culture, and has a series of glorious and great words: strong, dignified, rational, glorious, etc. But in Zhang Ailing's works, she dispelled all the noble connotations of patriarchal society entrusted to "father". First of all, Eileen Chang likes to degrade her father or adult man into children, babies, infant corpses and immature children. Like Mr. Zheng in *Flower Tune*, "He has been playing a farce for forty years, having children outside when he is rich, having children at home when he is not rich." Since the Republic of China, he has not grown older. Although he knows that alcoholic women and opium are still children's hearts, he is a child's corpse soaked in an alcoholic vat. "His appearance looks like a sign of drinking Lekoufu and smoking cigarettes on an advertisement. It looks like a standard young gentleman in Shanghai, with handsome drinking and smoking postures. Round face, eyebrows, mouth upward, "put on shorts, become a suckling boy, draw a beard, become an old man, if you add white beard, he can act as Santa Claus." These short descriptions use playful language to childish and naive Mr. Zheng, thus losing a man's due authority as a father. Sex and heroism have achieved spiritual castration. Secondly, Eileen Chang also likes to give feminine appearance to her male characters. From the male's own point of view, this gender misplacement is undoubtedly a kind of abusive insult. As Lin Xingqian said, "Because the word 'woman' has become an insult to men, it has obviously been depreciated by patriarchal culture, with extreme humiliating nature and negative significance. In Eileen Chang's writing strategies,



such a description of the shield or the tooth for tooth with a son's spear is her usual skill. [5] For example, Qiao Qiqiao in the novel *aloes and fragrances*—the first incense stove is said to be "somewhat gloomy and girl-like". Nie Chuanqing in the film of *Jasmine Fragrance* is "a boy of about 20 years" and "somewhat feminine", and is regarded as a girl by the female object he desires. This is undoubtedly a denial of Nie Chuanqing's male gender. As for this "feminized" treatment, "Chuanqing turned around and bit his teeth and said: "You take me as a girl. You-you-you-you just don't treat me like a human being!" It can be seen that the treatment of "non-male" to men is also a kind of spiritual insult and depreciation to men. Third, spiritual disability is also manifested in the lack of pursuit of life, carelessness, excessive gambling, opium smoking, kiln shopping, women playing, fatuous and trivial aspects. There are many such "father" images in "The Legend". For example, Jiang Jize in "The Golden Lock" does everything he can to eat, drink and gamble, and eventually lives by selling his ancestors' houses; and Qiqiao in *Crumbs of Ligumaloes* — the First Incense Burnt, whose wife provides for him by selling her body. There are also the old hooligans Situxie, the brutal and cruel Nie Jiechen in "Jasmine Flavored Tea" and the trivial and dirty Father Pan in "Young Age" and so on.

This series of "father" images, without exception, are physically and spiritually disabled, enough to allow people to see through the patriarchal society in the "father" on the head of the halo, to see the absurd nature of "father".

#### IV. HIGHLIGHTING OF FEMALE PARENTS

In her works, Eileen Chang banishes male parents from their families. Families without fathers, of course, are not perfect families in the orthodox vision, but incomplete families in the marginal areas of society. It is also in such incomplete families that the orthodoxy cannot tolerate that female parents can be highlighted. Eileen Chang endows women with supreme discourse power in her text, realizes the resistance to patriarchy through women's unique physical and mental experience, thus restoring the gender identity of women who have lost their self-subjective consciousness under patriarchal consciousness for a long time, and shows another aspect of her family structure model, that is, the presence of female parents and acting on behalf of patriarchy. This is not only the way Xu Xiaohan and Nie Chuanqing had to choose after they had to find their father, but also the inevitable result of Zhang Ailing's female self-rescue consciousness. In the absence of their father, female parents were endowed with the supreme authority which could not be shaken. They exercised the power of men and also showed their abnormal personality. For example, after the death of Liang Jiteng, Mrs. Liang in the "aloes - the first incense stove", she had a happy life in the Liang Mansion. Mrs. Liang's wealth in life, coupled with her present widowhood status, was in an absolute dominant position in her family. She dominates the lives and destinies of domestic maids and nieces, playing with simple girls on the palm of her hand, inducing them to go on the road of prostitution with both hard and soft. "She is a competent woman, holding the great wheel of the times in one hand, in her own small

