



Eileen Chang's *Yuan-Nv* and *the Rouge of the North* Creation Timeline Examination and Value Revaluation

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Abstract. During her time in the United States, Eileen Chang tried to open up foreign markets with English writing, and her creation was committed to retaining Chinese cultural characteristics while being close to the acceptance habits of English readers, which provided an important perspective for studying her later turnaround of creation. What is particularly important is that Eileen Chang spent ten years repeatedly translating and revising *The Golden Cangue*, publishing the novel *Yuan-nv* and its English version *The Rouge of the North*. This article focuses on these two works, combines the correspondence of Eileen Chang, Song Kuang, C.T.Hsia and others to sort out the creative process, analyzes and discusses the strategies and adjustments of Chinese and English versions in plot adaptation, language conversion and cultural transmission, and strives to explore the multiple reasons for the difficulty of publishing works abroad while seeing their unique value.

Keywords: Eileen Chang; *Yuan-nv*; *The Rouge of the North*; *The Golden Cangue*; Creation verification

1 Introduction

As a distinctive writer in the history of modern Chinese literature, Eileen Chang's works have consistently attracted scholarly attention. *Yuan-nv* (《怨女》), a Chinese novel from her later period, grew out of her earlier story *The Golden Cangue*. However, it marks a noticeable shift in style, offering new developments in character portrayal, narrative technique, and thematic expression. And its English version, *The Rouge of the North*, was eventually published in the UK. In recent years, numerous scholars have continued to studied *Yuan-nv* from diverse perspectives, including feminism, translation and rewriting, comparative analysis with *The Golden Cangue*, and its adaptation for film and television. Among these, comparative studies between *The Golden Cangue* and *Yuan-nv* are particularly prevalent and in-depth, with researchers often focusing on character development, narrative structure, and creative style. These studies help our understanding of the evolution in Eileen Chang's creative philosophy over time, while also revealing her writing strategies and challenges within a cross-cultural context.

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However, due to the rather tortuous creative process of *Yuan-nv*, existing research holds divergent views on its chronological relationship with the English edition, *The Rouge of the North*. By analyzing Eileen Chang's correspondence with figures such as Stephen C. Soong (Song Qi) and C.T. Hsia (Xia Zhiqing), we can further clarify the evolution of the work, from *Pink Tears* (sometimes referred to as *Red Tears* in correspondence, hereafter *Pink Tears*) to *The Rouge of the North*, and finally to the *Yuan-nv*. Moreover, the plot adaptations from *The Golden Cangue* to *Yuan-nv* demonstrate Eileen Chang's versatile creative style. The linguistic transformation between *Yuan-nv* and *The Rouge of the North* reflect her efforts to balance cultural transmission with reader reception, alongside the interactive revisions between Chinese and English versions during translation. Consequently, it is essential to include *The Rouge of the North* in comparative studies, examining the interplay between *The Golden Cangue*, *Yuan-nv*, and *The Rouge of the North*. This paper aims to trace the creative timeline of *Yuan-nv*, comparing its similarities and differences with *The Golden Cangue* and *The Rouge of the North* in terms of plot, characters, and language. It will analyze the focal points of Eileen Chang's creative process and explore the reasons for the English edition's limited reception in Western markets.

2 The Creative Process: Tracing the Timeline Through Eileen Chang's Letters

Eileen Chang arrived in the United States in 1955 and soon began writing and translating in English, seeking to establish herself in the English literary market. During her time in America, she reworked and translated *The Golden Cangue* multiple times. Correspondence with Stephen, Mae, and C.T. Hsia mentions several textual variants including *Pink Tears*, *The Rouge of the North* and *Yuan-nv*, though scholarly consensus on their chronological order remains divided. In *Eileen Chang's self-translation of Yuannv: Its lexical features and publication plight* (2018), Shi Hui systematically traces the chronology of *Yuan-nv*. Drawing on statements by Roland Soong—described in *The Literature World of Eileen Chang* as “Eileen Chang's lifelong friend and son of translators Stephen and Mae”—Shi argues that the evolution of the bilingual text of *Yuan-nv* can be traced from *Pink Tears* to *Yuan-nv* and finally to *The Rouge of the North*^[1]; Yu Han and Li Xinguo (2019) in *Deconstruction and Reconstruction of Chinese Cultural Complex—A Comparative Study of The Golden Lock and The Rouge of the North* mention that *The Rouge of the North* is an English retranslation, while *Yuan-nv* is a Chinese back-translation, thus positing *The Rouge of the North* as preceding *Yuan-nv*^[2]; Ma Taixiang (2024) in *The Naming of The Rouge of the North and the Eileen Chang of Cinema* contends that the 1967 work originally titled *Pink Tears* was renamed *The Rouge of the North* for its British publication. During the publication process, the author began translating and rewriting it back into Chinese, with this Chinese text later becoming *Yuan-nv*. His argument is thus that: The translation and adaptation of *Yuan-nv* was completed after *The Rouge of the North*^[3].

