

# The Construction of Eileen Chang's Image in Different Periods

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## ABSTRACT

From Seventeen-year Literature to the neglect of the mainland version of literary history during the Cultural Revolution, to the attention after the boom of rewriting literary history in the 1980s, the construction of Eileen Chang's image has gone from high to low and then showed a trend of recovery. The formative factors and development trend of this phenomenon have become a common concern and research topic in the literary history of mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan. It compares the concealment and silence of China mainland' literary and historical images before Eileen Chang, the contrast between the literature history of mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan from the 1960s to the 1990s and the reconstruction of Eileen's image, the withering image of the "hot" Eileen Chang in the literary history of a new century, explores the construction of literary history in different periods, and reviews and reflects on the significance of the reconstruction of Eileen Chang's image for the meaning for the writing of literary history.

**Keywords:** *Literary history, Eileen Chang, Image, Construction.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

<sup>1</sup>The series of literary works in the specific research time process of literary history is a term which related to the concepts of "order", "dynamic structure", "variation", and "process". This concept does not come from China, but is an "imported product" from Japan, and one of its tasks is to describe the process of interpretation, criticism and appreciation, and to provide a large number of specific research results for literary theory. To a certain extent, the entry of literature history is a way to display the artistic value of the works of writers and the contribution of the writer himself to the academic history of literature in the form of systematic integration. In the process of writing the modern and contemporary literary history in China, most of them are direct views of writers' works, and the attention to the image construction of writers is still lacking. As the main body of creation, especially the writers discovered after rewriting the

history of literature, the study of their image construction is still relatively blank.<sup>2</sup>

As the representative of the Eileen Chang excavated after rewriting the history of literature, the evolution of her personal image construction in the history of literature is worth studying. The image of Eileen Chang is sorted out in different versions of literary history. The literature shows that from 1949 to 1980, there were no articles with "Eileen Chang" as the title, theme or key word. In 1980-1990, there were fewer than 10; since 1990, it has soared to 300. [1] In the early 1980s, there were no "Eileen Chang" in several important literary histories, such as Wang Yao's Draft of *The History of New Chinese Literature*, and Liu Shousong's *The First Draft of the History of New Chinese Literature*. It can be learned that in the literary world before the 1990s, Eileen Chang was included in the official mainstream ideology. Exploring the construction of a writer's image in the history of literature is an important way to understand the intrinsic value of his or her works, and also a

1. Welek, Warren: *Literary Theory*, Sanlian Bookstore, 1984.

2. Du Shuying, Qian Jing: *The Academic History of Chinese 20th Century Literature*, China Social Science Publishing House, 2007.

necessary way to dissect the writer's personal creation methods, the deep artistic originality of his or her works and his or her personal creative contributions.

## **2. BEING HIDDEN AND SILENT: EILEEN CHANG IN THE HISTORY OF 1950S AND BEFORE**

In the early 1940s, *Crumbs of Ligumaloes — the First Incense* made Eileen Chang in the isolated Island Shanghai, a future writer who resounded in the literary world. Eileen Chang was firstly sent out as a mandarin duck and butterfly who did not enter mainstream literature. The fact that her entry into the field of literary criticism was noticed can be traced back to Mr Fu Lei. Mr Fu Lei published an article On Eileen Chang's Novels under the pen name of Xun Yu on Magazine *Wanxiang* with more than ten thousand words. He appraised Eileen Chang's works in a fair way, affirmed her writing skills and literary talent, and said that she possessed "multi-aspect cultivation". However, "From *The Story of the Golden Lock* to *The Blockade*, it is no more than a cup of Longjing tea, which has been poured with boiling water several times so tasted a little bland. Even so, it was too extravagant, too wasteful. Xun Yu (Fu Lei): On Eileen Chang's novels, *Wanxiang*, May 1944, vol. 3, No. 11.<sup>3</sup> "He only analysed the artistic achievements and development direction of Eileen Chang's works from the aspects of artistic value and creation form, but did not pay attention to the potential influence of Eileen Chang's image as a writer on her works.

As a precocious female writer on the literary road, she has been published in school journals and magazines since the age of 12, but she wasn't mentioned in the study of literary reviews and literary history in the 1920s and 1930s until the late 1920s. Hu Shi's *Chinese Literature in the 1920s* (New Republic Book Bureau, 1929) and Chen Zishan's *The History of Chinese Literature in Last Thirty Years* (Shanghai Ancient Books Publishing House, 1929) were not mentioned. Until Eileen Chang published *The First Incense*, she began to be formally concerned by the literary world.<sup>4</sup> Since then, the modern female literature historians, Zheng Bitan, Su Qing and Eileen Chang also pointed out that "Eileen Chang always puts a lot of efforts into her writing skills". He objectively analyzed the

outlook on life reflected in the works of the two popular Shanghai writers, and highlighted the "mortal consciousness" which shown in Eileen Chang's works, which is quite different from the "legendary" image of the writer.

