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Enclosure, Rewriting and Grotesqueness:

A General Analysis of Zhang Ailing's Earlier Works

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the

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by

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## ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

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This study is to look at what could be the impact of the hybrid cultures' inflow on the literary venations of Shanghai writers, as shown by the non-indigenous traits of "modernity" in the writings of Zhang Ailing. The author examines some of the earlier works of Zhang Ailing, including "Aloeswood Incense: The First Blazier," "Jasmine Tea" and "Love." Borrowing an angle from scholarship on the Sci-Fi, hybrid features in Lu Xun's "Iron House" and "A Mad Man's Diary," the study furthers the investigation on these works, which the author believes have manifested the repetition feature of rewriting and reinterpretation. It argues that the thread has

been given via the writer's repetitious emphasis on a claustrophobically confining ambience of quiet horror and terror, parallel to the drastic social changes occurring in Shanghai. The writer's ability to "spellbind" the readers to a logically-structured enclosure, akin to a form of "grotesqueness" seen in both the influx of western Gothic literatures and the bedrock Chinese modern literature, has been bestowed by this parallel as the essential fabric of the text.

The thesis of Jingjing Fan is approved.

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## I. Introduction

What motivates someone to rewrite? What motivates someone to not only revise, but also essentially reinterpret and "translate" their own original works? Could it be that one genuinely wanted to change the face of Chinese modern writings circulating in her early adult years? In this research I aim to look at modern Shanghainese bilingual writer Zhang Ailing<sup>1</sup> (1920-1995) and her propensity to transform the contemporary narratives, including her own stories; This leaning may be a contributing factor to Zhang's long-lasting popularity, as her works span a multiplicity of lenses that analysis on one story may only make a hasty generalization. As Walter Benjamin beholds, the transitoriness of artwork that is regarded as ubiquitous as for its likeness can be found in the life of the masses, "To pry an object from its shell, to destroy its aura, is the mark of a perception whose 'sense of the universal equality of things' has increased to such a degree that it extracts it even from a unique object by means of reproduction."<sup>2</sup> Thus, the enduring nature of a text may be ascribed to its intricacy and elusiveness. In such a case, it may be asked that why would one willingly destroy the aura of her creation from a unique period of her life?

Rewriting, in a broader sense (to an extent in which it overlapping with adaptation—bringing in a larger amount of original creativity,) may be signifying the recasting of a narrative style and a tongue of a discourse that may not originate from one's own thoughts and witness; it points to a source of imagination which transgresses the boundaries of the original and the individual. In Zhang Ailing's instance, it may be used as a method to assert her vision, by inserting her writing into the scene of a discourse, camouflaged in a layer of reference from

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<sup>1</sup> Also known as Eileen Chang or Chang Ai-ling in variant scholarly articles.

<sup>2</sup> Walter Benjamin and Harry Zohn, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," essay, in *Illuminations =Illuminationen: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 2007), 217–53, p.223

somebody else. Her essay "Love (orig. 愛)" would be such a case; it was based on a story told by Zhang's former husband Hu Lancheng (orig. 胡蘭成) about his recollection of an actual person, and yet within which, traces from the original had become barely recognizable. As the third chapter would demonstrate, her short-of-details presentation of the story was distinctly different in many aspects from Hu's own eulogical essay published decades later. Moreover, it borderlines with an aesthetic evocation of the Chinese belle-lettres: the romantic literatures of the Butterfly school, whose overall nature may be identified as "indigenous fiction of the 1910s and 1920s, as opposed to the 'New Literature' inspired from foreign models."<sup>3</sup>

Regarding rewriting in a narrower sense, (as many scholarships have already delved on,) Zhang is known engaging in the practices of self-translation and reworking. She has made efforts to present her literary works to English-speaking audiences, resulting in various versions of her stories, such as the novel *Chidi Zhi Lian* (orig. 赤地之戀) and its English counterpart *Naked Earth*. And, she also modified her novels written in English for Chinese-speaking communities, such as the two-volume novel *The Fall of the Pagoda & The Book of Change* and their abridged and rewritten novel<sup>4</sup> *Xiao Tuanyuan* (Translated as *Little Reunion*). Each of these parallel works contains a substantial amount of changes and equivalent amount of interconnection, which justifies and has received attention in numerous scholarship. Among them, Li Xianyu, whose essay characterizes Zhang's later works—— published from the 1950s to 80s as *Novels of Losses* [orig. 惘然小說, deriving from the title of Zhang's novel collection *Record of Losses*

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<sup>3</sup> D. E. Pollard, "Mandarin Ducks and Butterflies: Popular Fiction in Early Twentieth-Century Chinese Cities." By Perry Link. [Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: The University of California Press, 1981. x, 313 ]." *The China Quarterly* 91 (1982). pp. 524.

<sup>4</sup> It was posthumously published by her executor.

(orig. 惘然記)], posits that Zhang's earlier inclination to rewrite in her U.S. period was a deliberation to overcome her writer's block and create an innovative writing experience to "rewrite (orig. 改寫)" her signature style of writing; it was to let go of the emotions relating to her losses.<sup>5</sup> Li also attributes her later rewriting process as a translucent gesture to the public responding (orig. "回應的改寫") to the critiques directed towards her somewhat (style-wise) "unusual" latest publication. His review of these works is in line with a scholarly discourse that explores her creative attitude as being guided by a culture of "domesticity" in Shanghai<sup>6</sup>; which offered a market for feminine expressions of domestic happiness and conflicts, but was particularly ephemeral, due to its vulnerability and interdependence with warfares and political turmoils.<sup>7</sup> Li stresses the desolation of her writing tone, which is the most addressed feature of her earlier writing reflecting about the wars and family life; but it is more to the point that the sensation of desolation may be identified as a retrograde transformation inwardly flowing towards her literary learning from the past— that was gradually receding in the present.<sup>8</sup> In this sense, Li's work is suggestive of a diasporic reading to Zhang Ailing's later work.

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<sup>5</sup> Xianyu Li, "Lun Zhang Ailing Hou Qi Chuang Zuo De 'Gai Xie 'Xian Xiang ——Yi 'Wang Ran Xiao Shuo 'Wei Zhong Xin," *Modern Chinese Literature Studies*, no. 10 (2017), <https://www.chinesepen.org/blog/archives/155355>.

<sup>6</sup> Sean Macdonald, "Tragic Alliance as (Post)Modernist Reading: 'Jasmine Tea' by Zhang Ailing," *Hecate* 35 (January 1, 2009): 171, <https://www.questia.com/library/journal/1G1-217244398/tragic-alliance-as-post-modernist-reading-jasmine>.

<sup>7</sup> Please refer to Nicole Huang, *Women, War, Domesticity: Shanghai Literature and Popular Culture of the 1940's* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2005). 120.

<sup>8</sup> Li, "Lun Zhang Ailing."

To elaborate on the study about Zhang, insofar, the plenitude of Zhang's self-narratives prompts scholarship to cast eye over her autobiographical writings<sup>9</sup>, her letters<sup>10</sup> of correspondence and posthumously published writings.<sup>11</sup> One of the earlier studies of Zhang Ailing's life and its influence on her writing may be exemplified by Carole H.F. Hoyan. Hoyan notes that Zhang's "revenge mentality"<sup>12</sup> towards her immediate family, in the main, pervaded her literary vocation. Zhang's disengaged but ironic angle on the microscopic topics of wartime China may be shaped by a firm belief that "reality is something unsystematic, random, fragmented and difficult to understand"<sup>13</sup> and more importantly, such sort of "ironic detachment in fact paradoxically co-exists with a passion for life in Zhang's creative writings, especially, her essays."<sup>14</sup> Reviewing Zhang's pre-adult prose essays, Hoyan suggests that Zhang in her early adolescence had already been keen in defying the expectations of the students' writing standard of a "modern romantic literary style,"<sup>15</sup> which homes in sanguine, romantic vision while coupled with affects-rich lamentational passages.<sup>16</sup> Such is shown through Zhang, in one of her essays,

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<sup>9</sup> Including the essay "*Tongyan Wuji*," the published anthology *Written On Water*, the autobiographical *Pagoda & Change*, the annotated photo album *Duizhao Ji*, et cetera.

<sup>10</sup> The most well-known ones are her correspondence with C. T. Hsia and the letters exchanged with her literary agent(s) and close friends in America, the Songs.

<sup>11</sup> Which includes the novel *Little Reunion* and the novella "*Tongxue Shaonian Dou Bu Jian*."

<sup>12</sup> Carole H.F. Hoyan, "The Life and Works of Zhang Ailing : A Critical Study" (Dissertation, University of British Columbia, 1996), 30.

<sup>13</sup> Hoyan, "The Life and Works of Zhang Ailing ." 39.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. 46.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. 55-56.

