



Eileen Chang's Feminine Chinese Modernity: Dysfunctional Marriages, Hysterical Women, and the Primordial Eugenic Threat

Citation

Leng, Rachel. 2014. Eileen Chang's Feminine Chinese Modernity: Dysfunctional Marriages, Hysterical Women, and the Primordial Eugenic Threat. *Quarterly Journal of Chinese Studies*, (March 2014), 13-34.

Published Version

<http://oec.xmu.edu.cn/qjcs/upload/201401/201401.pdf>

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**Eileen Chang's Feminine Chinese Modernity:
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Primordial Eugenic Threat**

KEYWORDS: EILEEN CHANG, EUGENICS, CHINESE MODERNITY, REWRITING,
CHINESE WOMEN, CONTEMPORARY CHINESE LITERATURE

ABSTRACT

Eileen Chang has been described by critics as an unapologetically introspective and sentimental but largely apolitical writer. When most other writers of her time were concentrating on the grand and the abstract in exploring the May Fourth modernist spirit, Eileen Chang's approach to her writing poignantly laid bare an intense interest in the modern relationships between men and women, between an individual and the collective. Contrary to popular interpretation, this paper argues that there is a strong political and subversive dimension to Chang's writings that has hitherto been glided over or ignored completely. Specifically, this paper suggests that recurring themes of abortive parent-child relationships, the dilapidated household, and disillusioned sexual unions throughout Chang's work not only intertwines references to her own private life and love affairs, but reflects a larger sociopolitical history anchored in the rise of a national eugenics movement at the bedrock of Chinese modernity. The parallel narratives of *The Golden Cangue* (1943) and *The Rouge of The North* (1967) engage intimately in a social critique of the Chinese state's propagation of eugenic practices related to reproduction. These stories unveil Eileen Chang at her best in uncovering, even allegorically, the relationship between the feminine and the sociopolitical changes besetting contemporary China. She limns a fictional world where Chinese modernity has engendered its own reflection in the image of the monstrous, embittered woman suffering from psychological and bodily decay and grapples with the corporeal manifestation of the malaise of social and marital relations in modern China.

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Under the bathroom light in the middle of the night, she saw the male fetus in the toilet bowl. In her frightened eyes it was a full ten inches long, suspended between the white porcelain wall and water. Its flesh was smeared with a faint layer of blood, becoming the light orange color of recently planed wood. The blood that congealed in its recesses clearly outlined the fetus' contours. A pair of disproportionately large round eyes, two protruding eyes. [...] She thought it would not flush away, but it eventually disappeared amidst the surging water.

- Eileen Chang, *Little Reunion*.¹

夜间她在浴室灯下看见抽水马桶里的男胎，在她惊恐的眼睛里足有十吋长，毕直的欹立在白磁壁上与水中，肌肉上抹上一层淡淡的血水，成为新刨的木头的淡橙色。凹处凝聚的鲜血勾划出它的轮廓来，线条分明，一双环眼大得不合比例，双睛突出。[...] 以为冲不下去，竟在波涛汹涌中消失了。

- 张爱玲 《小团圆》

The above passage from Eileen Chang's *Little Reunion* 《小团圆》 (2009) vividly describes the novel's protagonist, Jiuli Sheng (Julie Sheng), as she lays eyes on her own aborted fetus. She is horrified by the unborn child's bloody flesh and "disproportionately large" dead eyes, and the sight concurrently arouses intense feelings of wretchedness, disgust, and even fear. This passage

¹ Eileen Chang, *Little Reunion* 小團圓 (Taipei: Huangguan Publishing House, 2009), 157. Page references are drawn from the Chinese-language novel. English translation is my own.

stands out in its description of the maternal body as one that is associated with the degeneration and termination of life, rather than an act of procreation. Moreover, the ghastly description of the dead fetus uncannily evokes the spectral fetuses that regularly traversed the pages of Chinese medical texts during the early 1900s. As Frank Dikötter (1998) documents in his historiography of birth defects and eugenics in China, these fetuses were often diagnosed as misshapen lumps of flesh smeared with “foul blood and filthy fluids” that “revealed the imprint of a ghostly face” with large, protruding eyes “like a goldfish” (56). These monstrous shapes were said to have been caused by a libidinous female imagination, reflecting an embryonic fear of the transgression of boundaries between body and mind, where the self is no longer a coherent and autonomous entity (Dikötter, 1998, p. 54-6).

The clot of blood and flesh that had colonized Jiuli’s womb for months on end comes to embody the power, cruelty, and malignance of the female mind. This interpretation of Jiuli’s unnerving confrontation with the lifeless fetus is enhanced by the circumstance that, although readers may speculate Jiuli was impregnated by Shao Zhiyong, her main lover in the novel, the actual father of the baby is never confirmed or disclosed. The portrayal of an experience of femininity and childbirth that is intensely abject, self-destructive, and degenerative is intricately related to my reading of Eileen Chang’s social critique of Chinese modernity. I understand the significance of Jiuli’s aborted fetus to be threefold: first, it provides an evocative metonym for Eileen Chang’s personal abortive familial and love relationships; secondly, it reveals Chang’s views on the sexual union and reproductive process that is always immanently regressive and derivative; thirdly, the dead fetus symbolizes the nonproductive influences of eugenics and invokes abortion as an act closely related to societal decay in the Chinese context.

Published posthumously, *Little Reunion* (2009) has generated critical debates about its literary value, autobiographical authenticity, and Chang's own emotional and political ambivalence towards the work. In a novel centered upon Jiuli's familial and personal love story against the backdrop of World War II, *Little Reunion* concerns the imbrications of human attachment and war in memory and history. The story is divided into two parts; the first reveals Jiuli's aristocratic but decaying family background when she is growing up during the beginning of Republican China, and the second primarily centers on her tumultuous love affair with Shao Zhiyong. Insofar as *Little Reunion* can be read as a semi-autobiographical novel, Jiuli represents Chang's alter ego, and the story itself provides insight into Chang's feminine perspective on Chinese modernity and the nonproductive spheres of parent-child relationships, love, and marriage. Critics have noted that *Little Reunion* diverges from Chang's past works in that the text weaves detailed descriptions of her personal family history, as well as overt elaborations of her love affairs with other men, especially of that with Hu Lanchang, a married traitor and philanderer. Unpleasant details about such relationships were rarely mentioned and at most only implicitly referred to in her previously published works. Jiuli's abortion takes place almost midway through the novel after she first arrives in an apartment in New York City, marking a transitional moment in her life both physically and emotionally. Jiuli's encounter with the dead fetus prompts her to acknowledge that she has left her life in China behind, and she is initiated into a truncated world of love, romance, and abject femininity.

Extending from Chang's display of hypersensitivity to human relationships in *Little Reunion*, it is possible to return to her earlier fictions and reflect upon the portrayal of individual lives and their relationships in new ways. Specifically, this paper suggests that recurring themes of abortive parent-child relationships, the dilapidated household, and disillusioned sexual unions

throughout Chang's work not only intertwines references to her own private life and love affairs, but reflects a larger sociopolitical history anchored in the rise of a national eugenics movement at the bedrock of Chinese modernity. Since space is limited, I will focus my analysis on two of Eileen Chang's English works: *The Golden Cangue* (1943) (hereafter referred to as "*Cangue*") and *The Rouge of The North* (1967) (hereafter referred to as "*Rouge*"). The parallel narratives of these two texts engage intimately in a social critique of the Chinese state's propagation of eugenic practices related to reproduction. These stories were produced at critical times in China's recent past, with the country in the midst of historical transition from the feudal Qing dynasty into the Republican Era and modernity. *Cangue* and *Rouge* unveil Eileen Chang at her best in uncovering, even allegorically, the relationship between the feminine and the sociopolitical changes besetting contemporary China. She grapples with the corporeal manifestation of the contemporary malaise of social and marital relations by limning a fictional world where Chinese modernity has engendered its own reflection in the image of the monstrous, embittered woman suffering from psychological and bodily decay.