In the 1940s, the Shanghai literary establishment paid close attention to Eileen Chang and her works, and various kinds of popular comments brought Eileen Chang some popularity. However, because there was no organization for the compilation of orthodox literary history, writers were famous for their own works, and Eileen Chang was no exception. The research and criticism of this period focused on Eileen Chang's talent and the skills of her works, without touching the original life of Eileen Chang's works, but only observing Eileen Chang herself and her excellent works in the periphery. Critics have highly affirmed Eileen Chang's talent and writing skills. This is also the peak period of Eileen Chang's creation.

In the 1950s, it was also an important period for "modern Chinese literature" to be separated from classical literature. With the institutionalized development of discipline since the founding of the People's Republic of China, the related writers and their works were also needed to enter classes in university, so that it was urgent to compile the literary history. As the first relatively complete textbook of a new literature history since the founding of the People's Republic of China, Wang Yao's *The History of New Chinese Literature* (New Literature Publishing House, 1953) was regarded as the foundation work of modern literature, but Eileen Chang was not mentioned in this book. This was followed by *The First draft of the History of New Chinese Literature* by Liu Shousong (Writers Publishing House, 1956) and *The History of Modern Chinese Literature* (Writers Publishing House, 1955) by Ding Yi. It is not surprised that Eileen Chang was also not mentioned in these two literary history books. In the 1950s, Wang Yao's *The First Draft of the History of New Chinese Literature* was clearly stated in the *Preface*, "It was completely in line with the CPC's guiding thoughts". The outline of *The First Draft of the History of New Chinese Literature* was to provide a teaching framework for professors of new literary history after the founding of the People's Republic of China (1949). It was the product of literature history under the guidance of mainstream ideology. It can be seen that Eileen Chang in the 1950s did not enter the scope of orthodox literature in mainland China, and the image of the female literary artist who rose to

3. Xun Yu (Fu Lei): On Eileen Chang's Novel, *Wanxiang*, May 1944, Volume 3, Issue 11.

4. Tan Zhengbi: On Su Qing and Eileen Chang, *Anhui Literature and Art Publishing House*, 1994.

fame in mainstream literature was still in a state of unfamous.

### **3. CONTRAST AND RECONSTRUCTION: EILEEN CHANG IN THE LITERARY HISTORY FROM THE 1960S TO THE 1990S**

Xia Zhiqing's *The History of Modern Chinese Fiction* was the most famous in the 1960s. A whole chapter was to analysis systematically both Eileen Chang and her works. Xia Zhiqing believed that Eileen Chang has Chaucer style feelings to enjoy life while facing to life situation, her attitude is very sincere with a sense of tragedy. Although Eileen Chang's early life was not happy, she can enjoy her life. The complex family relationship let Eileen Chang's suffered a lot in childhood, probably because of this, Eileen Chang formed a resolute and unyielding character, and didn't yield to the environment, leading to surviving in a difficult environment. Her pessimistic thinking ways in optimistic open-minded, also lit up her work. In this literary history, Xia held Eileen Chang to a high status, saying that "her perseverance did not yield to circumstances" and that her literary achievements were "comparable to those of modern women writers such as Katherine Mansfield and Katherine Anne Porter..."<sup>5</sup>

In Xia Zhiqing's revised version of literary history, Eileen Chang's image was justified, and the representative writers of vulgar culture are promoted to the ranks of orthodox writers of elegant culture. Mr Xia affirmed the image Eileen Chang shown from her novels, a pessimistic mind hiding a compassionate sentiment, simmering for years to die in suffering, but never lower the head, and never giving in. Eileen Chang had the toughness and bravery of blue blood, forgiving all the bad in the world, not feeling sorry for herself, and she was powerful enough to build her own inner spirit hut without contacting with the outside world. After the publication of Xia Zhiqing's *The History of Modern Chinese Fiction*, scholars in Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan such as Crystal, Tang Wenbiao and Lin Yiliang made a fair evaluation of Ms. Eileen Chang, which led to the formation of "Eileen Chang fever" in Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan. As the evaluation of literature written in Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan aimed at

the purpose at the marginal internal penetration of "writers" to mainland China without mentioning Eileen Chang's literature, Wang Yao and Liu Shousong's editions tended to be "subversive" and Xia's literature edition was not recognized by the orthodox literature writers, however, mainland scholars began to notice.