<sup>16</sup> A private Catholic high school in Colonial Shanghai.

identifying her concern of the great divide in her personally favored style (of the Mandarin Ducks and Butterflies school<sup>17</sup>) and the standard one she used ceremonially at school, which was commended by her teachers and classmates as "elegant."<sup>18</sup> As her skills in writing increased, Zhang began to experiment with assimilation of different genres<sup>19</sup>. These endeavors altogether result in Zhang's well-known narrative technique and style after her writer's career was fully established in Colonial Hong Kong. It has been characterized by Hoyan as "uniquely classical style," which demonstrates the influence of "the 'intimate boudoir realism' of *The Dream of The Red Chamber*<sup>20</sup>, and a parallel to Freudian psychology."<sup>21</sup> It is also accompanied with her distinguished modernized "*huaben* story-telling mode"<sup>22</sup> that concentrates on building narratives on the folktales, originating from the Song Dynasty.

In the twenty-first century, the author's later life as an immigrant to the United States post the grand phenomenon of her success in wartime China attracts greater attention. In line with Li Xianyu's essay, Lina Qu's "Writing, Rewriting, and Miswriting: Eileen Chang's Late Style

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<sup>17</sup> Sometimes abbreviated as "Butterfly" school, this school of writing style is often classified as the vernacular popular fiction which took "romantic novels in pursuit of fling, grief at separation and joy as main representative." Please refer to: Bin Li, "The School of Mandarin Duck and Butterfly's Creative Push on Early Chinese Publishing Industry," *Asian Social Science* 8, no. 12 (September 20, 2012), 165.

<sup>18</sup> Hoyan, 55-56.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. 56.

<sup>20</sup> One of the greatest Chinese classical novels completed during the Ming and Qing dynasties.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. 135-136.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

"Against the Grain" dives into what she terms as "temporospatial displacement"<sup>23</sup> and "poetic and political lateness"<sup>24</sup> as a broader theme in Zhang's writing amid her "self-exile" period in the United States. While Hoyan emphasizes "modernity" as the catalyst of Zhang's enchanting appeal in language, Qu instead stresses the outlook that Zhang's early works have manifested: a deliberately drawn fine-line between her arts and "sweeping modernization of Chinese culture and literature championed by most of her contemporaries; and that it continues to foster the maturation of her aesthetics of lateness through living and writing in exile."<sup>25</sup> In her essay, Qu discusses Zhang's new practice of "compulsive bilingual rewriting,"<sup>26</sup> reworking on many of her fiction published in her early career (as mentioned before):

An infamous example is Chang's three late renditions of her acclaimed 1943 novella "Jinsuo ji," translated into "The Golden Cangue" by herself. Based on the story of the Chinese novella, Chang drafted two English novels *Pink Tears* and *Rouge of the North*, but only the second one got published in London in 1967. Prior to the publication of the English novel, its Chinese rendition *Yuannü* (Embittered woman) was serialized in Hong Kong and Taiwan. Chang's compulsion of rewriting is more saliently revealed by her

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<sup>23</sup> Lina Qu, "Writing, Rewriting, and Miswriting: Eileen Chang's Late Style Against the Grain." *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 21.6 (2019), 2.

<sup>24</sup> Qu, "Writing, Rewriting, and Miswriting." 2.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.* 3.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

creation of multiple volumes of autobiographical fiction in both English and Chinese.<sup>27</sup>

In addition, based on David Der-wei Wang's viewpoint on Zhang's tendency of creating repetitious works (who theorizes that Zhang wrote to expel and heal the mental wounds from childhood traumas) Qu's essay elevates Wang's theoretical underpinning to a counter-Hegelian philosophical standpoint, arguing that Zhang's later works refute the "transcendental unity"<sup>28</sup> of the then-current "revolutionary dialectic"<sup>29</sup> inhabited in the historical narratives. It suggests that Zhang's creation is more in support of the Deleuzian philosophy on revolutions as the "repetitive affirmations of *a priori* difference."<sup>30</sup> Nonetheless, while Qu focuses on Zhang's late works on the troubled memories relating to her mother, in this study I discern that what Qu regards as a practice of rewriting and self-reinterpretation has been in existence ever since Zhang became a full-blooming writer, showing through her heavy reliance on reinventing contents over repetitive themes.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. 4.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Another entry point to examine the sequence of adjustments, translation, and rewriting that revolves around the novella "Jinsuo Ji" has been proposed by Jessica Tsui-Yan Li. On the reason why "Jinsuo ji" finally transformed to the later novel *Rouge of the North*, Li builds a connection between American 1960s politics and movements against gender-racial discriminations and bias, and Zhang's probable receptivity on the subject, epitomized by Li's observation of a "more heterogeneous and fluid conceptualizing of the female body of Yindi in Chang's novels." Please see: Jessica Tsui Yan Li, "Self-translation/Rewriting: The Female Body in Eileen Chang's 'Jinsuo Ji', the Rouge of the North, Yuannü and 'The Golden Cangue,'" *Neohelicon* 37, no. 2 (November 6, 2009): 391–403, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11059-009-0028-y>, pp.394.

Insofar, concrete studies have already been done on the much-celebrated writer. Nonetheless, beginning from the foundations laid by these scholarships, I proceed to significantly expand the study on Zhang Ailing's earlier works in chapter one and two, with regards to a shown feature of repetition which might be interpreted as a form of reproduction or emulation of a closed space or a stalemate, while also demonstrating a trait of simultaneous rewriting, which serves to increment the dimensions of her writing capacity; Such is given that this constitutes an overlooked area in her writing. The threads are given via Zhang's repetitious emphasis in multiple works, on a claustrophobically confining ambience, which was parallel to the drastic social changes occurring in Shanghai. I believe that the writer's ability to spellbind the readers to a logically-structured enclosure, akin to the exploration of "grotesqueness," has sought its inspiration from both the influx of western Gothic literatures and the bedrock Chinese modern literature represented by the leading writer Lu Xun. Moreover, in chapter three, it will be demonstrated that this parallel of the two elements has bestowed the fabric of the text, and been united by the advent of modernity. The key terms that I presume, as a presumptive attempt to grasp Zhang's era, are: Claustrophobia, Modernity and Otherness, represented by the intertwining between terror and horror; and I believe all of these are strongly present in Zhang's early work.

## II. Literature Review

Without first placing Zhang Ailing within the intricate and always shifting historical setting of China during the Semi-Colonial era, this study would have run the risk of reinforcing generalizations, blurring the author's identity or merely tending to the facade. One recognizes that a lot of critical works on Zhang have already provided intelligent and convincing arguments regarding her lasting influence and contradictions.

Liang Muling, a scholar who examines modern literature in Shanghai, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, characterized Zhang's writing style as innovatively exploring an alternative method to imagine what China is, an idiosyncratic angle arising from East Asian colonial history.<sup>32</sup> In Liang's point of view, Zhang's artistry of creating impressive cinematics through text which mobilizes the senses had the same context of *Shinkankakuha* (Original written in Japanese kanji: 新感覺派)—Neo-Sensationalism, which served an effect emulating (orig. 模擬) Colonial Literatures as its writers often cast a sensational and yet alienating gaze upon young women of the East who took up western-inspired apparel.<sup>33</sup> Liang contends that Zhang's earlier experience growing up in Shanghai's concession, attending Christian missionary school and receiving traditional Classical Chinese education since infancy motivated her appropriating the alienating gaze of Colonialism and rewriting the hierarchy of power, transforming it into a gaze which restored the realistic values to the "indolent, decadent and mixed" (orig. 慵懶, 頹廢, 混雜的) East in the gaze of the West.<sup>34</sup> According to Liang, what composite of Ailing Zhang's attention in her early fiction was the minute detailing of the Eastern gadgets, food, decors, the colony life in

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<sup>32</sup> Muling Liang, *Shi Jue Xing Bie Yu Quan Li: Cong Liu Na Ou. Mu Shi Ying Dao Zhang Ai Ling de Xiao Shuo Xiang Xiang* (Taipei, Taiwan: Linking Publishing Co., 2018), 14.

<sup>33</sup> Liang, *Shi Jue Xing Bie Yu Quan Li*. 52-58.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.* 110.

Hong Kong, and other Eastern fantasies which captivated the settlers; the narrator's tone was dissociative, and its observance exposed Orientalism's bizarreness and a sense of introspection on the colonists' gape.<sup>35</sup> On the other hand, given that the various characters in Ailing Zhang's narration (including the colonizers in Liang's discussion) were coequally unpalatable and exotic, falling into the decadence of the colonized land under the watch of Zhang's.

It would, therefore, reshape the two cities, Hong Kong and Shanghai accordingly; the colony and semi-colony which had become the two major settings of Zhang Ailing's early *ouvres*—the desolate worlds in which only matter remained. Men living in the sites in her novel had become the predestined constituents of the spectacle. In one respect, Zhang candidly criticized the colonizers. Their melancholy and disarray amid an imagined, extravagant, and materialistic 'Orient' (anatomized by the writer as a form of hypocrisy) and the locals-in-want parodying of their vision in order to adhere to the power system togetherly gave a satirical genre imagery. Nevertheless, the characters who were playing the roles of 'Oriental' are too often simultaneously subjugated as a sensational, exotic device dramatically contradicting the transforming Shanghai-born protagonists equipped with both reserved, traditionalist personalities and an anguish to obtain security in a gentrifying and polarizing society.