Through close readings of *Cangue* and *Rouge*, I will explore how Eileen Chang deploys the life stories of squalid and repulsive characters to critique the imposition of a Western eugenics model in modern China. The analysis will draw references to developments during the Republican Era (1912-1949) when the politics of sexuality, morality, and reproduction was a prominent subject in intellectual and popular discourse. This paper contends that the recursive figure of the hysterical woman embodied by Qiqao and Yindi in *Cangue* and *Rouge* respectively re-present eugenics discourse on female hysteria and the regulation of marital sexuality with regard to parenthood, population control, and social degeneration.

Eileen Chang: Life and Writings of Perpetual Female Transgression and Self-Destruction

Eileen Chang (Zhang Ailing 张爱玲, 1920-1995) has been lauded as one of the most important writers produced in twentieth century China, considered by many to be on par with Lu Xun and Shen Congwen, masters of modern Chinese literature and native-soil fiction. In today's heterotopic world where cultures converge, intersect, and interact in a multitude of ways and places, Chang's complex life and work presents a fascinating study of transition and hybridity across East and West. Since her death, scholarship has recorded Chang's proclivity towards retelling: she repeatedly rewrote her personal stories from different perspectives, across English and Chinese, at different times of her life, and using multiple mediums (Shen, 2012; Wang, 2010). As such, her literary work has extended its international reach through rewritings, translations, and film adaptations. Throughout her writing career both in China and America, Chang constantly returned to the early 1940s when she was one of the most celebrated writers in Shanghai, and most of her works are centered on that period. Chang's own personal experiences intimately informed her writing, and she frequently penned the story of a naïve, sometimes idealistic, youth who gets drawn into the chaos that pervades a deceiving, selfish, and disintegrating adult world.

Collectively, keen readers of Eileen Chang have noted her indomitable style for sentimental explorations of the self, an emphasis on the emotions and intimacy (or lack thereof) in relationships, and a tone of loss and desolation. She has often been compared to Jane Austen in her ability to dissect in minute detail the mundane things in life that affect human relationships (Louie, 2012; Luo and Wang, 2012). Consequently, scholars have stressed that Chang represents an unapologetically introspective and sentimental but largely apolitical writer (Huang, 2005; Lee, 2010; Tsu, 2010). As Ping-Kwan Leung points out: "the predominant accusation is that her works are trivial and narrow in scope,

focusing only on love affairs and ignoring larger social and political issues” (86). Chang herself famously declared that she is “incapable of writing the kind of work that people usually refer to as a ‘monument to an era’ and do[es] not plan to try... [A]ll [she] really write[s] about are some of the trivial things that happen between men and women. There is no war and no revolution in [her] works” (Zhang, 2005, p. 18).

To date, few critics have looked into how “trivial things that happen between men and women” can represent certain ideologies of particular times or places, and are also significantly influenced by sociopolitical developments. As Kam Louie (2012) writes, Chang “uses the ‘trivial’ to comment on human sensibilities during great social movements” and deploys a “narrative strategy of using everyday objects as metaphors and providing a rich and detailed tapestry of Shanghai and Hong Kong life at a time of great social upheaval” (17-18). This paper builds upon the argument that Chang’s works are not as divorced from politics as has commonly been assumed. When most other writers of her time were concentrating on the grand and the abstract in exploring the May Fourth modernist spirit, Eileen Chang’s approach poignantly lays bare an intense interest in the modern relationships between men and women, between an individual and the collective.

Born into a declining aristocratic family in Shanghai, Chang was immersed in an environment of decaying decadence from a young age. Despite the family’s pedigree, Chang’s father led a dissolute life, taking on a second wife and indulging in opium, while her mother was more preoccupied with her personal liberation and becoming a Nora of New China rather than her child’s wellbeing. Chang’s parents’ irreconcilable differences and bitter divorce left the family in disarray, especially when Chang’s mother abandons her children by leaving China to live in the UK for five years. Here, Chang’s mother embodies the effects of a self-conscious

women's movement that first began to take shape in China at the turn of the century with the influence of Westernization. During this time, more women were struggling for the rights to education and independence, including the ability for women to control their own reproductive bodies. Chang's writing is profoundly impacted by her mother's absence and admiration for Europe during her childhood. Hence, the image of a self-absorbed, absent, and selfish mother as well as the imagined allure of Europe haunts most of her work.

Although her work has been neglected in the official literary historiography for several decades, recent years have witnessed the rising contagion of "Eileen Chang fever" where her life and works are subject to extensive examination in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Mainland China (Louie, 2012). Since the 1970s, literary scholars such as C.T. Hsia and Shui Jing have reclaimed her significance, reviving the popularity of her work. Since her death, Chang's life and times have been attracting more critical and popular attention than ever before. In Taiwan in particular, several generations of "Chang School writers" are said to have emerged under Eileen Chang's influence (Su, 2006). Nonetheless, scholars have pointed out that in contrast to the wealth of scholarship on Chang's life and work in the Chinese-speaking world, few studies have taken up her English texts (Louie, 2012; Tsu, 2010). This paper's focus on *Cangue* and *Rouge* therefore attempts to contribute to scholarship on Chang's English-language writings.

What concerns me in this paper is not merely to identify the imprints of Chang's personal life in her fictions, nor to highlight the extent to which Chang retrieved or revised her repressed trauma through storytelling. Instead, I contend that there is a strong political and subversive dimension to Chang's writings concerning her singular understanding of feminine Chinese modernity. This aspect of Chang's writings has hitherto been glided over or ignored completely. By considering *Cangue* and *Rouge* as retellings of the same story about a Chinese

woman's misery in a disintegrating traditional Chinese family structure, it is possible to understand Chang's repetitive and bilingual writings as a reflection not only of her own life experiences but also her views on the rapidly changing sociopolitical landscape of the Chinese national body. Although *Cangue* and *Rouge*, like many of her other texts, deal mostly with the melodrama of ordinary life, Chang may have seen in the form of the fictional embittered woman a reflection of something closest to her own feminine perspective on Chinese modernity: one that is simultaneously decadent yet desolate, haunted by a looming fear of the self-destructive sexual union and primordial eugenic threat embodied by the female reproductive body.

This dark, macabre, and even cruel side to Eileen Chang's aesthetics is one that scholarship has yet to dwell upon. Ang Lee's 2007 film *Lust, Caution* (《色，戒》), an adaptation of Chang's short story of the same title, is the only recent interpretation of her work that touches upon a more sinister element of Chang's work. *Lust, Caution* tells the story of a college girl who falls in love with drama and playacting, such that she ends up playing a lead role in an assassination plot during wartime Shanghai, at the cost of her own life. The film generated a storm of controversy, especially with regard to erotic scenes and the blunting of a feminist edge that many claimed distorted the original short story. In his interviews, Lee explains that he was originally drawn to how "scary" the plot was; as he puts it, *Lust, Caution* is "a story about women's sexuality set against patriotism and the two put together is, for Chinese people, quite scary" (Utichi, 2008). Despite criticisms about the film's sex scenes, Lee maintains that they are necessary to express how "the contortion of their bodies visually represents [the pain] they inflict on each other" (Hill, 2007).