In 1985, Huang Ziping, Chen Pingyuan and Qian Liqun put forward the basic assumption of "20th century Chinese literature", which emphasizing an overall consciousness, opening up the time boundaries between modern and contemporary, and compensating for the content isolation among literary theory, literary history and literary criticism. [2] In the same period, "*Thirty Years of Modern Chinese Literature*", written by Qian Liqun, Wen Rumin and Wu Fuhua, was published. Eileen Chang was evaluated as "the one who was blocked by her political position" by this version of literary history and was only a slight description in the book.

To sum up, it can be seen that the compilation of mainland China literature history before the 1980s did not include Eileen Chang into the category of orthodox literature, scholars from Hong Kong, Taiwan and overseas were the first people to discover the unique value of Eileen Chang's characters and works. Since her debut in the 1940s, the influence of Eileen Chang's works in the mainland has become strong, and the acceptance of mainstream literature has shown a lower trend from a better beginning, which was worth paying attention to.

In Arnold's words, "There is no better way to discover real earthly masterpieces than to remember the famous words of previous masters and use them as a touchstone for new works." [3] However, at this stage, literature and politics remain closely related. Under the guidance of the mainstream ideological discourse rights, the compilation of literary history presented a strong political consciousness tendency. On the one hand, at the beginning of the founding of the People's Republic of China, the discourse in the field of literature and art was very strictly controlled. The marriage between Eileen Chang and Hu Lan Cheng was the main reason that influenced Eileen Chang's entry into literary history. The name of the "The wife of a traitor" became an important factor for her being unaccepted by the mainstream literature in mainland China before the 1980s. On the other hand, the artistic characteristics of Eileen Chang's works are to describe the love life of urban men and

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5. Xia Zhiqing: *A History of Modern Chinese Fiction*, Fudan University Press, July 2005, p. 251.

women, which had petty bourgeois sentiments and did not conform to the mainstream values at that time. It was worth noting that the in-depth excavations of Hong Kong and Taiwan and overseas have to some extent filled the loss which caused by ideological problems.

The craze of "rewriting the history of literature" that emerged in the 1980s, became a special historical event and cultural movement in a specific period. After the mid-1990s, the reform and opening up of Chinese society was developed deeply, and politics began to temporarily loosen the control on literature. At that time, intellectuals wanted to use the discipline of Chinese modern and contemporary literature as a discursive medium to influence the literature history, which seemed to have been concluded, and people were in an attempt to explore the diversified possibilities of literature history research by reconstructing the new form of literature history, showing the coexistence of objectivity and individuality.

In the ten years from 1980 to 1990, the history of mainland literature was firstly included into the history of mainland literature was the compilation of *A Brief History of Modern Chinese Literature* (1984 edition), a version that placed Eileen Chang in the occupied area of progressive writers, but Huang thinks Eileen Chang's works "more marketable, lower tone", and that "her thoughts will tend to be reactionary".<sup>6</sup> In addition, Yin Guoming's history of novels and special topics, such as *The History of Modern Chinese Literature Schools* (Guangdong Higher Education Press, 1989), also earned Eileen Chang a lot of attention. At this stage, the literature history interpreted both Eileen Chang's characters and her works from one side, giving high recognition to Eileen Chang's writing skills, and basically grasping the writing characteristics of Eileen Chang's novels, but the personal research vision of the writer is still a little narrow.

The most noteworthy is *The Thirty Years of Modern Chinese Literature* written by Qian Liqun, Wen Rumin and Wu Yuhui. In the revised 1998 edition, the evaluation of Eileen Chang's image and her works as: "Both popular, pioneering, Chinese, modern, and Chinese culture is enough to face the world"[4] By affirming Eileen Chang's novel achievements in the 1940s, with her talented writing style and rich life experience, she painted

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6. Huang Xiuji: *A Brief History of Modern Chinese Literature*, China Youth Press, 1984, pp. 354 to 355.

the literary development in the 20th century. The two versions of Eileen Chang's image flow were seriously affected by depoliticization, and the 1998 edition of the modern Chinese literature depends on the guiding thoughts of the CPC Central Committee on literature. A whole chapter was made to elaborate the artistic value of Eileen Chang and her works. Scholars studied her monographs and comments, and discarded Eileen Chang's political stains. It reflected that the tendency of literature history has gradually objectified by separating literature history from political control only from the perspective of Eileen Chang's academic research contribution. Tang Tao and Yan Jiayan, who revised *The Brief History of Modern Chinese Literature* in 2008, and wrote a section titled "Eileen Chang's Novels", which basically continued the view of "Thirty Years of Modern Chinese Literature", affirming Eileen Chang's sharp stokes, keen artistic intuition and insight, and revealing the depth of human nature.<sup>7</sup>