Zhang's novella "Aloeswood Incense: The First Brazier", one of the instances cited and analyzed by Liang<sup>36</sup>, has the frequently seen and classic plot of inversion, coalescence and revelation: an innocent and assiduous Shanghainese student came to Hong Kong for education and found herself defamed and manipulated by her romantic interest George and her aunt's collusion, and consequently became a courtesan working under her aunt's wings (whose house was fashioned in style of the 'Orient') to support George's living. In the story, the heroine Ge

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<sup>35</sup> Liang, *Shi Jue Xing Bie Yu Quan Li*, 112-114.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.* 208.

Weilong arrived at her well-to-do aunt's doorstep unknowing the latter's means, immediately struck by the artless and coquettish manner of the housemaids. Here ensues an elaborate description of Weilong's gaze at these maids:

Her aunt's housemaids seemed full of mischief—the sweet-and-sour type. They were jaunty, clopping back and forth on the veranda in wooden clogs. Just then, one of them called out sweetly: "Glance, who's that in the living room?"

"I think it's someone from Young Mistress's family."

Judging from her voice, Glance was the one who'd poured tea for Weilong—a long face and a water-snake waist, and though she wore a braid down her back like the others, her bangs fell loosely forward.<sup>37</sup>

Readers who are familiar with this novella would notice that "sweet-and-sour type" is an on-the-spot allusion of Ge Weilong's recollection about someone's risqué remark on Hong Kong's beauty standard, "One time somebody made a wisecrack, saying that if girls from Canton and Hunan, with their deep-set eyes and high cheeks, were sweet-and-sour pork bones, then Shanghai girls were flour-dipped pork dim sum."<sup>38</sup> However, although annoyed by being objectified as merely a type, Weilong thereupon coolly brought the stereotypical judgment into play: there was acquiescence to that set of values in her inspection—Glance and the other housemaid Glint from heads to toes were indeed an exotic taste alien to Shanghai, while both

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<sup>37</sup> Please see: Eileen Chang, "Aloeswood Incense: The First Brazier". *Love in a Fallen City* (New York Review Books Classics). New York Review Books. 9.

<sup>38</sup> Chang, "Aloeswood". 9.

exhibited flippant personae somewhat complemented by the description on Glance's body shape. ['Water-snake waist (orig. 水蛇腰)' is an allusion from the classical novel *A Dream in the Red Chamber* written in the eighteenth century, in which it describes a daring housemaid's sultry, curvy waist. Zhang's choice of this allusion in the given context may be ascribed to her anticipation that readers would possess enough insight to grasp its meaning and evoke the intended association.]

Even more so, the names given to the housemaids by Weilong's aunt—Glance (*Di-di* 睇睇) and Glint (*Ni-er* 睨儿)—are not appropriate names for individuals. The words composite of the names (*Di* and *Ni*) in Mandarin stand for the conduct of looking askance<sup>39</sup>; in certain circumstances, these words could have connotations of one being voyeuristic or furtive in the conduct of watching. I am inquisitive about whether Zhang created these names for the maids to enhance the escapist atmosphere of the 'Oriental' estate and its owner's odd taste of aesthetics, or to give a hint about the maids' appearance and personality (as these names draw attention to the act of looking and may indicate that the maids can be the focus of voyeuristic attention)—or perhaps both. But in point of fact, although there is indication of the empowerment in terms of feminine gaze associated with their names, the hint remained faint as the maids' characterization did not showcase character arcs but rather overshadowed by Weilong's arc of development—shown by the reflection of Weilong's aunt:

This George Qiao was an evil star in her astral house, forever playing tricks on her. She'd tried using Glance to hook him, but he'd merely swallowed the bait and gone on swimming about, free as he pleased. After that, she'd

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<sup>39</sup> In Cantonese, the word "*Di*" is commonly used to mean "to look," but the word "*Ni*" has the same meaning as it does in Mandarin.

decided to take a loss, and to ignore him. But she couldn't keep Glance, not after all the ruckus he'd kicked up, and when Glance left it was like losing both of her hands. So she'd fired up the cooking pot again, and devoted all her energies to training Weilong. Putting her whole heart into the effort, she'd brought the girl along till she showed some promise. Weilong was just now making her debut, she was ten times more valuable than before, and now George turned up, once again, to feast on the fruits of others' toil. Even this was not enough; he'd casually taken Glint too. Madame Liang had lost a queen and a pawn. All her best personnel has been netted by this fellow—how could she not be angry?<sup>40</sup>

George had been the beau of Weilong's aunt for a long time; eventually she found out that George was too calculating to be a patron of hers and also was not a person easy to be tied down. All of her pawns had been mesmerized by George yet no one was able to exert an influence on him. It was from this point that Glint and Glance retired from the narrative as the trusted subordinates of Madame Liu whereas Weilong legitimately filled their vacancy to assist Madame Liu.

What had been taking place in Weilong's transformation was just like what Liang has argued: Zhang Ailing had twisted the perceived high place of gazing—the gaze from the colonizers to the colonized as well as the one from male to female—burlesquing the peculiar absurdity via reminding the readers the distance between the narrator and the characters. The injustice was deliberated over, and Weilong had been established as a character with a conflicting mood that was obvious to the readers but not to herself— on one hand she was aware of the

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid. 62-63.

hypocrisy of men, and on the other hand she could not help internalizing the prerogative of watching.<sup>41</sup> Nevertheless, when Zhang brought the readers to the locale of Hong Kong with the gaze of an outsider—Primarily, it is pertinent to note that the language used in Hong Kong differs significantly from both Mandarin and Shanghainese. Zhang also paid a considerable amount of effort to elucidating the distinctions in the local population's physical appearance and wear, as experienced through the lens of a Shanghainese perspective. — there remains the presence of a third kind of gaze: The individual embarks on a journey from their hometown, which had been tightly linked to the refined customs and traditions of the gentry class, to a distant region wholly strayed from the former's cultural atmosphere. The act of observing evoked a sense of longing for the cultural sustenance, and presented a clear contrast with the predecessors', such as Lu Xun's and Shen Congwen's expressions of ambivalence or nostalgia towards their hometowns and bygone eras. It was a private revelation which self-refers to her conception of China's socio-cultural stratum. Simultaneously, Zhang was sharing this power of watching (and to scrutinize, to some extent) to her audience, predominantly urban dwellers who identified as Shanghainese. In her book *Women War, Domesticity*, Nichole Huang explores the relationship between wartime Shanghai and female authors. She initiates a conversation on the themes of domesticity and modernism that were present in the personas of Shanghai's women writers.

Nicole Huang pointed out that Zhang, promoted by woman's journals whose readership was middlebrow readers at the time, was clearly in accordance with a marketing strategy to associate domesticity with 'modern' Shanghainese women viewed as 'new' and 'voguish'<sup>42</sup> ; and

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<sup>41</sup> Muling Liang, *Shi Jue Xing Bie Yu Quan Li*. 221-222.

<sup>42</sup> What makes a Shanghainese a 'modern' woman? In 1928, The English newspaper in Shanghai *North-China Herald* began to advance the public discussion of young modern Chinese women describing them as radical girl students – "As these short-haired young women, who talked about

accordingly it created a collective modernized urban Shanghainese identity and moral codes, as well as the city's resilience and cultural particularity.<sup>43</sup> What is discrete about Huang's study is that she stresses the same mechanism had been working when Chinese women's image and domestic culture had been showcased in Japanese-sponsored journals after late 1941— when Japan fully occupied Shanghai and marked the closure of the city's Orphan Island Era.<sup>44</sup> Zhang obtained a new look through invoking the pre-modern Chinese classical arts tradition "from the late nineteenth century"<sup>45</sup>, combining it with "contemporary commercial visual arts"<sup>46</sup>; they

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free love and government positions in the same breath, are no longer concerned with the search for a rich husband to give them ease and position... So they question blandly and continue to do as they please regardless of masculine censure..." (Please see: "Where Are You Going My Pretty Maid?---Miss Kao Kunshan Answers Some Questions About Girl Students," interview by L.B.W, *North China Herald*, February 18, 1928. pp. 287.) Therefore, it is evident that the changing womanhood that made a clear-cut definition peculiarly hard to find.

As recent collaborated scholarship has argued, 'Modern Girl' was a global buzzword from 1920s to 1930s, and yet in each locale the term adapted to the geographical, socio-political, cultural and economic contexts and customs.[Please see: Alys Eve Weinbaum et al., eds., *The Modern Girl around the World: Consumption, Modernity, and Globalization* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009). 2-5] When "'modernity'" was introduced into China and morphed into the representation of western-led fashion trends, it carried the colonial and commercializing interests, albeit simultaneously it was employed by the local populace as free, artistic expression—therein 'Modern Girl' had been a "'manifestation as a style, an icon and a performance. It is in these guises that 'modern girlness' was appropriated by married as well as unmarried women, and as easily invoked in advertisements for anti-bed bug remedies as in those for cosmetics." (Please see: Alys Eve Weinbaum et al., eds., *The Modern Girl*. 11-12.)