Lee's decision to shoot graphic sex scenes allowed him to internalize and digest the deeper implications of *Lust, Caution*, consuming its ghost and rechanneling its haunting effects

through different sensory manifestations. Reviews and studies of *Lust, Caution* have since analyzed Chang's dense and gripping storytelling as one that delves into the complexity of human struggles with love, seduction, betrayal, and death, as well as stylized portraits of Chinese mannerisms and historical contingencies. However, I maintain that amid such interwoven abstract emotions as anxiety, fear, pain, alienation, and apathy, Lee was able to visualize a previously unspeakable dimension of Eileen Chang's derivative, exilic, and desolate authorial perspective on the Chinese body politic. What we glimpse in Ang Lee's film is not an Eileen Chang characterized by Haiyan Lee's (2010) essay on the revelation of "contingent transcendence," wherein the female protagonist is able to transcend herself and achieve self-agency, but one that more intimately inflects Chang's understanding of female sexuality as immanent *transgression* marked by incessant self-cancellation and destruction.

From *The Golden Cangue* to *The Rouge of The North*: Dysfunctional Marriages, the Hysterical Woman, and Abortive Motherhood

[*The Non/Procreative and De/Generative Conjugal Couple*]

Eileen Chang published *Jinsuo Ji* (《金锁记》) in 1943 during her zenith of popularity in China. She later translated it into English as *The Golden Cangue*. Combining the thematic tradition of the classic Chinese novel with modern writing skills, the novel was a great success in China at the time and has aroused enduring interest among literary critics and researchers. Fu Lei, a renowned writer and translator, declared the novel to be "at least ranked among the most beautiful fruits of our literary garden" (as cited in Xun, 2004, p. 12). C.T. Hsia, in his book on *A History of Modern Chinese Fiction* (1961), famously proclaimed Eileen Chang to be the most important and gifted Chinese writer to emerge in the forties and asserted that *The Golden*

Cangue is “the greatest novelette in the history of Chinese literature” (Hsia, 1961, 398). The story narrates the life of Cao Qiqiao, the daughter of a sesame oil shop owner, who is sold by her brother to be the wife-cum-nursemaid of a blind and crippled man from an aristocratic family. Although Qiqiao obtains material wealth through the marriage, it comes at the expense of her psychological health. Through Qiqiao’s estranged relationships with her crippled husband, in-laws, and children, the novella exposes the suffering of Chinese women under a traditional patriarchal and feudal system. After years of bitter experiences, Qiqiao is seen at the end of the novel languishing in opium smoke after having completely deprived her children of any meaningful human connection.

After Eileen Chang settled in America in 1956, the desire to sustain her career as a writer as well as the need to earn an income compelled her to write in English. In the 1960s, Chang began working on a full-length English version of *Cangue*, entitled *The Rouge of The North*, which was published in 1967 by Cassell Company of London. In contrast to the popularity of *Cangue* in China, *Rouge* was received coldly by reviewers and American readers. A close reading of both *Cangue* and *Rouge* reveals clear differences, ranging from changes in the plot and character to the addition of details and explanations of Chinese customs and cultural particularities. While *Rouge* derives its story from *Cangue*, it now provides a prolonged account filled with specifics of the life of Chai Yindi as she deteriorates into a rancorous and paranoid widow. Although Qiqiao and Yindi are both women deeply disappointed by life, Yindi initially appears a more tempered and pedestrian version of her counterpart. On the one hand, the minute tracing of Yindi’s moral and psychological degeneration in *Rouge* discharges the intensity that *Cangue* conveyed by condensing only the pivotal moments in Qiqiao’s life. On the other hand, one may argue that Chang’s detailed rewriting of Qiqiao into Yindi amounted to a fuller re-

representation of the same lived feminine experience in all its banality, absurdity, and cruelty across time from different aesthetic distances and perspectives.

Significantly, the publication of *Cangue* and *Rouge* both coincide with distinct transitional moments in Chang's life and her experiences of marriage and relationships. She published *Cangue* in 1943 when she was still young and had a lot of pent up rage against her family, especially her negligent mother and dissolute father, to whom she attributes an unhappy childhood. The popularity of *Cangue* helped attract the attention of Hu Lancheng, who then pursued and married Eileen Chang, only to betray her both sexually and emotionally repeatedly before their divorce in 1947. Accused as a traitor for her marriage to Hu, Chang was exiled to the margins of respectability as a writer in China, and though she eventually managed to declare her innocence, she never regained the level of popularity she previously enjoyed. Upon moving to the U.S., Chang worked on writing *Rouge* when she was remarried with her second husband, Ferdinand Reyher (1897-1967), a prominent leftist writer twenty three years her senior. The year 1967 when *Rouge* was published turned out to be an emotionally difficult time in Chang's life, when Reyher died after a long illness in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Given the backdrop of Chang's personal experiences, perhaps it is unsurprising that many of her texts take up the institution of marriage, sexual relations, and issues of parenthood as a focal concern.

Cangue and *Rouge* cast an especially pathological lens on all marital relationships and sexual unions. From the beginning, the stories recount how Qiqiao/Yindi marries into an affluent family as the Second Mistress, delving into detailed descriptions about how the girl is repulsed by the sight of her blind and crippled husband. For Qiqiao/Yindi, marriage to a crippled man is an intensely abject experience, one that traps her in a state of liminality between life and death. Coined by Julia Kristeva (1982), the term "abjection" refers to signs of disgust

and horror as reactions to an inability to transcend the base associations of the corporeal such as bodily fluids, waste, blood, and gendered difference. As such, the abject focuses attention on the “thresholds” that are manifested in those bodily orifices blurring the distinction between the inside and the outside, attraction and repulsion, desire and death. “At these sites,” as one critic puts it, “what is inside the body is expelled to the outside, and what is outside can be taken in,” blurring the boundaries between self and other (Newman, 1997, p. 210).

In *Cangue*, Qiqiao is horrified by her bedridden husband and the idea that by “staying with a cripple, [she will] smell crippled too,” incarcerating her as “a butterfly specimen in a glass box, bright-colored and desolate” (186). Qiqiao is constantly aware that others view her as an object of derision yet voyeurism because of her sexual relations with a man afflicted with “the soft bone illness” and “tuberculosis of the bones” (190). She becomes the source of endless gossip amongst her sister-in-laws and even the household servants, especially after she starts smoking opium “to take her mind off things” (177). *Rouge*’s Second Master is equally repugnant as an asthmatic “hunch-backed and pigeon-breasted” man, with eyes that were “tilted slits now closed, now squinting upward, empty” (24). Before Yindi even meets her future husband, “part of her died” at the anticipation of his “horrible-looking eyes” (21). Like Qiqiao, Yindi is highly aware of her lowly status within the family, where “the attitudes of the servants and relatives were plain to see” (28).

Throughout the novels, Qiqiao and Yindi repeatedly emphasize their ghosted lives as a result of their marriage with Second Master. When Qiqiao has a conversation with her brother-in-law, Chi-tse, about the importance of health, Qiqiao dissolves into tears, crying that touching her husband is enough to make one realize “how good it is not to be sick” (186). This recollection of touching “soft and heavy” deadened flesh causes her to convulse in a way that

“seemed to be not so much weeping as vomiting, churning and pumping out her bowels” at the image of the shrivelled body (187). As such, Qiqiao’s entire life is weighed down by her husband’s “sticky dead flesh,” where even a moment of solitude reminiscing girlhood memories of going to the market is now haunted by the image of her husband’s “lifeless body” (194). Infected with “all kinds of illnesses from anger,” she begins to sink into a zombie-like state of being “sane enough one minute and the next minute off again, and altogether disagreeable” and increasingly “out of touch with reality” (190-3, 205).