From the above, it is evident that scholarly disagreement primarily centers on the chronological order of translation between *Yuan-nv* and *The Rouge of the North*, specifically which served as the source text for the other.

Regarding the differing scholarly opinions, the author has conducted a relatively detailed examination of the translation issues surrounding *The Rouge of the North* and *Yuan-nv* through the correspondence between Eileen Chang and Stephen, Mae, and C.T.Hsia. The author believes that, based on the correspondence, Eileen Chang's decade-long process of repeated self-translation and revision can be divided into three distinct phases.

The first phase involved Eileen Chang's adaptation of *The Rouge of the North*, namely the initial drafting and revisions of *Pink Tears*. In a letter to Mae dated 24 March 1957, Chang stated that the final seven chapters of *Pink Tears* had been dispatched on the 13th. However, in a letter dated 5 June 1957, she noted that the publishing house Scribner had declined the manuscript. Thus in correspondence spanning 1958-1959, *Pink Tears* remained in a state of revision. As late as 8 February 1960, she wrote that "*Pink Tears* has still not been sold"^[4].

The second phase involved extensive revisions to *Pink Tears*, during which Eileen Chang took Stephen's suggestion to rename it *Tears of Rouge*. After returning to Hong Kong in October 1961 and resettling in America the following March, she ceased correspondence with the Song-Kuang couple. Traces of the translation process for both books, however, can be found in her letters to C.T.Hsia. On 19 May 1963, Eileen Chang wrote to Hsia stating that "the manuscript remains unfinished". In a letter dated 25 September, she reported "being busy revising this novel, which was finally dispatched last week", having undertaken "extensive revisions". According to Hsia's annotations, the manuscript mentioned in the first letter and the English-language novel sent to Hsia for review in the second letter both refer to *The Rouge of the North*. Hsia noted, "This work evolved from *The Golden Cangue*, originally titled *Pink Tears*, and she herself to writing this compact novel during her residency at the MacDowell Colony in 1956."^{[5](p5)} That is to say, after *Pink Tears* was rejected, Eileen Chang did not continue revising or resubmitting it for some time. It was only after returning to the United States from Hong Kong that she resumed work on revising *Pink Tears*. The first major revision was completed in 1963, by which time the novel had already taken shape as *The Rouge of the North*, though the English manuscript had not yet been titled as such. Returning to the Chang-Kuang correspondence, in Stephen's replay to Eileen Chang dated 13 May 1964, he suggested renaming the Chinese-to-English novel—that is, the heavily revised *Pink Tears* to *Tears of Rouge*. In her letter dated 25 May 1964, Eileen Chang mentioned, "*Tears of Rouge* is still in a state of flux; once the revisions are completed, we can decide which version to translate." On 11 November 1964, Chang stated that *Tears of Rouge* had been "rewritten, only to discover further revisions were needed, and it was only sent to C.T.Hsia just before moving house." She planned to translate one or two chapters of *Tears of Rouge* for the Song-Kuang couple after completing the radio drama script for the Biology of *Di Cun*.