Still, one finds Nicole Huang's argument of 'modernity' well grounded: Being a 'modern' woman was reproducing a myth and embodiment of the ideals whose formation largely points to "self-refinement" and "a sense of fictiveness" which omits other less appealing parts of reality. [Please see: Nicole Huang, *Women, War, Domesticity*, 120.]

<sup>43</sup> Nicole Huang, *Women, War, Domesticity: Shanghai Literature and Popular Culture of the 1940's* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2005), 110-112.

<sup>44</sup> Huang, *Women, War, Domesticity*. 85-89.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid. 89

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

generated "a hybrid product that was essentially a middlebrow form of art. Wherein Shanghai's relationship with 'Westernization' as a chapter of colonial history was obscured and meticulously transformed to the triumph of Japan, its new colonial pan-Asian empire."<sup>47</sup> Huang's perspective undoubtedly pointed out that Zhang's works exhibit intrinsic contradictions which align closely with the cultural and historical backdrop of Shanghai. This encompasses the convergence of established and emerging powers, the dawning of a relatively new political hierarchy, and the underlying trend of business enterprises transitioning towards mainstream and expansive operations in the contemporary day.

What remained understudied, however, is pertaining to how the writer's persona encompassed aspects beyond what was expected of, politically, "domesticity". For example, the interplay of her writing career with her apolitical self-representation. Nicole Huang delves into more details of what was left out of her earlier writings in another essay "Eileen Chang and Things Japanese." Huang noted that Zhang's infamous former-spouse Hu Lancheng was the person who, if not initiating, accentuated Zhang's myth as he lauded Zhang as a 'celestial being' at a time when they were in love.<sup>48</sup> Huang cast doubts upon Zhang's wartime career as a professional writer and an unapologetic consumer of imports from Japan; She revealingly suggests the construct of Japan's imperialist presence lying underneath the wonder at the radiant soft goods and textiles from Japan, and big-hit Japanese homefront cinema. And even in Zhang's written work, Huang contends, a lack-of-depth and even stereotypical fascination has been harbored towards Japan's culture, and an attempt to overgeneralize Japanese national character

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Kam Louie and Nicole Huang, "Eileen Chang and Things Japanese," essay, in *Eileen Chang: Romancing Languages, Cultures and Genres* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2012). Kindle.

was observed too. The gravitational attraction that was present whenever Japan was brought up in Zhang's was summarized by Huang as 'feminization of Japanese culture.'<sup>49</sup>

Zhang's attempt to feminize the worldwide depiction of Japanese culture reveals her sometimes indifference for the authenticity of her recollections and her tendency to impose her own subjective perspective. Zhang's work has seen a decrease in the importance placed on textual critique and integration, as evidenced in several noteworthy instances. To enumerate, Zhang in her album memoir *Duizhao Ji* (orig. 對照記) had once paraphrased several passages from the biographical novel *Flowers in the Evil Sea* (orig. 孽海花) regarding the anecdotes of her grandparents; However, some specific pieces of information she provided were found to be inaccurately stated, perhaps solely coming from her memories of life events.<sup>50</sup> In *Love In A Fallen City*, the well-to-do returnee Fan Liuyuan sought the heroine of her affection with an extract from the Chinese cannon *Book of Song*, and a few phrases taken from the poetry had been altered without foreshadowing or supplementary editorial notes; the meaning of this alteration has only vague implication.<sup>51</sup> Lastly, Zhang's lecture on translations, which she delivered while

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<sup>49</sup> Louie and Huang, "Ailing Zhang and Things Japanese," *Kindle*.

<sup>50</sup> Please see: Yongxiang Liu, "'Ji Long' Shih De Liu Chuan—'Ji Long' Shih Yu Zhang Li Yin Yuan/The Circulation of 'Chicken Coop' Poem---Examining the Poem and the Marriage between Zhang and Li)", *Oriental Morning Post*, March 16, 2016, sec. Shanghai Book Review, <https://www.duxieren.com/shanghaishuping/201603.shtml>.

<sup>51</sup> However, as Kam Louie in his essay had pointed out, the verse appearing in the text had been altered, and he gave a sound conjecture: "Liuyuan (or Ailing Zhang) may have deliberately used the wrong word here, so that he says let's enjoy each other's company now, without the suggestion of a promise. Or maybe Eileen Chang, like so many other writers, who cite classical poetry, had simply forgotten the verse and used the wrong words in the text when she wrote the story, even though she clearly knows the right version because she uses the correct words in her essay on writing this story, 'Writing of One's Own (*Zi Ji De Wen Zhang* 自己的文章, 1944)."[Please see: Kam Louie, "Romancing Returnee Men: Masculinity in 'Love in a Fallen City' and 'Red Rose, White Rose' ," essay, in *Eileen Chang: Romancing Languages, Cultures and Genres*, ed. Kam Louie (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2012). *Kindle*. ] I personally agree with Kam that artistic decision may have played an important role in this

working for Radcliffe Institute at Harvard, had a rambling structure as a typescript. It dives into the depths of memory and recounts her experiences throughout historical events, as noted by Christopher Lee.<sup>52</sup> Lee provides commentary on the typescript, with the aim of introducing Chinese translation to a Western audience unfamiliar with China's cultural development. Meanwhile, Zhang has assumed the position of a cultural intermediary, proactively facilitating the transmission of cultural knowledge:

Zhang speaks as an avid reader, and the inclusion of numerous authors and works, sometimes with little explanation, reconstructs the literary milieu in which her writing emerged. Even though she does not directly address her own experiences as a translator, she calls attention to the West's tendency to exoticize China while dismissing its modernity as inauthentic and unworthy of interest, prejudices that adversely affected her reception in the United States.<sup>53</sup>

The commentary also included a remark that the intense discussions and critiques on the ideologies and politics had proven Zhang's well-known apolitical public image to be false or carefully constructed.<sup>54</sup> However, despite its title suggesting that the message is about a Chinese translation methodology, the content actually consists of brief summaries of historical events.

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miscitation, but still, Zhang had left no remarks in that essay concerning the Zhang for one to be inquisitive.

<sup>52</sup> Eileen Chang and Christopher Lee, "Chinese Translation: A Vehicle of Cultural Influence," *PMLA/Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 130, no. 2 (2015): 488–99, <https://doi.org/10.1632/pmla.2015.130.2.488>. p.488.

<sup>53</sup> Chang and Lee, "Chinese Translation." 489.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.* 489.

These events include the Chinese reception of western literature and separate translation projects that have helped introduce western philosophies and ideologies since the twentieth century. And such insight exemplifies a constraint in Zhang's method or willingness of building a clear framework, albeit the expression retains a lasting allure that transcends different eras.

### III. "Jasmine Tea," Nation and Enclosure

One could then go further back to examine Zhang Ailing's earlier pattern of writing, beyond the implication regarding her often toned-down relationship with Japanese culture during war and the inseparability between her promoting Shanghainese identity and Shanghai commercial and printing culture that had offered the surroundings. Which in the main may be classified as the tragedy or dead-ends with the strong foundation from Butterfly school, mixed with the critical angle to assert individuality provided by the widespread of civic movements, philosophical debates, movies and literature from overseas. It could be said that it was "novelty" that Zhang was after, but the content was driven by a repetitious act of rewriting/adapting existing real-life materials—The most telling tale besides her various rewritten childhood stories, was how Zhang enraged her uncle by writing his family stories into the widely-read novellas filled with unflattering and scandalous descriptions.<sup>55</sup>

The first instance of Zhang's rewriting project may have shown up as early as she was 14-year-old, converting the classical novel *A Dream of the Red Mansion* into a modernized urban romance with the assistance of her father. Whose plots, according to Hoyan, involve all the novelties: a lawsuit, fashion shows and going abroad.<sup>56</sup> The first of her attempts to emulate the formula of a melodramatic tragic story, however, started with her first piece of writing even much earlier; Hoyan remarks it to be an imitation of the Butterfly school writing.<sup>57</sup> The school

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<sup>55</sup> See Zhang Zijing's account on the novella "*Hua Diao*" and "The Golden Cangue" in *My Sister Zhang Ailing*:

<sup>56</sup> Hoyan 53.

<sup>57</sup> According to Hoyan, "Zhang's first creative writing is an untitled family tragedy. This butterflies-style short story, written at the age of seven, involves the female protagonist's murder of her sister-in-law. Later, in primary school, Zhang attempted another butterflies-story about a love triangle, which ended with the female protagonist committing suicide. The choice of a

flourished in the first two decades of the twentieth century; It is often known for its involutory attitude to "Literary Revolution"<sup>58</sup> and styles itself as a continuum of classical Chinese literature of both morality and enjoyment, though it may sometimes address concerns towards state and culture.<sup>59</sup> To summarize, it may also be characterized as an umbrella category for the citizen-writers who announced no clear ambition in the "deflating and perplexing period that followed, hence the trivialization."<sup>60</sup>

The core has run remarkably consistent in the vein as Zhang writes in her earlier career, as she has declared her interest on imitating the structure of classical novels in a myriad of essays on her writing; And, the majority of her novels focus on the citizens' life in the urban scene rather than responding to the revolutionary ideals. Nevertheless, Zhang received very little criticism, except for two times: once from the commentator and translator Fu Lei (orig.傅雷),<sup>61</sup>

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family tragedy reveals Zhang's early interest in the complicated human relationships in traditional extended family." Ibid. 52

<sup>58</sup> The concept is proposed by Liang Qichao and finalized by Chen Duxiu. Please see: Michel Hockx, "The Involuntary Tradition in Modern Chinese Literature," in *Cambridge University Press eBooks*, 2008, 235–52, <https://doi.org/10.1017/ccol9780521863223.012>. pp. 235.