In *Rouge*, the narrative is more subtle in relaying the consequences of Yindi’s decision to marry a blind, stunted invalid. After her marriage, Yindi “felt as if she had died and was back as a ghost” and repeatedly talked about being dead and having “dropped dead” (26, 32). Her humiliating position within the family and sexual frustrations lead her to conclude that the sexual union where “giv[ing] your body over to be loved” also involves “giv[ing] it over to be robbed and abused” by the man “walk[ing] in on her any time and tak[ing] anything he wanted” (106-7). As a widow, Yindi sees her own face in a window glass and experiences an eerie distancing from her reflection: “Just the face alone with no hair showing, a blue-shadowed moon afloat on the dark pane... It frightened her to see the face smile back at her beckoning slightly... A ghost. Perhaps she had hanged herself sixteen years ago and did not know it” (107). Thus, both *Cangue* and *Rouge* present a scenario where a young girl encounters one of the living dead in the form of her crippled husband, provoking her descent into madness and a phantasmagoric existence.

Kristeva’s *Powers of Horror* (1982) asserts that the corpse is the most horrifyingly disruptive site of abjection, confronting the self with boundaries that are traversed and unity punctured so that the resultant breach threatens to consume the whole. In this interpretation,

Qiqiao's violent reaction to the loathing of her invalid husband displays how "amid the violence of sobs, of vomit," she is "in the process of becoming an other at the expense of [her] own death" (Kristeva, 1982, p. 3). In contrast, Yindi's response is a mute protest of the symptom. At first glance, it may appear that *Rouge* limns a milder experience of abjection in marriage, but upon closer reading it becomes clear that in Yindi's case, the border between self and Other was already encroached when she *chooses* to marry a wealthy but crippled man. Here, Yindi manifests what Kristeva terms an abject "passion that uses the body for barter instead of inflaming it," compelling her to marry for monetary gain instead of love (1982, p. 4). By making the decision to enter into a sexual union with "the jettisoned object," Yindi had already plunged herself into a "place where meaning collapses" and her ghostly reflection represents the power of death to infiltrate, infect, and consume life (Kristeva, 1982, p. 2). While Qiqiao still manages an attempt to establish her selfhood in confrontation with and trapped by abjection, Yindi is one step further from redemption: she is fully engulfed by the horror of self-abjection, unable to extricate herself, because she traded her youth and vitality for wealth and vanity.

In "From the Mouths of Babes" ("童言无忌"), Chang reveals an unnerving take on the notion that humanity is trapped in an endless cycle of repetition and ghostly reflections that reverberates with the experiences of Qiqiao/Yindi: "The transformation of life into drama is unhealthy. People who have grown up in the culture of the city always see pictures of the sea before they see the sea; they read of love in romance novels and only later do they know love. Our experience is quite often second-hand, borrowed from artificial theatricals, and as a result the line between life and its dramatization becomes difficult to draw" (Zhang, 2005, p. 8). These sentences underscore that there is an abject component inherent to the act of copying, a term

that can be associated with the adoption of Western thought in contemporary Chinese society as well as the human reproductive process.

The feminine experience of Chinese modernity in Chang's worldview is forever contaminated by some uncanny element that is intrinsically harmful, alien, and artificial. To further understand Chang's desolate view on the non/productive sexual union or the de/generation of a wholesome national body, we must turn to consider the eugenics movement of Republican China in regulating the quality of bodies. In the context of Chang's life and writings, the abject body can be understood on three interrelated levels: first, in terms of an individual's physical conditions; second, in relation to the nuclear family structure; and third, as the projection onto a national body that signifies China's status as a nation-state at the global level. By reading *Cangue* and *Rouge* against the framework of the Chinese eugenics movement, the shadowy realm of Eileen Chang's corpus that engages in sociopolitical criticism by revealing the anarchic power of abject bodies, self-destructive sexuality, and delinquent parenthood begins to take shape.

[Grotesque Bodies, Transgressive Sexuality, and the Spectral Nation]

Although *Cangue* and *Rouge* present readers with a woman's abject experience on a psychological level, the setting of a historical epoch and a city – Shanghai – in decline cannot be overlooked. The revolution of 1911 profoundly altered the political structures of imperial China. In an era of intense nationalism and rapid state-building, open talk of sex rapidly became a sign of liberation from the “shackles of tradition” among modernizing elites, taking large cities by storm in Republican China (Dikötter, 1995, p. 1). Soon, educated groups began promulgating that the control of sexual desire and reproduction was necessary to restore the strength of the nation and achieve modernity. For the modernizing elites of Republican China,

individual sexual desire had to be disciplined and evil habits eliminated, and couples were to regulate their sexual behavior strictly to help bring about the revival of the nation (Dikötter, 1992). Pan Guangdan (潘光旦, 1899–1967), a distinguished sociologist and eugenicist in China at the time, began to publicize his observations of the symptoms of the Chinese national character. He criticized that the Chinese did not have any desire to glorify their national life, but were only selfishly concerned with their individual propagation or family-line continuation. After a series of foreign invasions, opium, civil wars, custom-reform campaigns, and anti-superstition campaigns, the only lesson Chinese people had learned was how to manage barely surviving (Pan, 1928; Lu, 2009). Pan's judgment of the Chinese national spirit in exhaustion and decay resonated with the May Fourth critique on cultural decadence and racial degeneration. Along the same lines, Lu Xun criticized: "Chinese males and females tend to age ahead of their time; before they reach twenty, they have already turned senescent" (as cited in Sun, 1996, p. 202).

Due to this degeneration discourse, eugenic ideas based on the American model soon gained increased attention from the public and became an influential source of inspiration for national salvation (Chung, 2002). The bedrock of the Chinese eugenics campaigns revolved around the healthy conjugal couple and social control of carnal impulses as essential to combating the threat of racial degeneration. Raising the specter of racial extinction, many writers claimed that the poor physical quality of the population was one of the key causes of the nation's backwardness (Dikkotter, 1995, p. 69).

With an understanding of the eugenics discourse Chang was likely exposed to during her life and times, it is possible to see how her fiction manifests imperfect conceptions of an unhealthy Chinese national body. After the fall of the Qing dynasty, the married couple was

feverishly promoted as a harmonious family model and heralded by civil society as the “natural” foundation of social order in modernizing texts on sex and society (Chung, 2002; 2011). The woman had a duty to the body politic, social reformers claimed, since careless procreation would lead to the production of unfit people and degenerates (Dikötter, 1998, p. 17). Following from this, the fact that Chang makes *woman* and her abject status in the Chinese family system the central issue of *Cangue* and *Rogue* comes into focus as a critique of social changes altering the structure of the traditional family model. Qiqiao and Yindi’s tragic marriages reveal how the conjugal couple, rather than being procreative, is immanently transgressive and self-destructive. This sentiment is emphasized by the female protagonists’ perverted marriage to a wretched, crippled man.

During the Republican Era, Chinese eugenics campaigns enlisting popular support for the improvement of population quality and national prosperity promoted the regulation of marital health. These campaigns focused on breeding future generations of better quality (素质 *suzhi*) citizens by restricting certain individuals from reproducing, preventing the racial stock from being contaminated by undesirable traits (Chung, 2002; 2011). For example, the 1931 marriage regulations of the Chinese People’s Republic stated that persons suffering venereal disease, leprosy, tuberculosis, mental disease, or paralysis were forbidden to marry (Meijer, 1971, 61). Crippled individuals were often relegated to the category of *canji* (残疾, literally translated as “deformed” but now takes on the meaning of “disabled”) in the production of an undesirable Otherness for the Chinese population (Kohrman, 2004). As Murphy *et al.* (1998) observe in their study, disability is “an in-between state, for the disabled person is neither sick nor well, neither fully alive nor quite dead” (238). Disabled or disfigured individuals thus occupy a deeply indeterminate zone → an ambiguous space → of their and others’ making.