The third phase saw Eileen Chang begin translating her English novels into Chinese. This Chinese work, titled *Yuan-nv* by Eileen Chang herself, underwent

repeated revisions alongside *The Rouge of the North* during this period. In a letter to Hsia dated 2 February 1965, Eileen Chang mentioned she was translating *Tears of Rouge* into Chinese, noting that “once rendered into the original language, many passages prove unsatisfactory and require further revision, including those passages Donald Keene (Professor of East Asian Studies at Columbia University) deemed unclear. After completion, I plan to set the English manuscript aside for several months before translating it again. A bit of distance will allow for clearer vision.” A letter to Stephen dated 7 February 1965 reveals that *Tears of Rouge* was “already three-quarters translated. I intend to translated the English manuscript back into Chinese after some time and send it to Britain for testing.” A letter to Stephen dated 13 October 1965 mentioned intending to title the translated novel *Yuan-nv*. A letter to Hsia dated 31 October stated, “The Chinese manuscript of *The Rouge of the North* (now titled *Yuan-nv*) has only just been completed.” In November of the same year, *Yuan-nv* was sent to Hong Kong for Stephen. Serialization began in the Sing Tao Evening News on 9 September 1966, marking the earliest publication of this work. However, in a letter dated 13 October that year, Eileen Chang mentioned she would retrieve *Yuan-nv* based on the amended English manuscript. On 1 November 1967, in a letter to Stephen, Eileen Chang stated that *The Rouge of the North* “would be published in the middle of next month,” meaning it would appear in Britain around mid-December.

Combining the content of both letters reveals that Eileen Chang used *The Golden Cangue* as her foundation to first create Pink Tears. After multiple rejections, she made substantial revisions after a period of time. The revised manuscript was successfully renamed *Tears of Rouge* and *The Rouge of the North*, finally settling on *The Rouge of the North* for publication. In summary, *Yuan-nv* was initially translated from *The Rouge of the North*. However, issues continually arose during the translation process, necessitating a two-way interactive revision strategy. Not only was *Yuan-nv* translated back into Chinese as *The Rouge of the North*, but the Chinese version was also further based on feedback from the English revisions.

3 Value: Successful Adaptation of Plot and Language Conversion

Although both *The Rouge of the North* and *Yuan-nv* enjoyed relatively limited reception and influence within Chinese and Western literary circles, failing to achieve canonical status, this in no way diminishes their value as crucial experimental works within Eileen Chang’s literary exploration. Having devoted years to meticulously crafting each word and revising the manuscripts multiple times, the dedication and perseverance she poured into these works are undeniable, underscoring their extraordinary significance. The additions, deletions, adjustments, and deepening that occurred from the initial draft to the final version reflect her careful consideration and relentless exploration of character development, plot structure, and artistic creation. Here, the author compares the three successfully published works, focusing particularly on the plot variations between the two Chinese-language works, *The*

Golden Cangue and *Yuan-nv*, and the subsequent linguistic differences that emerged during the translation process between *Yuan-nv* and *The Rouge of the North*, thereby discerning the meticulous intent behind Eileen Chang's repeated revisions.

3.1 Plot Variations: From *The Golden Cangue* to *Yuan-nv*

The plot variations between *The Rouge of the North* and *Yuan-nv* are relatively minor. *Yuan-nv* translated from *The Rouge of the North*, features only minor edits to paragraphs and details. The primary differences lie between *The Golden Cangue* and *Yuan-nv*, where substantial alterations were made to characters, plot and narrative techniques. Broadly speaking, these alterations can be grouped into three main areas.

Firstly, the character identity settings differ. The female protagonist shifts from Cao Qiqiao to Chai Yindi. The three young masters of the Jiang family in *The Golden Cangue*, who were named in the original, are now referred to only as First Young Master, Second Young Master, and Third Young Master. *Yuan-nv* omits Jiang Yunze, the Jiang family's young lady, Qiqiao's daughter Jiang Chang'an, and the entire storyline revolving around Chang'an. Both stories center on their female protagonists, yet the transition from Qiqiao to Yindi presents a marked contrast. Cao Qiqiao is what Eileen Chang termed a "thoroughly formed character", a fully realized figure from her first appearance as the second mistress of the Jiang household. In contrast, Yindi is an "incomplete character"; we never witness Qiqiao's marriage into the Jiang household, yet we know Yindi's status was self-chosen. She enters the narrative as an unmarried young woman whose elder brother and sister-in-law are seeking a match for her. After weighing her options, she chooses to marry for money rather than love.