<sup>59</sup> Hockx, "The Involuntary Tradition." 238-239.

<sup>60</sup> D. E. Pollard, "Mandarin Ducks and Butterflies: Popular Fiction in Early Twentieth-Century Chinese Cities." By Perry Link. pp.524.

<sup>61</sup> The opening of Fu Lei's article: "In an era of depression, in places where the water and soil are particularly unsuitable[for a writer to grow], no one has any illusion to expect rare-found flowers to emerge from the literary garden. However, the most significant incidents in the world often happen when you are not prepared. Historians or sociologists would use logic to prove that accidental incidents are actually the result of long-term planning. But the public who do not have this kind of analytical mind always feel that there is something like a magic wand directing the world, and every new incident seems to fall from the sky, making people somewhat unprepared to introspect if they are sad or happy. This is the first impression Ms. Zhang Ailing's works have given readers. "It was so unexpected, so miraculous!"—The reader never really expressed an opinion other than such far-fetched ones. Maybe it was too unexpected that they were stunned. Maybe people are always timid, so that unless a clear public opinion is established, the wisest way for them is to be ambiguous. But public opinion must be cultivated by the public; and the growth of literature and arts urgently needs substantial social criticism, not caution or cold

and once from another translator and editor Man Tao (orig. 滿濤). According to Zhang's biographer and scholar Chen Zishan, Man Tao wrote to criticize Fu Lei, for the latter was overly supportive of Zhang. Man Tao was dissatisfied with the endorsement, for Zhang had expressed her fondness for reading the British novelist and travel writer Stella Benson's works.<sup>62</sup> He was upset as he perceived Stella Benson as serving a contemptible objective of Christian missionaries. (According to Chen, in 1920, Benson did come to Hong Kong and worked for the American parochial schools. Man Tao might have acquired a prejudice toward this knowledge.<sup>63</sup>) And Fu Lei, in his critique of Zhang's writing, had stated Zhang was a writer comparable to Romain Rolland, which led Man Tao to believe that such was to draw an equation between Rolland and Benson.<sup>64</sup> Besides these two open letters of critiques, none of the others from the Revolutionary camp had been known for finding faults in Zhang's "political attitude"—In fact, to Man Tao's puzzlement, Zhang's works were popular even in Beijing, a city that had a thoroughly different political climate than Shanghai and was the pivot of Chinese civic and political movements including May Fourth. Zhang felt the pressure and censorship on her creativity only following the end of the 1949 Shanghai Campaign, in which Kuomintang ceded power over

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silence. If you like or dislike something for being right or wrong, you might as well just say it. If you have said something wrong or interpreted something wrong, someone will definitely correct it for you—This isn't a matter about your dignity." Which is generally considered as mild political-related criticism, for Fu Lei did praise Zhang's literary skills and "The Golden Cangue" before he made his dissatisfaction clear on some of her novellas' lack of engagement to realistic details. Please see: Lei Fu, "Lun Zhang Ailing De Xiaoshuo=論張愛玲的小說 (On Zhang Ailing's works of fiction)," *Wan Xiang*, May 1944. pp.48-60.

<sup>62</sup> Zishan Chen, "Fu Lei Peng Zhang Ailing Weihe Bei Tongma=傅雷捧張愛玲為何被痛罵 (The logic behind the lashing out on Fu Lei for his praise of Zhang Ailing)," *The Paper*, August 1, 2015, [https://www.thepaper.cn/newsDetail\\_forward\\_1359090](https://www.thepaper.cn/newsDetail_forward_1359090).

<sup>63</sup> Chen, "Fu Lei Peng Zhang Ailing Weihe Bei Tongma."

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

Shanghai to CCP. Her stress was palpable, given that she seldom published novels using a pen name.<sup>65</sup>

The reason for this phenomenon of immense encouragement and recognition is evident: Not only did Zhang have an exceptional skill to write and reason with her critics, but she was writing from a "New Literature" standpoint to criticize matters of society from a feminine intellectual perspective, who, along with other female writers such as Su Qing, filled the vacancy for addressing "women's opinions" in Shanghai publishing culture. The most well-known example is the social salon interview that Zhang and Su Qing participated in 1945, in addressing the dilemma of women choosing between a job and domestic life; but most of the discussion lacked a central focus, either spreading over unnecessary domestic anecdotes or over-generalizing the conditions of Shanghainese women.<sup>66</sup> Given Nicole Huang's research has been covered in the last chapter, these types of conversations and interviews can be understood as a self-marketing tactic in Shanghai. Yet, it may also be viewed as Zhang's take in supplying to the performance of her national intellectual identity. Furtherly speaking, it may be argued that a liberal vein of social criticism is co-existing with Zhang's Butterfly school practice, and may be

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<sup>65</sup> Chen Zishan suggests that before 1949, there may be an occasion where Zhang used a pseudonym "Shimin (orig. 世民)" to write columns for the "Women Circles (orig. 女人圈)" section in a Hong Kong tabloid. At that time, the topics of these articles may be considered as too morally ambiguous or reputation damaging for a famous writer to touch on. One of them was titled "The unchanging legs," reportedly an ode to women's thighs. [Please see: Zishan Chen, "Zhang Ailing Youyi Yiwen Bei Faxian: Zheci Zushi Nainai Yong De Shi Biming =张爱玲又一佚文被发现:这次祖师奶奶用的是笔名 (Another Unknown Writing of Zhang Ailing Has Been Discovered: This Time She Is Using a Pen Name)," *The Paper*, June 20, 2015, [https://m.thepaper.cn/newsDetail\\_forward\\_1343444](https://m.thepaper.cn/newsDetail_forward_1343444).]

<sup>66</sup> "Su Qing Zhang Ailing Duitan Ji--- on Women, Family, Marriage and Other Issues=苏青张爱玲对谈记——关于妇女、家庭、婚姻诸问题 (Su Qing and Zhang Ailing's Conversation—on Women, Family, Marriage and Other Issues)," interview by Qing Su and Eileen Chang, *Za Zhi*, March 1945.

connected with Stella Benson's influences, who had been famous for being a satirical writer and an advocate for women suffrages.<sup>67</sup>

Interestingly, as Debra Rae Cohen's research has suggested, Benson's wartime novels are also known for the theme of "conflicting ideologies on the home front by means of a complex interplay of realism and fantasy."<sup>68</sup> Although one may argue that Benson's fantastical elements came directly from mythologies,<sup>69</sup> while Zhang has shown no such relish in exploring the mythical, Cohen in the essay did suggest that Benson's novels in this period could be characterized by recurrences of "evasions and exclusions...[representing] the home-front experience as a battle of enclosures"<sup>70</sup> through the fantasies; and that, "the fantasy structures rarely survive for the length of the novel."<sup>71</sup> In summary, in Benson's wartime works, there seems to be far from a rhapsodic atmosphere ensuing the imagery of fantasies, that a work will reveal itself as a "site of self-deconstructing rhetorics, unstable gender and pervasive doubt."<sup>72</sup> In terms of the pattern of enclosure, Zhang's focus on the themes of crushing and harrowing morbidity during war suggests that she may possess similar tendencies as Benson. Therefore, it may be interesting to look at the theme of similar circumstances of enclosures in Zhang's earlier work, as portrayed by "Jasmine Tea," a novella with an obscured backdrop of time and high-strung notes of rising antagonism, national insecurity, pipedreams and disenchantment.

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<sup>67</sup> Andrew Doyle, "The Snake Within the Suffragette Movement," *UnHerd*, September 14, 2023, <https://unherd.com/2023/08/the-snake-within-the-suffragette-movement-stella-benson/>.

<sup>68</sup> Debra Rae Cohen, "Encoded Enclosures: The Wartime Novels of Stella Benson," in *Palgrave Macmillan UK eBooks*, 2001, 37–54, [https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230599895\\_4](https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230599895_4). pp.38

<sup>69</sup> Cohen, "Encoded Enclosures," 38.

<sup>70</sup> Cohen, 38-39.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.* 39.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

## **Overview of "Jasmine Tea"**

In the novella "Jasmine Tea", the male protagonist Chuanqing was a lean, moderately good-looking and meek university student in Hong Kong emigrated from Shanghai, whose frail appearance looked to have borne his mental scars from domestic violence. While he was from an opium-addicted dysfunctional family infused with neglect and abuse, Danzhu was described as a robust, tanned and charming woman with chubby cheeks, whose father Yan Ziyue happened to be a former boyfriend of Chuanqing's deceased mother and a Chinese Literature professor teaching in their university. Chuanqing often wondered what life could be if his mother ended up marrying Yan's father instead of his—then, wouldn't he become another Danzhu, the glowing son of a sharp and handsome intellectual?