Bodily disintegration became a signifier of the dangers of sexual pollution and transgression, and symbolized the fragility and vulnerability of human existence (Kohrman, 2004). As Frank Dikkoter vividly describes in his study on *Imperfect Conceptions: Medical Knowledge, Birth Defects and Eugenics in China* (1998): “A grotesque carnival of freaks and monsters, a macabre procession of sick people, cripples and hunchbacks, a bedraggled humanity crushed under the weight of inbreeding and mental retardation trekked through the pages of medical texts... [F]reaks embodied the disfigurement of the nation” (68).

Qiqiao /Yindi’s marginal marriage to Second Master resulted in her being physically and emotionally cast out of her own family onto the social and geographic margins of life and respectability. As a widow, she is further marginalized by being deprived of her full portion of the household inheritance and the property she should have received. In a sardonic twist, the fact that the bedridden Second Master is even able to have children, when eugenic laws would have prevented his marriage and reproduction, insinuates something sinister and barren about the trajectory of Chinese modernity. Chang herself was deeply concerned about the poor capacity for people to shoulder the responsibilities of providing for their children. In her own words: “Mothers and fathers are not gods, but they are forced into occupying a position of divinity... If conditions do not favor a child even before he is born, then he can hardly be expected to succeed later in life. Such are the operations of fate” (Zhang, 2005, p. 132). Given the subaltern and peripheral lives led by Third Master as a crippled father and Qiqiao/Yindi as an evil mother in a decaying aristocratic family, the narrative foreshadows the deprived and marginal fates that await their children.

In both *Cangue* and *Rogue*, the feminine experience of sexual relations and motherhood are degenerative and self-destructive, revealing Chang’s cynical position on the potential for

sexual enlightenment to provide the “bright light on the path to national wealth and power” (Dikotter, 1995, p. 2). The incestual relationship between Qiqiao/Yindi and her brother-in-law, Third Master, directly contributes to her distrust of all men and eventual descent into madness. In *Cangue*, Qiqiao’s desire for her brother-in-law, Chi-tse, is only alluded to in a scene of flirtatious banter. Years later, when a widowed Qiqiao sees Chi-tse again when he comes to borrow money, she admits that she had married into the Chiang family just “to meet Chi-tse, because it was fated that she should be in love with him” (201). Their love is one that is never consummated, however, and Qiqiao unleashes her anger built up from a repugnant marriage and fruitless affair on her children, manipulating their lives and forcing opium on them. She attempts to bound her teenage daughter’s feet even after being warned that they were not fashionable anymore, turning her into “a great joke” (208). She humiliates her in front of others and constantly puts her down, ruining Chang-an’s confidence in returning to school for self-improvement, and later also sabotaging her marriage plans (208). In the end, Chang-an emerges as the totally unpleasant “spit and image” of her mother who manipulates others to maintain her own security and power (211).

Qiqiao equally depraves her son by forcing him to cook opium for her and gossip about his wife, so that she can enjoy divulging to others “in detail all her daughter-in-law’s secrets as confessed by her son” (215). Her actions drive her son’s wife into sickness and eventual death. As Qiqiao herself recognizes, “this was an insane world, a husband not like a husband, a mother-in-law not like a mother-in-law” (216). The story ends in a maudlin tone where Qiqiao is all alone confined to her opium couch, arousing only to the revulsion of her own wicked existence and the knowledge that “her son and daughter hated her to the death, that the relatives on her husband’s side hated her, and that her own kinsfolk also hated her” (234). However, the

narrative does not indicate when Qiqiao's story will end, and implies that women like her may continue to haunt a feminine Chinese modernity indefinitely. This lingering presence is enhanced by the time consciousness of *Cangue*'s narrative, where the novella opens with a reference to "Shanghai thirty years ago on a moonlit night," and ends with a contrast between "now" and "then" by asserting that "the story of thirty years ago is not yet ended – can have no ending" (171, 234).

Taking *Rouge* as a continuation of *Cangue* across time, one can see how Yindi's story weaves larger sociopolitical developments in modern China, particularly with regard to the propagation of eugenics discourse. One of the most prominent changes is in the title itself, which is modified from *The Golden Cangue* to *The Rouge of the North*. The words on the head page explain the title:

The face powder of southern dynasties.

The rouge of the northern lands.

Chinese expression for the beauties of the country, probably seventh century.

It is worth highlighting that in Chinese, the phrases "the face powder of southern dynasties" (南朝金粉) and "The rouge of the northern lands" (北地胭脂) do not actually refer to "beauties," but rather to the figure of the prostitute (Luo and Wang, 2012, p. 2). Thus, the title implies that women like Yindi peddle their beauty and youth for wealth through marriage, and are not dissimilar from prostitutes capitalizing on the female body as a transactional commodity. The basic plot concerning Qiqiao and Yindi's marriage appears to support this reading where the female body is similarly leveraged for monetary gain: Qiqiao was sold by her brother in *Cangue*, whereas Yindi decides to sacrifice her love interest and exchange her beauty and adolescence for wealth. Accordingly, the title change further underscores the theme of social and moral decay

with regard to female sexuality and the reproductive body, and foreshadows the prolonged account of this deterioration in *Rouge*.

Yindi similarly has an affair with her brother-in-law, Third Master, but the novel reveals more details about how she once sang a ballad to him in the middle of the night, and had rendezvoused with him at a Buddhist temple, after which she had tried to hang herself out of shame and fear of being punished for adultery. Yindi also projects her anger and unfulfilled desires onto her son, Yensheng, but her actions are less fuelled with the vengeful determination and manic energy that make Qiqiao the most abominable mother in modern Chinese literature. Although Yindi manipulates her son's life and ruins his marriage by driving his wife to death, she nonetheless reveals tenderness towards him. She reveals traces of protectiveness when she gets angry about Yensheng's cousins and relatives "laughing at him" or commenting about him being "so small and thin" (137). Towards the end of the novel, Yindi recognizes that "there was something monstrous about a face grown unrecognizable over the years" but they still "felt so safe together... For a moment she was close to tears, willing to live her life through him. He was a part of her and male" (150). Although this moment did not last long, and Yindi soon returns to her usual iniquitous self, she lets Yensheng handle the family money – the one thing that she values more than anything else – knowing that "he could be trusted because he wanted to win her confidence" (173). In effect, the desperate madwoman in *Cangue* is transformed into a moneyed but desolate woman in *Rouge*, making Yindi a more believable yet unsettling persona.

[The Hysterical Woman and Fearsome Children]

The exceptional rage and delusion represented by the prototype of Qiqiao/Yindi in her attempt to destroy everyone around her would seem a fitting counterpart to Lu Xun's infamous

madman of China. Although it is possible that Chang similarly wanted to criticize the inescapable “iron house” of traditional China and urge readers to work towards a more progressive society, my reading infers that Chang was not nearly so optimistic about the Chinese population’s capacity for change. Instead, a more appropriate counterpart of Qiqiao/Yindi might be found in the figure of the hysterical woman in eugenics discourse. Insofar as Qiqiao/Yindi constitute Chang’s inquiry into the female psyche, they reflect a constant state of bodily and emotional imbalance. As David Wang (1998) points out, “the Chinese title of *Rouge*, *Yuan-nü* (怨女) is more suggestive of Yindi’s state. The Chinese character for *yuan* denotes ‘embittered,’ ‘sullen,’ and ‘rancorous;’ and when used to describe women, it evokes a major trope in classical Chinese poetic invocations of the feminine” (xxii). In this understanding, female embitterment is a menacing force. In addition to having roots in the Chinese poetic tradition, I want to argue that the figure of *Yuan-nü* (怨女) has close associations with the hysterical woman in eugenics discourse as an anarchic figure defying all reason and regulation.