#### **4. CARNIVAL AND CORRECTING NAME: EILEEN CHANG IN THE HISTORY OF NEW CENTURY LITERATURE**

In the version of literature history since the new century, the evaluation of Eileen Chang's image and works of *Thirty Years of Modern Chinese Literature* has been basically continued. In the *History of Modern and Contemporary Chinese Literature* written by Wang Jialiang and Yan Min, "she has not only boasted the new trend of modern western civilization, but also a profound cultivation of traditional literature." Therefore, Eileen Chang "skilfully combined traditional writing skills with some expression techniques of modernism" in her writings.<sup>89</sup>

In the version of *Chinese Modern and Contemporary Literature* by Li Yi and Gan Tianquan, there was little space which involved Eileen Chang, but it evaluated that she is 'special' in modern literature and the conscious spokesperson of the new citizen culture", affirming that Eileen Chang was recognized as one of the best female writers of China in the 20th century.[5]

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7. Tang Tao and Yan Jiayan: *A Brief Introduction to the History of Modern Chinese Literature*, Fudan University Press, April 2008.

8. Wang Jialiang, Yan Min: *The History of Chinese Modern and Contemporary Literature*, Shanghai Education Publishing House, 2009, p. 185.

9. Same as footnote 1.

In the textbook of *Chinese Modern and Contemporary Literature* which edited by Ding Fan and Zhu Xiaojin<sup>10</sup>, Eileen Chang's novels were "fragrant like Huadiao wine" and "always had a much modern life experience" and people praised Eileen Chang as "a fairy talent". In Zhou Xiaoming's edition of *The History of Chinese Modern Literature*, where specially mentioned the divorce between Hu Lancheng and Eileen Chang had influenced Chang's novels a lot, described it as "both noble life marks, and to feel the new and old way of life", at the same time, it also quoted Eileen Chang is "a fairy" as the evaluation of Eileen Chang herself.<sup>12</sup>

In addition, the fine compilation of *The History of Modern Chinese Literature* written by Zhu Donglin is a representative of the construction of the author's image. From the relevant evaluation of the *Golden Lock*, it reflected that the author believes that Eileen Chang fully showed "a special sensitive and thorough understanding of secular human nature and female psychology".<sup>13</sup> *The History of Chinese Modern Literature* cited the view of evaluation Eileen Chang "like Zhou Shuren looked down at human and human culture, and human ignorance, felt the human desolation", the "modern female tolerance, modern female culture and female literature tolerance" made her works into complex human nature.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>15</sup>"Useful people in the world are often vulgar" is the claim of Chang herself, but in Luo Ande's *Point and Face: The History of Modern and Contemporary Chinese Literature*, he said Chang "with her unique female delicacy and innate urbanite identity that it is also the 'unique wisdom' that urbanites must have".<sup>16</sup>

In *the History of Chinese Modern Literature* written by Liu Yong and Zou Hong, he placed

10. Ding Fan, Zhu Xiaojin: *Chinese Modern and Contemporary Literature*, Nanjing University Press, 2007, p. 213.

11. Reporter: <Legend> Tea Review, Journal, Volume 13, Issue 6, 1944.

12. Zhou Xiaoming: *The History of Chinese Modern Literature*, Central China Normal University Press, 2011, p. 678.

13. Kong Fan: *The History of Modern Chinese Literature*, People's Education Press, 2012, p. 570.

14. Wang Furen: *The Historical Tracks of the Development of Modern Chinese Short Stories (Next)*, Lu Xun Research Monthly, 1999, No.10.

15. Eileen Chang: *Eileen Chang: Must Name (Volume 4)*, Anhui Literature and Art Publishing House, 1992, p. 51.

16. Luo Ande: *Point and Face: The History of Chinese Modern and Contemporary Literature*, China Social Sciences Press, 2016, p. 142.

Eileen Chang in the creation chapter of the occupied areas and national areas, evaluating Eileen Chang as a "romantic advocate, advocating pure and sincere sexual love, and dissatisfied with the erosion of money society on human emotional life".<sup>[7]</sup>

Influenced by the ideological trend of "rewriting literary history", Eileen Chang's image has gradually recovered. In the history of literature after the 1980s, the first version of Huang Xiuji's included Eileen Chang to Qian Liquan, Wen Rumin, Wu Fuhui's versions, which rehabilitated Eileen Chang. Eileen Chang's image ranges from "a woman writer with political rebellion and low-end works" to "the greatest female writer in the 20th century who has the similar life experience like a desolate island". The rheology reflects the progress of value judgement in the literary history of writing, which not only brought artistic value of the works of buried writers into the ranks of the literature history, but also realized the transition from literary history writing to new enlightenment to diversification. In the upsurge of re-evaluating the history of literature in a new era, although the inertia of official ideology has not completely disappeared, it has a progressive significance to a certain extent.