To further matters, Danzhu—whom he felt did not deserve to have a father like Ziyue—had admitted she never thought of him as a man, but more of a feminine confidant. The accumulating rage of Chuanqing finally exploded one day, after he was lambasted by Yan Ziyue during a class as a lazy and cowardly youth who had corrupted the nation. He was ordered to exit the classroom. Later, Danzhu found Chuanqing and tried to console him, but her words were more protective of her father and made him even more hostile and confused. He tried to figure out whether Danzhu kept hanging around him meant she was secretly attracted to him; if so, he thought, matrimony could allow him to keep a tie with the family of Yans. However, Danzhu's plain-spoken denial of that possibility became Chuanqing's last straw; he felt that Danzhu had been taking advantage of his "effeminacy" for long, so he strode away from her with fury. Meanwhile, Danzhu just came to realize Chuanqing had long been thinking of her as a potential partner; Blaming it on herself and taking pity on him, she once again caught up with Chuanqing,

who at that point started to wish her to be dead. In the frenzy, Chuanqing acted violently to Danzhu and battered her to the point that she was lying lifelessly on the ground. He left her there and returned home. At home, since he returned past the curfew, his step-mother talked to his father about wanting to marry someone to him, so that they could control his "unruly" behavior. Chuanqing felt dread, and his focus finally switched back to the topic of Danzhu. The conclusion of the story goes: "His mouth twitches a little, as if he wants to smile, but he can't smile at all, like a layer of ice has numbed his face. Another layer of ice seems to have begun to numb his body as well—Danzhu isn't dead. When school starts in two days, he still has to see her there. There's no place to hide away."<sup>73</sup>

"Jasmine Tea" shows a strong feature as a psychological fiction, rich in the complex interactions among multifaceted reality and one's formed beliefs. Moreover, as Macdonald has argued, it can be interpreted as a discussion on sexuality and alliance<sup>74</sup>, interfaced with Zhang's "existential view of life"<sup>75</sup> as an alternative reading to modernity. Nonetheless, I am discontent with Macdonald's analysis in one point: It is misleading to state that Chuanqing came to believe Yan Ziyi "to be his father,"<sup>76</sup> and that he was "obsessed"<sup>77</sup> by paternity. I would contend that what Yan Ziyi signified in Chuanqing's vision is more aligned with the traditional image of a sage-teacher figure rather than a "father." The Confucian scholar Han Yu (orig. 韓愈) addressed the image of an ideal kind of teacher in his essay "On The Teacher (orig. 師說)," emphasizing

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<sup>73</sup> My translation. Eileen Chang, "Jasmine Tea," *Bo Wen Shu Ku*, n.d., <http://www.bwsk.com/mj/z/zhangailing/000/020.htm>.

<sup>74</sup> Macdonald, 171-172.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.* 175.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.* 178.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*

that the Teacher's excellence ought to exceed all others in terms of promoting all aspects of learning, even surpassing a child's father.

In ancient times scholars always had teachers. It takes a teacher to transmit the Way, impart knowledge and resolve doubts. Since man is not born with knowledge, who can be without doubt? But doubt will never be resolved without a teacher...

He who loves his son selects a teacher for the child's education, but he is ashamed to learn from a teacher himself. He is indeed deluded. The teacher of a child is one who gives instruction on books and on the punctuation of sentences. This is not what I meant when I talked about one who transmits the Way and resolves doubts. To take a teacher for instruction in correct punctuation and not to take a teacher to help resolve doubts is to learn the unimportant and leave out the important. I do not see the wisdom of it.<sup>78</sup>

As Chuanqing was a student in the least familiar with the classical literature,<sup>79</sup> and also as his aesthetic appreciation of Ziyue's appearance started in the sanctuary of their university, I therefore propose that a Teacher who is more than a scholar, father and (perhaps) a lover was probably what Chuanqing had been fantasizing for. Chuanqing had never believed his abusive biological

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<sup>78</sup> Yu Han, "On The Teacher," trans. Shih Shun Liu, *Renditions*, no. 8 (August 1977), <https://www.cuhk.edu.hk/rct/renditions/sample/b08.html>.

<sup>79</sup> The evidence is shown in the speech with his step-mother, when she laughed at him choosing a major of Chinese that basically repeated what he had already learned about classical poetry.

father was not his father, nor did he actually imagine himself calling Ziyue his "father" or "step-father," but only imagining the possibility of being a son. Further, Chuanqing was well aware that Ziyue had been living abroad for several years while his mother was married into the Nies' family and never returned to see his mother. Hence, what had driven Chuanqing to disillusionment and violence may not be only interpreted as a resentment of misplacement nor an embittered sibling rivalry. It could be a combination of longing for the attention from a male representing superior knowledges and mind strength, and a sense of uncertainty about his masculinity—The latter, as a scholarship has stated, is linked to the history of Imperialism, the ransacked late Qing and Chinese national self-esteem, as well as the original cultured ideal of "maleness".<sup>80</sup>

As an overview, it is evident that Zhang was writing to parody a mentality experiencing a dilemma, in which one had no way else to turn to. The concise framework of the novella's narrative works as a reductive site converging viewpoints from both the characters and narrator, may be aiming at setting the readership in an experience of discourses rather than confronting a specific one. Thus, I assume the critique of a congruent national image is not lucid in the text but hidden in the characterization of Ziyue, the subject of Chuanqing's fantasy. Ziyue, beyond his image as a professor and nationalist intellectual, had been a lover known for having multiple romances at different times. Although Chuanqing believed Ziyue to be a faithful suitor and mourner of his mother—another typical imagining of a poet-lover—even two decades after the heartbreak, this belief has never been confirmed by the text. Instead, Danzhu said Ziyue was

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<sup>80</sup> Gladys Pak Lei Chong, "Chinese Bodies That Matter: The Search for Masculinity and Femininity," *International Journal of the History of Sport* 30, no. 3 (February 1, 2013): 242–66, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09523367.2012.754428>. pp.244.

feeling deeply disappointed by Chuanqing, because the latter behaved poorly in class, spoiling his foundation in traditional Chinese learning.

Zhang used the term "*guowen*" in the original to convey the phrase "foundation in Chinese," whose literal meaning is "nation literature." *Guowen* has been a common-seen usage in early modern China when referring to Chinese education, whose emergence so far can be traced to the nineteenth century, as a phrase meaning "teaching conducted in Chinese" in a parochial school's curriculum<sup>81</sup>. Then, from the Self-strengthening Movement in the 1860s to the establishment of Nanyang Public School (orig. 南洋公學) in 90s, the term had gradually become more associated the Chinese education of the state.<sup>82</sup> In other words, when Chuanqing was thinking about the possibility of Ziye being driven by a mixture of revenge mentality and fatherly concern to humiliate him in the classroom, what Ziye was actually thinking about was a nationalistic cause.

The essay of Macdonald skips from examining Zhang's subtle critical tone towards the illusionary image of Yan Ziye. He interprets him as a device or projected concept to explain Chuanqing's motivation. This method fails to look at how reinforcement of nationalism and masculinity has played a role in Chuanqing's violence, and how Chuanqing's violence and breakdown were connected to his first contact with another reality (other than the bleak one he faced when he returned home)—that Ziye was a man different from what he had seen through rose-colored glasses; thereby it misses Zhang's point made at the beginning of the novella, in

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<sup>81</sup> Qianqian Tang and Chengxian Du, "From 'Guo Wen' to 'Guo Yu': The Subject Revolution Underneath the Difference in Wording," *Modern Education Review*, no. 1 (2023): 41–53. pp.42-43.

<sup>82</sup> Tang and Du, "From 'Guo Wen' to 'Guo Yu'."43.

how this story may represent Colonial Hong Kong from her vision: "This pot of Jasmine tea that I brew for you is, perhaps, a little bit too bitter. And I am going to tell you a romance about Hong Kong; it can be as bitter as this pot of tea. Hong Kong is a beautiful city of magnificence, but it is sad as well."<sup>83</sup>

Masculinity, the antithesis of Chuanqing's effeminate facial feature and physique, seems to be constructed as a symbol of nationalist, heroic paternal figure that Yan Ziyue had stood for. The fact that Danzhu had grown up to be a healthy, carefree and "motherly"<sup>84</sup> girl coincided with Chuanqing's belief of Ziyue as a responsible model father; and Ziyue's work attire and physical appearance also matched the ideal image of a nationalistic great man that one may find in nationalist propaganda: which is, he is not conforming to an ideal of masculinity coming from a culture to which he does not belong, but he is poised, resolute and unorthodox in character. He can also be easily discerned from a woman, as he is conforming to the traditional standards of masculinity.

Yan Ziyue comes in and walks up to the podium. Chuanqing suddenly feels that he has never seen this man before. This is the first time Chuanqing comprehends the special, sober and unembellished beauty of the Chinese cheongsam robes. Chuanqing himself wears a robe for economic reasons, but like most young people, he in truth prefers suits. However, the loose-fitting gray silk robe and its draping folds makes Yan Ziyue's frame

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<sup>83</sup> My translation. (Chang, "Jasmine Tea.")