Medical texts in the late Qing dynasty increasingly scrutinized women based on their reproductive functions, and their bodies were described as intrinsically out of balance and sickly, particularly during polluting events like menstruation and pregnancy. Moreover, medical texts endowed postmenopausal women with a sexuality which was thought to be irresistible and dangerous. Sexual deprivation caused these “old girls” (老女 *laonü*) to become bitter, jealous, and intolerant. The sexualization of the female body in biologizing discourse was particularly prominent in medical concepts of hysteria, which was thought to be a hereditary disease which was expressed between the age of fifteen and twenty-five. Hysteria was characterized by symptoms such as neuroticism, violent affectional changes, emotional instability, excessive

apprehension, and deliberate exaggerations (Su, 1935; Dikkoter, 1995, p. 50). In this sense, hysteria became a catch-all for irregular female behavior and all forms of pathological phenomena, where the hysterical woman lacked self-control and often indulged in improper thoughts or wild fantasies. She was inclined towards crime, wandering about in a state of altered consciousness. Sexual frustration was pinpointed as the primary cause of female hysteria; therefore, the fulfillment of sexual desires and the ability to control the female reproductive body was believed to be the only way to remedy such a medical condition (Dikötter, 1995).

Knowledge about this component of eugenics discourse makes it possible to see how Qiqiao and Yindi are both hysterical women to varying degrees. Through these characters, Chang projects a dysfunctional and morose approach towards childbirth, motherhood, and the female reproductive body more generally. While *Cangue* focused on the perversity of one woman and how she had used the “heavy edges” of her golden cangue “to chop down several people” causing them death and suffering, *Rogue* fleshes out Yindi’s surroundings to reveal the absurdity of others’ lives and actions as well. The concluding chapters of *Rouge* place repeated emphasis on how everyone was “in fact all in the same position as Yindi... a widow living on some dead money” (133). With the onset of the Japanese occupation, “more and more people were put into her position... so not just her relatives but all of the more scrupulous people had come to be like her, a widow who stayed home to keep watch over her chastity. Now she could pinch pennies legitimately as everybody was doing” (176). The irony here is that the exact behavior that used to be a source of ridicule and derision for Yindi later became a model for others to emulate. Chang’s rewriting implies that from *Cangue* to *Rogue*, selfish and neurotic behavior is no longer limited to the isolated hysterical woman, but has permeated all of Chinese society.

Chang's pessimistic assessment of parenthood and the nuclear family as a reflection of (un)civilized society is evident in the portrayal of Qiqiao/Yindi's warped relationships with their children, but is even more obvious in *Rouge* when Third Master's womanizing comes under special scrutiny. In *Rogue*, the narrative follows his life in greater detail as a man who steals from his own family and sinks deeper and deeper into debt, gambling, and prostitution. Near the beginning of the novel, there is an incident where Third Master steals his wife's coveted pearl flower, which he likely pawned for money to continue patronizing brothels. To clear their name from theft, the household's servants hired a round lighter to try and identify who actually stole the item. Third Master finds out that the only way to break the spell would be to smear pig's blood on the face, as "pig's blood is one of the filthy things used as antidotes for witchcraft" (68). When he attempts to buy a bowl of pig's blood, however, he receives a bowl of blood from dubious origins. He questions not simply "what" the blood was, but "whose," implying the possibility that it could be human blood (69). This scene inauspiciously occurs in the same chapter following Yindi's childbirth, after which she was made to remain in the maternity "blood room" and "sit up straight all day so as to bleed as much as possible and be rid of the unclean blood" (55).

Therefore, the narrative sequence intimates that the blood Third Master receives and ends up smearing on his face is the same blood Yindi shed during childbirth, leaving the room "reek[ing] of blood as if there had been a murder" (70). In Chinese eugenics discourse, the blood of women, especially blood related to the womb during menstruation or pregnancy, is perceived as a sign of female generative power and vitality, but also the site of murderous contamination, sickness, and abjection (Chung, 2002; Furth, 2002). This morbid scene where Third Master smears his own face with contaminated blood hence portends his destitute

existence and cursed fate at the end of the novel. Moreover, the inclusion of this bloody scene seems to reflect Chang's own desire to expose how "only filth can kill the mystery, the aura" of sex, childbirth, and parenthood (68).

Interestingly, the round lighting process depends on the purity of children with "clean eyes able to see ghosts and spirits invisible to grown-ups" to catch the thief (70). At this juncture, the text points to Chang's simultaneous respect and fear towards children. In her essay on "Making People," Chang asserted her observation that "most parents don't understand their children, while most children are able to see right through their parents and understand exactly what sort of people they are... [Adults] fail to see what is so very frightening about children's eyes – such earnest eyes, the eyes of angels on Judgment Day"(131). The little boy in the story exemplifies this formidable power of children's eyes when he declared he "saw a red-faced person" with "no eyes or nose, just a big red face," leaving Third Master "exhilarated by his narrow escape" (70). As a virgin boy, the child had the power to see into the depths of Third Master's conscience, and if it were not for the filthy blood used, the narrative indicates that a different scenario would likely have unfolded.

In the last few chapters of *Rouge*, Yindi learns that Third Master lived his later years with two concubines in a barren room of a small alley house and died from illness without having any children. The fate of Third Master divulged in *Rouge* that was absent from *Cangue* evokes the growing emphasis in popular eugenics discourse that a man's excessive sexual activity causes a decline in the generative power of his semen. Profligate sex would decrease his ability to have healthy offspring and increase his exposure to venereal diseases. Therefore, sexual desire was targeted as a domain for state intervention and public control, where discourse demanded that the social subject subordinate his drives to the needs of a higher collectivity

(Chung, 2002). The fate of Third Master denudes the barren outcome of men who do not keep their womanizing in check, speaking directly to prevalent public discourse on the issue, but also reveals the lingering resentment Chang still holds against her ex-husband, the libertine Hu Lancheng.

Another significant difference in the plot between *Cangue* and *Rouge* is the omission of Qiqiao's daughter, Chang-an, in Yindi's story. Scholars have noted that without Chang-an, Yindi appears more pleasant and acceptable as a mother (Luo and Wang, 2012). However, the question remains: what might have happened to Chang-an that caused her character to completely disappear from *Rouge*? Given the insight readers now have into Yindi's abortive seduction of Third Master, we may speculate that Yindi aborted her second (love)child. At one point in the story, Yindi reflects that the concubines from singsong houses "not only ruined Third Master but left him childless," as "practically all singsong girls were barren, maybe because of the abortion herbs that their madams had forced on them too often" (146). This keen knowledge about the frequent usage of abortion herbs amongst singsong girls insinuates that she might have acquired some for her own usage. Moreover, we may turn to Chang's other texts, especially *Naked Earth* (1954), for clues as to why she departed from the original storyline in *Cangue* when rewriting in English. Chang wrote *Naked Earth* (1954) and *Rice Sprout Song* (1954) during the time she was based in Hong Kong in between leaving China and arriving in the United States. The books were commissioned by the United States Information Services as part of an anti-Communist propaganda initiative.