world, retaining the lustful air of the late Qing Dynasty, closing the door to become a small Empress Dowager Cixi." Mrs. Liang's status as a female parent is vividly reflected in her jealousy struggle with Watching and Ge Weilong. She exposes the authority of her female parents to the patriarchal society, even if it is deformed.

In her classic book *The Golden Lock*, Eileen Chang pushed the image of Qiqiao, a crazy female parent, to the top of her power. Cao Qiqiao, born at the bottom of the society, had no personal freedom at all. Her parents died in her early years. She lived with her brother and sister-in-law. When she grew up, she was sold by her brother to the disabled elder brother Jiang Erye of Liang House Courtyard, and began her loveless and asexual marriage life. Jiang Jia's high-wall courtyard and strict family rules delineate Qiqiao in a cold and stagnant family prison. She couldn't satisfy her burning desire. The only man she met, Jiang Weize, was not sincere about her at all, but only coveted her money. In the double shackles of lust and money, Qiqiao can only grasp tightly the money she sold her life for. Because living in a society like that, only by mastering money can we finally establish our position. The essence of money is not for exchange, but for the realization of power. After power was seized by Qiqiao, a mad woman, tragedies began to unfold. "She traded her life for gold shackles, tied herself, and chopped people around her with the heavy shackles. She also lost half her life without dying." Qiqiao's fate was caused by the patriarchal society. She did not realize it herself. On the contrary, she recognized everything imposed on her by the patriarchal society and acted according to the standards of patriarchal culture. She laissez-faire her heir to her property and son of her parents sooner or later. She allowed him to visit kilns and play games. She also lured him to smoke. She exercised the right of domination and revenge on the more humble women, daughters and daughters-in-law. She probed into the privacy between her son and daughter-in-law and played up it as if she had suffered the same devastation that she had suffered at that time, which resulted in Chishou's painful death in hell. Juan, who was upheld to be the steproom of Changbai, was tormented and hanged. She trampled on her daughter's happiness wantonly, not only maliciously teaching her daughter that men could not touch her, but also strangled the love between Chang'an and Tongshi Fang, destroyed her only chance to get a happy marriage, and extinguished the last warm light of human nature of Jiang Mansion. "Chang Bai dared not marry again, but only walked in the brothel, Chang'an also early cut off the idea of marriage."

Qiqiao here is no longer a simple image of female parents, but standing on the edge of madness and thus has a dual identity, that is, from subordinate status to the dominant status of female parents, she not only makes desperate resistance to Male Subjectivity consciousness, but also conspires to suppress and strangle a young and lively life. Qiqiao's approach makes the dominant absence of male's subjective consciousness implicitly appear in the deep consciousness of female parents, makes the fate of women more sad and desolate, which forms a unique national cultural psychological structure in Eileen Chang's works. She excavates and criticizes this kind of abnormal cultural

psychology from the unique perspective of women with the female body. We have made our own thinking on the construction of a new psychological structure of women's culture. As Yu Qing said: "If Lu Xun devoted all his life to criticizing national character, it is a contribution to the construction of national cultural psychology, then Zhang Ailing's exposition and criticism of female's original sin consciousness in female consciousness is a supplement to Zhang Ailing's construction of national cultural psychology, which is a contribution to the evolution and development of female consciousness." [6]

#### V. CONCLUSION

In a word, in Eileen Chang's works, the pursuit of missing father's love, the "text without father" appearing without father and the prominence of female parents bearing female consciousness created by her "father without father" constitute a strange family structure model, which carries too much unconscious content of the writer's mind. It is precisely because of this that, it is for later generations to Eileen Chang and her works. The interpretation of the works offers unlimited possibilities.

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