<sup>84</sup> Chuanqing had alleged Danzhu coaxing him like a toddler instead of a grown man, which may be understood as an "allergic" reaction from Chuanqing to see in Danzhu a potent mother he never had.

even more prominent than before. Chuanqing can't help but fantasize: If he was Yan Ziyue's child, would he look like Yan Ziyue? In all likelihood, they would be similar. Because unlike Danzhu, he is a boy.<sup>85</sup>

As this passage has shown, in Chuanqing's mind, the personality and political viewpoints of an individual could be reflected by how the person is dressed. Classical Chinese Literature in a western classroom (i.e. the university system) has been reinstated by Ziyue in and through his smartly-dressed Chinese intellectual clothing.

Regarding Danzhu expressing to Chuanqing that the foundation of Chinese study was lacking for Hong Kong students, Macdonald points out that a tonation of "subtle cultural hierarchy"<sup>86</sup> from Zhang's writing interrelated in the dynamics of Chuanqing and Danzhu's vision of Hong Kong, which I agree with. However, I argue that Chuanqing also kept another gender-biased familial and cultural hierarchy that could be passed down through generations clearly shown in his frustration and criticism of Danzhu's behavior as the daughter of Ziyue and how his words were connected to a conservative Confucian family values. Therefore, I disagree with Macdonald's interpretation of Chuanqing's mistreatment of Danzhu as a violence only to discuss an interfamilial relationship or substitute/step-relationships. Rather, it might also show an expression of violence that stems from the sense of dead end and anxiety in a situation lacking retreat. The situation has been a continual rhetoric from "Aloeswood," a narrative involving the colliding of Shanghai and Hong Kong, which resulted in the defeat in one's self and the subsequent and unavoidable dissolution of identity.

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<sup>85</sup> My translation. Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Macdonald, 179.

## Enclosure

As discussed in the last chapter, "Aloeswood Incense" is also a novella about the romance in Colonial Hong Kong, where the protagonist arrived from Shanghai and encountered an exotic "Oriental" culture alien to Shanghai. Yet, it may be noted that what is considered as exotic in that story is not the existing Hong Kong's high-class courtesan culture,<sup>87</sup> but the "bizarre" environment layered within the culture that was heavily influenced by the western tastes, as well as a more complicated exploitative and parasitic relationship between prostitutes and clients. While the Shanghai Courtesan Literature and guidebooks to brothels often cautioned the clients not to be fooled by the art of love of the courtesans in Shanghai,<sup>88</sup> Zhang Ailing's writing appears as an admonishment to the Shanghai students not to be deceived by boyfriends and relatives' feigned love in Hong Kong. Besides the implicit reiteration of a seemingly natural hierarchy of local cultures in China, there is a playful irony in the downfall of Shanghainese identity when it has been transplanted to another region, a sensation of otherness that arises from the desolation of losing one's assurance of self. This desolation has also been woven into the narrative of "Jasmine Tea."

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<sup>87</sup> Shanghai had a rich and long history of courtesan culture, in which the intricate dynamics between the clients and courtesans had long nourished a lineage of Courtesan Literature for entertaining and admonishing purposes alike. The culture has been penetrated by many unwritten rules and customs of hierarchy. One of them was that the non-Shanghainese courtesans' cultivated skills were always believed to be more exotic and tasteless than the local-born courtesans. Please refer to the comprehensive study of this culture: Gail Hershtatter, "Courtesans and Streetwalkers: The Changing Discourses on Shanghai Prostitution, 1890-1949." *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 3, no. 2 (1992): 245–69. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3704057>.

<sup>88</sup> Gail Hershtatter, "Courtesans and Streetwalkers," 252-257.

In Chuanqing's case, it not only accounts for his lack of confidence and emergence of jealousy when confronting Danzhu, but also can be explained by his feeling of desperation living with his family.

Chuanqing dares not to speculate or imagine what Bi-luo's married life was like. She was not a bird in a cage. A bird in a cage can still learn to fly out if the cage is opened. She is the bird embroidered on a screen—a white bird among the golden clouds sewn on a depressive purple satin screen. As the years pass, her feathers have become lackluster, mildewed, and moth-eaten; and yet even dead, she remains on the screen.

She is dead. She is done. But how about Chuanqing? Why should Chuanqing suffer this? Bi-luo marrying into the Nies was at least a sober sacrifice. Yet, Chuanqing's birth in the Nies was not his right to choose at all. Another bird has been added to the screen. Even if it were to be beaten to death, it cannot fly off the screen. He has been raised by his father for twenty years and has thus been made into a mentally disabled. Even if he is given freedom, he cannot run away.<sup>89</sup>

The story of Chuanqing can thus be understood as the generational story of two victimized people, both falling into the trap of an encasing condition: Chuanqing's mother, whose name literally symbolizes "heaven," according to Chuanqing, half-willingly free-fell from the "above" into the space of a screen, and thereafter "sewn" and could no longer fly away.

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<sup>89</sup> My translation. Chang, "Jasmine Tea."

Chuanqing was born into that confinement, a situation he was determined to define as "cannot run away." The problem of the screen appears to be a condition which includes different causes for them. For Chuanqing's mother, it seems to be a combined reason of family pressure and filial piety that she agreed to marry, and it were the wedlock, bonds to her son and economical reasons that she was not able to leave. For Chuanqing, however, economical reliance on his family and domestic abuse were the two driving causes. I would like to explain that "the screen" was not only a "terminal" determining the fate of two lives, but rather a self-contained locale that limited epistemic knowledge and relied solely on Chuanqing's cognitive perspective. Stated otherwise, "the screen" is a sense of desolation and "otherness" engineered by Chuanqing's personal conception.

#### IV. Grotesqueness—Sci-Fi, Gothic & Lu Xun

In the early stages of her career, Zhang Ailing's works incorporated a recurring theme of confinement, while also expanding upon and enriching existing materials by incorporating fragmented concepts acquired from classic subjects and ideas. A marked example of this is a short essay titled "Love", which began with a concise opening (presumably also an eye catching claimer): "This is true."<sup>90</sup> The essay is arguably based on a story Ailing Zhang heard from Hu Lancheng, her first husband, about the history of a concubine of Hu's adoptive father. Hu's anthology *This Life, these time* (今生今世) had recorded this story along with detailed description<sup>91</sup>, while Zhang's seemingly a short converse of idle talk and catharsis—

There was once a daughter of a tolerably well-off family in the country who was very lovely and sought out by many matchmakers, although nothing had come of their efforts. That year, she was only fifteen or sixteen years old. One spring evening, she stood by the back door, hands resting on a peach tree. She remembered that she was wearing a moon-white tunic. She had seen the young man who lived across the way, but they had never spoken. He walked toward her, came to a halt close by, and said softly: "So you're here, too?" She did not say anything, and he did not say more. They stood for a moment and then went their separate ways.

That was all.

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<sup>90</sup> Eileen Chang, *Written on Water*, trans. Andrew F. Jones and Xincun Huang (New York, United States: New York Review Books, 2023).

<sup>91</sup> Lancheng Hu, "Yuan Dong Feng [*lit.* Begrudging the East Wind]", *This Life, These Times (Chinese Edition)* (China Chang'an Press, 2013). 71-76.

Later, the girl was abducted by a swindler in the family and sold as a concubine in some far-off town, then sold several times more, passing through any number of trials and ordeals. When she was old, she still remembered that incident and often spoke of that evening in spring, the peach tree by the back door, that young man. When you meet the one among the millions, when amid millions of years, across the borderless wastes of time, you happen to catch him or her, neither a step too early nor a step too late, what else is there to do except to ask softly: "So you're here, too?"<sup>92</sup>

Hu's account of *This Life, These Times* was rather a chapter boiled with nostalgic touch of the lifestyle of rural families. In his account, he visited the town of his adoptive father whilst a little child and saw his concubine, whom he called as adoptive stepmother, welcoming him with wide arms.<sup>93</sup> Trying to make him more accepting of her presence, the concubine told Hu about her own story of her abduction as a girl. What was said about being sold was the shortened version that Zhang penned in the final part of "Love." Zhang changed the initial section of the narrative in little ways. According to Hu, the tree she was standing next to was an apricot tree; while, in Zhang's version, the tree was a peach tree—a common emblem of love. Her story tells that the young man never showed any romantic gesture to the girl before they met beside the peach tree. According to Hu, however, the young man had already asked the girl for her hand through a matchmaker and had been turned down by her parents just like the other suitors before this chance encounter. Standing next to the apricot tree, the girl realized that it was inappropriate for them to run across each other following that incident, especially given her need to obey the

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<sup>92</sup> Eileen Chang, *Written On Water*. 87

<sup>93</sup> Hu, "Yuan Dong Feng." <https://www.99csw.com/book/1919/53369.htm>.

moral standards for unmarried women, which meant she had to avoid being seen by men who were not related. She thus fled from the spot.