Naked Earth (1954) stands out for its insertion of a horrific episode where a female character goes for an illegal abortion that eventually bleeds her to death. The Chinese version of the novel, 《赤地之恋》, does not contain this scene. In the English version, Su Nan is

impregnated from a love affair with Sheng, a high ranking Comrade, in a scheme to seduce him and make him release her first love, Comrade Liu, from prison. Her pregnancy drives her into a frenetic state, where she obsesses over “that thing growing inside her, fattening itself on her” and likens its growth to that of a time bomb “ticking inside her, faster than the clock” (289, 291). This loss of control over her womb provokes Su Nan to feel alienated and repulsed by own body; she loathes that her body was “dumbly protect[ing] this thing she could not live with” and “could not understand how that parasitic life had such a tenacious hold on her” (291). When she finds a dodgy clinic reputed for giving illegal abortions, an accidental spill of antiseptic prior to her operation leaves ominous red stains on the floor that makes the room look like a murder scene. Su Nan finds herself in a doubly humiliated and marginalized position: Sheng had not only exploited her sexually, but had also fooled her about liberating Liu. Yet, she was to be the one suffering both physically and emotionally from her unproductive maneuvers, sacrificing her psychological wellbeing and eventually her life.

By way of suggesting a point of entry into reading the significance of abortion in Chang’s oeuvre, I will return to the evocative passage from *Little Reunion* cited in the epigraph to this essay. It is worth highlighting that the scenes from *Little Reunion* and *Naked Earth* are the only two instances where Chang plainly writes about abortion. However, the issue of abortion and themes of abortive relationships pervade all of her works. In *Eileen Chang and Reyher* (《张爱玲与赖雅》, 1996), Sima Xin attributes the addition of abortion in *Naked Earth* to Chang’s own abortion and miscarriage experience prior to marrying Reyher. The ghostly fetus(es) haunting her from this experience of abortion might also have impelled her to cancel the existence of Chang-an from the pages of *Rouge*. Notably, this erasure of the female character

echoes Chang's peculiar ethics of "the moral virtue of self-negation," through which she expresses a desire to cancel herself out from life (2005, p. 132).

The implications of abortion in *Rouge* and *Naked Earth* evoke the double-edged sword of the abortion issue in relation to the Chinese woman and eugenics discourse. Abortion appears on the agenda of eugenics in multiple ways: as the revelation of medical control over reproduction, a means to regulate the quality of the human population, and also the ability for women to achieve a form of self-determined sexuality (Gilheany, 1998). The rise of eugenics discourse in China brought women enhanced prenatal care and means of birth control, nonetheless shouldering them with an ever-growing burden of national survival. With the stress on birth and population regulation, the control that Chinese women exerted over their bodies became the primary arena where they could subvert national and patriarchal hierarchies. The view that motherhood should be freed from slavery, where Chinese women should be spared the burden of required reproduction to become better citizens contributing to society, gained popularity. The traditional Chinese belief of childbearing and childrearing as the essence of marriage was perceived as manacles enchaining Chinese women, draining substantial mental resource and physical strength from them. With the introduction of birth control and abortion procedures, both the preservation and taking of human life become the subject of new types of moral and political decision making for the first time (Gilheany, 1998).

Chang reveals a unique sensitivity towards these developments altering the intersection of eugenics, reproduction, and motherhood. With the rise of eugenics, the human body and the process of reproduction increasingly became merely another socioeconomic and moral commodity in government rhetoric. Her contemplations on the social consequences of the blurred distinction between life and death is most clearly addressed in her essay on "Making

People” (造人, 1944) where she reveals a deep seated anxiety about the perpetuation of an unregulated reproductive process. In her words: “Nature’s ways are shockingly wasteful... Why should we expend our flesh and blood in such a profligate manner? Civilized people are extremely expensive creatures, requiring enormous sums of money to be fed, raised, and education... What on earth could induce us to produce these useless creatures, destined as they are for the evolutionary scrap heap, in such profuse quantities?” (Chang, 2005, p. 132-133). The matter of censurable motherhood is one that laces many of Chang’s works, infusing the narratives with an undercurrent of premature death. As Carlos Rojas (2008) observes, “for Eileen Chang ... the image of her mother similarly functions as a temporal interregnum, foreclosing the possibility of her own death before it has even come to pass, and opening a space for textually mediated modes of procreative dis/semination (180).” In this way, the figure of Qiqiao/Yindi serve as a reminder of Chang’s past and the inevitable rupture of figurative artifact bearing tangible traces of her dead mother’s presence. Delinquent parenthood is at the core of Chang’s diagnosis of her unhappy life, and by extension, a disintegrating China.

The increased number of abject characters that populate *Rouge*, especially the numerous troops of singsong girls, Peking Opera female impersonators, and concubines, further evinces this fear of excessive proliferation. Set during a time in China’s history where prostitution was increasingly reviled as a social evil and polygamy was abandoned for the conjugal family model, the presence of these characters in *Cangue* and *Rouge* connotes a dismal state of modern Chinese society in the 1900s (Hershatter, 2002). The fearsome power of uncontrollable reproduction is best dramatized by the burlesque outcome of Yindi’s attempt to bring honor to the family by securing Yensheng a concubine and a son. Ironically, while Yindi succeeds in getting a grandson, her plan backfires as the house ends up being overpopulated by undesirable

children, a spectacle that mocks the anachronistic overemphasis on women's biological function in marital relations. The concubine, Dungmei, is described in terms of a commodity whose "belly [is borrowed] for a son," but turns to be "too good a breeder" giving birth to babies in "litters like pigs" (169, 180). This satirical plot change in *Rouge* mirrors the fear and aversion Chang herself developed towards children over the years, where she "felt both esteem and terror when confronted with little children, from whom [she] deliberately maintain[ed] a respectful distance" (2005, 131).

Chang's concluding lament in "Making People" is telling of her view on the primordial eugenic threat inherent within human reproduction: "It is in our nature to want humanity to thrive and proliferate, to reproduce and to continue reproducing. We ourselves are destined to die, but our progeny will spread across the earth. But what unhappy progeny are these, what hateful seeds!" (2005, 133). In returning to the possibility of Yindi's abortion, then, one might suspect she murders her own daughter before the newborn even has the chance to live. Alternatively, Yindi's transgression concedes the reality that bringing another life into her world would only lead to other forms of unhappiness, frustration, and death.

The Proliferation and Spectral Return of Recursive (Re)Productivity

In the early 20th century, modern Chinese literary thought was produced under tremendous political turbulence and historical crisis. Since the "Opium War" of 1840-42, China had suffered from the repeated humiliation of defeat in war by the imperialist powers of Japan and the West. The Chinese intellectual class wanted to strengthen their nation's position by embracing Western discourses of modernity, initiating the adoption of the Western model of eugenics. With the external threat of imperialist encroachment, China's weaknesses as a nation had been exposed. Therefore, cultural production during this time, as Kirk Denton (1996)

explains, “convey at the very least the sense of urgency and crisis felt by educated Chinese” (5). Out of this turmoil, May Fourth authors envisioned themselves as a cultural force using literature to prompt social change, empowering themselves through writing to validate current political regimes and establish standards for Chinese modernity.