Secondly, the expansion of plot elements from short story to novel. The transition from the short story *The Golden Cangue* to the novel *Yuan-nv* inevitably involved omissions and additions to the narrative. It can be said that *Yuan-nv* serves as an expanded version of *The Golden Cangue*, providing more detailed accounts of certain plot elements from the original work. Chapters One and Two of *Yuan-nv* recount Yindi's life prior to her marriage, explaining how she ultimately chose to wed into the Yao family under the influence of her brother and sister-in-law, the matchmaker, and even her maternal grandparents. This background is absent from *The Golden Cangue*. Another significance difference between the two works lies in the portrayal of the uncle-niece relationship. The portrayal of this relationship in *The Golden Cangue* is restrained. Qiqiao and Jize's connection remains confined to flirtation. Jize, adhering to his principle of "not involving his own family"^{[6](p.226)}. His restraint forces Qiqiao's passions into repression and unfulfillment. In *Yuan-nv*, however, Yindi's desires find release, their journey from flirtation to illicit affair and eventual severance forms an intermittent yet complete narrative, constituting a significant chapter in Yindi's life.

The story of Qiqiao's daughter Chang'an was omitted from *Yuan-nv*. In *The Golden Cangue*, Qiqiao disregarded warnings and bound Chang'an's feet. Years of repressed desire made her envious of Chang'an's romance; she falsely accused Chang'an of opium use before Tong Shifang, ultimately sabotaging the marriage. Beyond interfering with Chang'an's marriage, she also meddles in Changbai's affairs. Ultimately, both her son and daughter become solitary figures like her, without a place

to call home. Both Changbai and Chang'an dares not remarry. Chang'an's disappearance in *Yuan-nv* allows the narrative to focus more intently. The absence of the tragedy of a mother oppressing her daughter also lessens the madness and harshness attributed to Yindi. Where *The Golden Cangue* devotes but a few lines to Changbai's marriage, *Yuan-nv* dedicates an entire chapter to detailing how Yindi gradually steered Yensheng, employing a "delaying tactic" to ensure Yensheng settled down first. Through their dialogue, glimpses into Yindi's inner world inevitably emerge.

Thirdly, there is a shift in characterization, Cao Qiqiao is more extreme, a raving demon, while Yindi appears more ordinary, a mundane mortal. Unlike Qiqiao's extreme vengeance, Yindi excels in calculation, her methods are more restrained and shrewd. If Cao Qiqiao embodied the alienation of individual humanity, then Chai Yindi represents something more universal, one among countless women. Yindi could choose her own marriage, even such a choice was shackled by the constraints of the era. This choice reveals an agency absent in Qiqiao, who possessed neither choice nor agency. External forces pushed her forward, the threads of fate tugging at her, until she ultimately forged her own shackles—bound by lust and gold—through which she found catharsis. In *The Golden Cangue*, Qiqiao's interference in her children's marriages employs a dual narrative to render her character more extreme and absolute.

3.2 Linguistic Transformation: From *Yuan-nv* to *The Rouge of the North*

Yuan-nv and *The Rouge of the North* are different linguistic versions of the same story, their differences primarily manifesting in the title, narrative perspective, and translation.

Firstly, the variation in titles. The Chinese edition was finally titled *Yuan-nv*, concisely and precisely summarizes Yindi's sorrowful life and emphasizing the theme of female destiny. The English edition evolved from the initial *Pink Tears* to *The Rouge of the North*, Eileen Chang conducted extensive research into the classical allusion "The face powder of southern dynasties, The rouge of northern lands" for the title. Though she failed to pinpoint its exact origin, she included an explanatory note at the English edition's preface stating, "The phrase 'The face powder of southern dynasties, The rouge of northern lands' is 'a Chinese expression for describing a beautiful woman, dating back to around the seventh century'."^[3] It is evident that Eileen Chang sought to preserve Chinese culture elements in the English edition while also providing essential cultural context for English readers.

Secondly, there are differences in narrative perspective. In *Yuan-nv*, the narrator maintains relatively close to the characters, observing the world through their eyes. The narrative often interweaves the characters' subjective feelings and emotions. In *The Rouge of the North*, however, the narrator adopts a more objective stance and maintains a certain distance. Building upon the original framework, the adaptation incorporates additional external perspectives to elucidate events, rendering the storyline clearer and more complete. This approach aligns more closely with narrative conventions prevalent in English literature. The character in *Yuan-nv* and *The Rouge*

of the North are identical, though character names have been simplified and certain figures, such as the daughter Chang'an, omitted, focusing instead on Yindi's life. While this adjustment may not impact Chinese readers, it allows the English edition to concentrate the narrative thread and effectively preventing readers from becoming distracted by overly complex names and relationships.