## 5. RETROSPECT AND REFLECTION: FROM THE IMAGE CONSTRUCTION OF EILEEN CHANG, AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF LITERATURE HISTORY

From Hu Shi and Chen Zizhan to the Seventeen-year Literature to the Cultural Revolution, the writing of mainland China literature history ignored Eileen Chang; to the upsurge of Hong Kong, Taiwan and overseas literature history in the 1960s, to the attention and recovery after "rewriting literary history" in the 1980s, Eileen Chang's image showed a hidden to contrast to the trend of modern and contemporary Chinese literature.

Why people write history? Who wrote history for? The authors would first like to clarify these two issues in future studies. Why they write history? Because human beings are in the stage of continuous development, history is the basis for recording the development trajectory of human beings, while literature reflects the situation of the times, and literature history is a systematic

elaboration of literature. From the history of literature, people have clearly known the excellent writers and works of the times, so as to understand the current situation. For example, Du Fu's poems in his later years recorded the chaos of the rebellion of An-Shi and the tragic situation of the people. From Su Shi's words, people can understand the life of a generation of bold Ci style pioneer Mr. Dongpo. Human beings should respect true indiscriminately recorded history. When people write history for human beings, they should refuse self-deception and respect others creative achievements.

First of all, in the upsurge of reevaluating literature history in a new era, although the inertia of official ideology has not completely disappeared, it has progressive significance to some extent. After the 1990s, the writing of literature history became increasingly prosperous, and a gratifying phenomenon appeared. But in the face of controversial figures, seemingly unprecedented prosperity, substantial research is still stagnant.

Secondly, going back to literature itself, repairing history and establishing books should adhere to the tendency of demoralizing, depoliticizing and de-utilitarian. On the one hand, the moral quality of a writer cannot be completely equated to the actual aesthetic value of the work. Before the 1980s, Eileen Chang was called a "traitor" because she married to Hu Lancheng. The artistic originality and artistic conception of her works were not unnoticed, but it still directly affected the writing of literary history. On the other hand, the author's political tendency and the artistic value of the work itself should be separated, "the birth of the reader at the cost of the author", once born, the author and the work should be separated, considering the constant aesthetic value itself cannot be political standard, as a benchmark with artistic standard evaluation, they should be excavated by the history of literature. Thirdly, the utilitarian literary values are always willing to be literary weapons, awaken the ignorance and the nation, and highlight the WTO accession spirit of "worrying about the country when feeling".<sup>17</sup> At this stage, Eileen Chang's creation obviously does not belong to this mainstream. In addition, Eileen Chang's dislike for the old society has not risen to a level of value criticism. Although she is concerned about life, the reality of politics and national struggle has never entered her vision.

The process of Eileen Chang being incorporated into the literature history also reflected the changing political environment of the chronicle and the emotional intervention of the editor. Before 1980, people who rewriting the history of literature, such as Eileen Chang, Qian Zhongshu and Shen Congwen, were all ignored and criticized in literature history. Under the special political background of the mainland China, it was difficult for the creators of literature history to choose candidates who could be included in literature history based on the writers' creative achievements and the actual height of their works.

In contrast, overseas researches began earlier than Chinese. Wang Yao, Liu Shousong's literature history books were recognized by people, however, Qian Zhongshu, Eileen Chang and Shen Congwen were unaccepted before the publication of *The History of Chinese Modern Novels* made by Xia Zhiqing, which also made scholars who studied literary history very difficult. Although scholars did know the important significance of Eileen Chang, under the mainstream ideology, they had a lot of scruples.

## 6. CONCLUSION

To sum up the analysis, the creation of literature history should be independent. The current situation of Eileen Chang's research is by no means an individual case, but also the bottleneck of the whole modern and contemporary literature research and literature development. Only by breaking through the social context and exploring the charm of the writer and his or her works from the perspective of literature, the writer and his or her works can be famed again. The change of literary paradigm can not only respond to the change of times and requirements, scholars should have independent thinking abilities and permissive research background, and dare to tell the truth, willing to tell the truth. Otherwise not only Eileen Chang, there are a lot of buried excellent writers on the research road will still be very bumpy, and the academic value mining cannot boast new growth points.

## AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

Yaqi Zhao wrote the paper. Guicheng Zhuang revised and edited the paper.

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