Although writing out of the same milieu, Eileen Chang has consistently been described as an author who goes against the grain of May Fourth fiction. As David Wang writes of *Rouge*, “this is a novel not about national politics but about politics as a daily practice of life. It does not have the usual revolutionary ‘obsession with China,’ to use C.T. Hsia’s term; rather it probes the reactionary meaning of all such Chinese obsessiveness” (1998, p. vii). Eileen Chang herself provides us with a roadmap to understand her perspective: in her work, emphasis is placed on the futility of grandness and exhibits no tragedy but only desolation, because “tragedy is a kind of closure, while desolation is a form of revelation” (2005, 17). In the absence of fecundity, her texts are arguably much more evocative as a radically bestial call to arms. There is a powerful destructive undercurrent flowing throughout all of her works beneath the intricate descriptions of a looming, decadent, gothic family environment, and a monstrously anarchic and fearful female sexuality.

In “Writing of One’s Own,” Eileen Chang contemplates her unique vision of modern history and her fascination with an aesthetics of liminality:

In this era, the old things are being swept away and the new things are still being born. But until this historical era reaches its culmination, all certainty will remain an exception. People sense that everything about their everyday lives is a little out of order, out of order to a terrifying degree. All of us must live within a certain historical era, but this era sinks away from us like a shadow, and we feel we have been abandoned. In order to confirm our own existence, we need to take hold of something

real, of something most fundamental, and to that end we seek the help of an ancient memory, the memory of a humanity that has lived through every era, a memory clearer and closer to our hearts than anything we might see gazing far into the future. And this gives rise to a strange apprehension about the reality surrounding us. We begin to suspect that this is an absurd and antiquated world, dark and bright at the same time. Between memory and reality there are awkward discrepancies, producing a solemn but subtle agitation, an intense but as yet indefinable struggle (Chang 2005, p. 17-18).

Here, Chang's writing captures the uncertainty of transitional moments, where history is distinctly broken into fragmented segments characterized by illusory realms situated at the intersection of memory and reality, past and present, legitimacy and expediency. However, this passage also implies that these broken fragments can be reorganized and infused with fresh meaning; but what does it mean for "new things" to be born into "an absurd and antiquated world" dominated by backwardness, regression, and destruction? What if what is born is not an infant, but a stillbirth, where the pregnancy is aborted right before the delivery? As Chang comments in another essay, "The more arduous the situation, the more apparent will become the tremendous love parents bear for their children. Either the parent or the child must be sacrificed to circumstances, and it is from this hard truth that we have derived the moral virtue of self negation" (2005, p. 132). Thus, the mother sacrifices herself to save the child from entering a world haunted by abortive, spectral beings – yet another sexual and textual perversion in Chang's corpus.

Chang's own "indefinable struggle" focuses on uncovering the irremediably corrupted basis of life in a threatening world of facades, masks, and deception. The stories of Qiqiao, Yindi, Jiuli, and Su Nan all parade a reality in which childbirth and procreation is no longer natural and

pure, a causal chain is established between morality, illness, and mortality, and biological disorders are explained as a breakdown in social order and human conduct. Chang understands that her generation of Chinese grew up at a most volatile moment of modern Chinese history, challenged alternatively by old and new spaces. Through the trope of an overwrought Chinese woman, Chang illuminates a feminine Chinese modernity where the damaging effects of social change and eugenics are not confined to the physical body, but equally inscribed on the psychic condition. Her works therefore dwell on the experiential and interpersonal dimensions of human existence. It is in this state of flux that we glimpse the (im)possibilities of sexual freedom and experience the predicaments of moral agency. Women who are shrewd enough to exploit the intersections of extreme pathology and extreme enlightenment manage to carve out a precarious space for themselves, albeit at the expense of other people: their children, their rivals, their servants, their lovers. There are no obvious winners here – even those who appear to come out on top are profoundly compromised by many bruised hearts and lost souls. Women are embittered to the point of perversion by their surroundings, sliding ever further into moral decline and bourgeois deception.

Much has been written about Eileen Chang already, and yet much still remains a mystery. The puzzle that intrigues me the most is Chang's distinctive acts of self-translation and rewriting. David Wang has written variously on her penchant for rewriting her life story in various formats, especially in the last four decades of her career (1998; 2010a; 2010b; 2012). As an author, Chang must have understood the importance of originality in literary production, so why was she so preoccupied with making repetitive copies? In Wang's forward to *Rouge*, he posits that at a psychological level, Chang's rewriting exhibits a Freudian compulsion leading to her "repetitive and bilingual project" where she rewrites the story of *Cangue* into two languages more than four

times over a span of twenty-four years (1998, p. vii). Many have also highlighted the semi-autobiographical elements of these stories in relation to Chang's own childhood and marriage experiences, and surmised her need to simultaneously recall and suppress memories of her past (Fong, 2001; Wang, 2010a; 2010b; Shen, 2012). However, the act of reproducing abject women and themes of anxiety vis-à-vis sexual desire and human procreation extend beyond Chang's attempt to retrieve or overcome her own repressed memories and trauma; the textual proliferation of *Cange* and *Rouge* emulates Chang's own primordial fear of the reproductive body signified by the act of (re)writing itself.

As a Chinese immigrant to the US, Chang wanted to reinvent herself in English, but her stature from the 1940s in the sphere of Chinese ideograms repeatedly miscarried in the terrain of English letters. Critics observed that Chang had not given up Chinese for English, and the novels could not be fully appreciated due to aesthetic preconceptions. As Sheng-mei Ma (2011) observes, Chang's "habit of inserting phonetic transcription of Chinese phrases into English novels privileges Chinese, as if the English rendition exists only as a pointer to the Chinese original which is unavailable, technically, on Chang's typewriter or, linguistically, on the reader's mental template" (129). Chang's English novels on China read "linguistically authentic," but "artistically inferior," and this "bizarre and frustrating mix" contributed to the untenability of her English writings (Ma, 2011, p. 129). Her repeated efforts to write in English and gain entry into the American literary circle were ultimately sterile, providing a concrete analogy for Chang's poignant view on the futility of reproduction. Moreover, the fate of *Naked Earth* acutely displays her misadventure in transcribing her works in English: the preface indicates that the book was an "experiment" by The Union Press in determining public interest

in the publishing of English works of Asian authors. However, the book was a disappointment; it was never reprinted, and remains in obscurity to this day.

The insertion of a morbid abortion episode into the narrative of *Naked Earth* evocatively parallels the presence of repellent foreign elements introduced with Chang's use of an adopted language. It was as if she could no longer trust her native language to speak of such grim details, and sought out a surrogate voice in which to convey the paralyzing alienation, marginalization, and uncontrollable fears that her homeland had inflicted upon her. By depicting the primordial eugenic threat haunting the landscape of modern China through estranged characters and hybrid narratives, Chang crafts a spectral return of the legacy of the Western eugenics model on the diasporic frontier. In Chang's eyes, there is no originality or enlightenment in the world, and almost all forms of life are immanently transgressive and regressive. The process of rewriting and copying was one that she compulsively engaged in yet also deeply feared, revealing a self-destructive obsession with the abject nature of reproduction and the artificial creation of derivative facsimiles. Eileen Chang's own fate proved her to be a grim author imprisoned by desolation when she lived years in self-imposed isolation and was eventually found dead, wasted, and alone in a destitute apartment at the periphery of Hollywood. Within this context, it is fitting that her stories revolve around the fruitlessness of marriage and looming social decay, represent childbirth as a pathological process, and identify female sexuality with danger. Regardless, there is something uncanny about the way her works increased in popularity and continue to proliferate after her death. Given the recent resurgence of eugenics arguments in public discourse with the revision of China's one-child policy and shifting approaches towards population control, it would seem that the implications of Eileen Chang's life and works for the

state of Chinese modernity, like her recursive retellings of *Cangue* and *Rouge*, has not yet come to an end – can have no ending.

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