The most obvious divergence between the Chinese and English editions lies in translation challenges. *Yuan-nv* contains extensive detailed descriptions of traditional Chinese family life, customs, etiquette, traditional clothing, and architecture. These descriptions provide Chinese readers with a familiar cultural backdrop but may pose comprehension challenges for English readers. However, in *The Rouge of the North*, Eileen Chang chose to retain these intricate descriptions, particularly those concerning characters' clothing, rather than omitting them. Perhaps the author deemed these elements essential for conveying Chinese cultural understanding and thus preserved them. The translation of material culture represents a more conspicuous area of adaptation between the two editions. Certain items distinctive to Chinese culture are rendered through direct translation supplemented by brief explanations. For instance, the embroidery pattern described as “錯到底” in the novel is translated in the English version as “mistaken to the end”, accompanied by the clarification, “It had a nice tragic ring and the pattern of thin broken lines”^{[7](p.11)}. This enables English readers to grasp its meaning. Similarly, the description of the wicker basket brought by Bingfa when visiting Yindi in *Yuan-nv* differs. In *Yuan-nv*, the basket is elaborated upon, “a heavy double-decked container of bamboo strips and wood trim painted a brownish-crimson”^{[7](p.57)}. The supplementary detail may have been influenced by Hsia. In a letter to Eileen Chang dated 7 September 1968, Hsia raised several issues regarding the translation of *The Golden Cangue*, the first of which concerned the rendering of “提籃盒”, “What exactly is a ‘提籃盒’? Might you provide an illustration? Is ‘basket’ the most appropriate translation?”^{[5](p.101)} It is evident that in translating *The Rouge of the North*, Eileen Chang consciously avoided the pitfalls encountered during her first translation of *The Golden Cangue*. Though no illustration was provided, she employed a subordinate clause to explain the nature of the “提籃盒”.

Comparative analysis of *Yuan-nv* and *The Rouge of the North* reveals Eileen Chang's selective retention and adaptation during linguistic conversion. While preserving the core essence of the original work, she endeavored to render it comprehensive and acceptable within the English cultural context. This cross-cultural revision and adaptation, though failing to generate widespread resonance in the English-speaking world, nonetheless reflects Eileen Chang's proactive exploration.

4 Limitations: Publication Obstacles and Limited Influence

Despite Eileen Chang's considerable effort in rewriting and translating *Yuan-nv* and *The Rouge of the North*, striving to preserve Chinese flavour while integrating English expressive logic, the English editions encountered marked indifference in Western markets. The following examines the dissemination challenges of *The Rouge*

of the North in the English-speaking world through its convoluted publication journey and the obstacles encountered.

4.1 The Tortuous Path to publication

Eileen Chang arrived in the United States in October 1955, where she supported herself through writing, with her livelihood largely dependent on royalties. Beyond this, she hoped to carve out a niche in English-language literature, so she had high expectations for *Pink Tears*. She spending years drafting, revising, and refining manuscript before finally submitting it in March 1957. Yet the outcome proved disappointing: Mrs. Rodell's affirmation only heightened the disheartening coldness of Knopf's rejection letter. In a letter sent by Eileen Chang to Hsia on October 16, 1964, she mentioned that the rejection letter was to the effect that "all the characters are offensive. We have published several Japanese novels, all of which are subtle and not so squalid. I am curious, if this novel is published, I don't know what the critics will say."^{[5](p.10)} Prior to this, *Pink Tears* had already been rejected by Scribner's, as stated in the letter, "Scribner's declined *Pink Teras*, just saying that 'although the details are sometimes charming, the personalities of the characters are too unsympathetic to feel that they are not worth bothering about'. This is Eileen Chang's initial submission of *Pink Tears* was rejected, and then she hit a wall many times after tossing and turning, and in April 1958, she had "still received no word", which is a big blow to her. In August of that year, she began revising *Pink Tears*, but subsequent submissions were repeatedly rejected on the grounds that "the characters are too unsympathetic." By 8 February 1960, *Pink Tears* (referred to as *Red Tears* in the letter) remained unsold. It was not until 6 May 1964 that Stephen suggested renaming the novel *Tears of Rouge*. The subsequent rewriting of, as mentioned earlier in relation to the translation process of *Yuan-nv*, was ultimately published by Cassell in Britain under the title *The Rouge of the North*.^[8]

The English version of the novel adapted and translated from *The Golden Cangue* has experienced twists and turns from *Pink Tears* to *Tears of Rouge* to *The Rouge of the North*, which once made Eileen Chang physically and mentally tortured, but it is regrettable that after the novel was published, it was not as she expected. As Hsia noted in his preface, "there is no reaction at all".

4.2 Analysis of the Reasons Behind the Publication Setbacks

Eileen Chang attributed the failure of *Pink Tears*' publication to two factors. Firstly, "the English version was written in the New England countryside, which was too far away from the previous environment, and the impact was very bad"; Secondly, in 1949, Eileen Chang had adapted *The Golden Cangue* into a film, although the film was not made, "leaving some elements of the film script undigested"^{[5](p.5)}. However, an in-depth study of *The Rouge of the North* shows that in addition to the two self-statement factors, the historical context and textual translation may also affect its publication.

In the article *An Analysis of the Translation of Eileen Chang's Novels in the United States and the English-speaking World: Taking The Rouge of the North as an Example*, Wang Chuncheng pointed out that the difficulties encountered in the translation and reception of *The Rouge of the North* largely came from the political climate of the time, one was “the expansion of Western-centrism in the 1950s led to a disregard for Eastern cultures”, the second was “the silent generation of the United States resisted the stable and indifferent oriental culture”, and the third was that America entered the golden age, and the American people were full of expectations for the future. The novel's portrayal of “a resigned acceptance of reality”, tinged with quiet melancholy, alongside the petty intrigues of a humble peasant household, failed to satisfy the heavy tastes of American readers at this time.”^[9] Despite cultural exchanges between East and West, these interactions remained unequal, with Western cultural exports vastly outpacing Eastern ones. Against this backdrop, *The Rouge of the North*, which has a strong Chinese classical cultural atmosphere, could scarcely make sound in Western markets.

In order to enable readers to truly understand traditional Chinese culture, Eileen Chang retains traditional cultural elements and customs as much as possible during translation. As previously noted, she often employed literal translation supplemented by brief explanations to convey the work's original form, though this approach may have overlooked foreign readers' familiarity with Eastern traditions. Numerous proverbs and idioms were rendered literally according to their Chinese meanings. For example, “杀千刀”^{[10](p.100)} translated as “die from a thousand sword cuts”^{[7](p.3)}, “上床夫妻, 下床君子”^{[10](p.119)} translated as “In bed, husband and wife; out of bed, lady and gentleman.”^{[7](p.28)}, “天雷不打吃饭人”^{[10](p.136)} is translated as “Even thunder doesn't strike a sinner in the middle of a meal.”^{[7](p.51)}, “瞒上不瞒下”^{[10](p.142)} is translated as “Hide it from the top, not the bottom”^{[7](p.59)}, however, for foreign readers who do not understand the Chinese cultural background, there are still certain difficulties in understanding these literal translations.

In summary, the obscurity of *The Rouge of the North* in the English-speaking world is the result of the combined effect of the acceptance of the times, cultural translation and the author's situation. The textual efforts made by Eileen Chang's are still difficult to overcome the barriers caused by multiple factors, which is not only the limitation of the author itself, but also the dilemma of cross-cultural literary communication.

5 Conclusion

The journey of creation and revision of *Yuan-nv* reflect Eileen Chang's literary exploration within a foreign cultural context. From *The Golden Cangue* to *Yuan-nv*, she achieved an alternative portrayal of female psychology and real-life circumstances. Through the bidirectional translation and revision between Chinese and English editions, she thought both to export traditional Chinese culture and to accommodate the reading habits of English-speaking audiences. Although *The Rouge of the North* failed to meet Eileen Chang's expectations in its reception within the

English-speaking world, its tortuous and largely overlooked publication journey shed lights on the profound impact of cultural differences and historical contexts on literary dissemination. The intrinsic literary merit of both *Yuan-nv* and *The Rouge of the North* remains undiminished by these challenges. The two works represent a transitional phase in Eileen Chang's stylistic evolution and stand as crucial texts for studying her relationship with English and American literature. Decades later, *Yuan-nv* still shines in the spectrum of Eileen Chang's works.

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