Hu Lancheng's *This life* was released ten years after the publication of Zhang's "Love". It is reasonable to hypothesize that Zhang did not adequately verify the facts with Hu before publishing this piece of short writing with great amount of ambiguity. It appears that this written essay was impromptu in nature, and closed with a subdued exclamation of the injustice of life that seems too familiar to Zhang's readership. Zhang deliberately omitted the precise time period in which the story occurred. Therefore, here I am inclined towards the idea that this nonfiction work by Zhang was her attempt to romanticize the story she heard from Hu, turning it into a myth-like tragedy of one dealing with sorrow and closure. Further, I speculate that the modification made to the original narrative may be aimed at emulating the characteristics of a Tang Dynasty poem by Cui Hu, titled "*Ti Du Cheng Nan Zhuang*" (orig. 題都城南莊; lit. "The Village At the Southern Outskirt of the Capital").

The poem recounts a story of a poet falling in love at first sight, with a girl from a village whose flushed face reminded him of the lovely peach blossoms blooming in her yard. The poet returned to the village the next spring, only to find the family had moved away, leaving the peach tree behind. I believe that the well-known Tang poetry bears a striking resemblance to Zhang's interpretation of Hu's story, as both involve peach trees, introverted beauty, a chance encounter, and the subsequent remorse over unreciprocated affection. But Zhang had brought an aromatic, grim perspective on the classical romantic narratives of China, a reversal on the display of wishful thinking from the male perspectives and often lacked insights on the female ends. Cui Hu's narrative corresponds with a conventional romance tale that reveals the narrator's longing for a perfect mixture of the aesthetical purity and sensuality, and Hu Lancheng details a private

revelation of losses and miseries from a woman who was sold and his deep sympathy for her; Different from them both, Zhang depicts the woman's internal torture inflicted by the eternal punishment given by her gender—the manacing ill fate that may come if one fails to catch or rejects the olive branch of marriage at the right moment. The two young people's silence in their encounter once demolishes the girl's desire to fall in love, but her anguish transforms her memory of a possibility into the relics of a myth, and a conclusion from Zhang's retelling.

### **The shared theme of Claustrophobia**

Despite the presumably arbitrary nature of this claim, I aim to establish the common theme of silent despair as a sensation of claustrophobia. Yet, Zhang Ailing is not the first author nor the most obvious one who may spring to mind, when one addresses the social issue and environment of dread stagnation that developed side-by-side with the rapidity of China modernizing itself.

Lu Xun, a renowned writer, translator, and social critic, was a pioneer in exploring the theme of claustrophobia in literature. He preceded Zhang's career by approximately three decades. Lu Xun is best known for his influential short fiction "Diary of A Madman" (published in 1918) and his preface to "A Call to Arms." The preface can be seen as Lu Xun's declaration of his intention to use his writings as a tool to criticize those who refuse to acknowledge the harsh reality of societal decay and indifference, even as the country succumbs to corruption and interpersonal "cannibalism." He was often recognized as a nonconformist who opposed the restrictive limitations imposed by a conventional culture that hindered social transformation.

Lu Xun's *Diary of A Madman* and 'Iron House Parable' continue to render discussions, especially with the latter that metaphorically represents a condition of slumber that progressively endangers the people. Scholarship on these two topics has brought thoughts on the relationship

between Lu Xun's experimental short novels with Sci-Fi. For instance, Cara Healey investigates the "paradigm of information degradation"<sup>94</sup> of Sci-Fi, an ontological conception that produced a falsely-conceived reality only for it to be revealed fallacious by the characters' undertaking. She notes that the attributes of Lu Xun's aforementioned works can be measured up to this precept of containment and subsequent revelation.<sup>95</sup> *Madman*<sup>96</sup> and "Iron House" alike contribute to a sense of blockade: In the former, a man confessed in his diary that he was desperate, for he was absent of outside help and guidance, being the only person in a cannibalistic village who rejected conversion to cannibalism; Eventually, he proclaimed that a truth had come to light: The Chinese society had been cannibalistic, so were the histories—written by cannibals propagating cannibalism, and each of the lines constituting the narrative eat people. Regarding the Iron House, Lu Xun proposed a question: If we wake from a dream and find ourselves trapped in an iron house without windows with many others asleep, and the oxygen is almost depleted, should we wake everyone up to warn them, or, should we see them dying with us without affliction in their dreams? <sup>97</sup> An answer is provided at the closing paragraph. The author himself would become a person who stirs up the crowd, for there would be much more hope and remedies if more people are aware of the situation. But still, as this question is not provided with sufficient puzzle-solving conditions, the narrative itself had already come to an apocalyptic closure before it unfolded.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Please see: Cara Healey. "Madmen and Iron Houses: Lu Xun, Information Degradation, and Generic Hybridity in Contemporary Chinese SF." *Science Fiction Studies* 46, no. 3 (2019). 513.

<sup>95</sup> Healey. "Madmen and Iron Houses." 514.

<sup>96</sup> Lu Xun (Shuren Zhou), *A Madman's Diary*, trans. Paul Meighan (United States: Easy Peasy Publishing, 2014)

<sup>97</sup> Lu Xun. *Call to Arms & Wandering*. The Renaissance, 1924.

<sup>98</sup> Lu Xun, "Zi Xu".

What Lu Xun intends, presumably, is the taste of horror from one's empirical distress. Healey suggests that the story of *Madman* contains a "false cosmology, an enlightened individual struggling to break the forgetfulness pattern, the pathologization of this individual by his society, and found documents as evidence of information degradation"<sup>99</sup> which makes it interestingly echoing the contemporary Si-Fi's elements challenging the acquired beliefs of the readers. Concurrently, the ethos of Lu Xun's preface of *A Call to Arms*, popularly referred as the Iron House Parable, are considered stimulating for the very reason that the conditions of a stagnant culture had been predetermined, and thus the readership is disposed to think within a set framework. Therefore, as Healey contends, both cases "ultimately challenge readers to question their own assumptions,"<sup>100</sup> and their shared pattern of collective amnesia was insurmountable at heart:

In either case, the classical preface shows the reader that the forgetfulness pattern has reasserted itself, and even the text of the diary has not been enough to awaken the compiler, who must then be one of the "sound sleepers." Whether the reader is a light enough sleeper to be swayed by the diary remains an open question.<sup>101</sup>

And yet, Healey maintains that her overall argument would only contribute to contemporary Chinese Sci-Fi's common hybridity.<sup>102</sup> Given that Lu Xun's works are often interpreted in the

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<sup>99</sup> Healey. "Madmen and Iron Houses." 516.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid. 517.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

light of "strictly realist texts"<sup>103</sup> and Lu Xun was considered as one of the founding fathers of modern Chinese vernacular literature, this reading to Lu Xun opens up the possibility of one discussing the generic hybridity of Chinese literature. And from this vein, I intend to look at Zhang from the perspective of Lu Xun's literature, especially the shared pattern in their literary themes, shown in the ambience in the backdrops that may be coined as "claustrophobic".

In this circumstance, the term "claustrophobia"—which I borrowed from psychology while kept just for literary use—signifies one's perpetual fear of a closed-off space.<sup>104</sup> It has been a widely seen theme pertaining to Gothic literature. According to Fred Botting, Gothic fiction itself represents an inscribed profusion, encompassing "the despairing ecstasies of Romantic idealism and the uncanny dualities of Victorian realism and decadence."<sup>105</sup> The "internal organs" of the old, maze-like architecture was a dominant contributing factor. Architecture, particularly medieval in form (although historical accuracy was not a prime concern), signaled the spatial and temporal separation of the past and its values from those of the present. The pleasures of horror and terror came from the reappearance of figures long gone. Nonetheless, Gothic narratives never escaped the concerns of their own times, despite the heavy historical trappings. In later fiction, the castle gradually gave way to the old house: as both building and family line, it became the site where fears and anxieties returned in the present. These anxieties varied according to diverse Zhanges: political revolution, industrialisation, urbanisation, shifts in sexual and domestic organisation, and scientific discovery.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid. 515.

<sup>104</sup> Christy Vadakkan and Waquar Siddiqui, "Claustrophobia," StatPearls - NCBI Bookshelf, February 8, 2023, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK542327/>.

<sup>105</sup> Fred Botting, *Gothic* (London: Routledge, 1996), 1.

<sup>106</sup> Fred Botting, *Gothic*, 2.

In Gothic literature, death's symbolism in the plots derives from the fear of superstitions, brutality, and a claustrophobic anxiety towards medieval establishments in deteriorating state in the eighteenth century. Various drastic changes in societal components passed on to the fabric of the Gothic, shown in its overabundant aesthetics of embodied sentience led by imagination.<sup>107</sup> Botting believes that the dilution of morality and reason in Gothic novels had contributed to the abomination and ill reception from the eighteenth century's critics, but he stresses that different directions of the developing genre— which could be defined as the gravitations towards two non-imbricating poles of the generic, evolving Gothic novels— the "exciting and pleasurable<sup>108</sup>" *terror* and the part of *horror* which ensues, with all the unveiled menaces and threats, restores and reinforces the dividing line between Gothic from the non-Gothic.<sup>109</sup>

Considered as a serious threat to literary and social values, anything Gothic was also discarded as an idle waste of time. Its images of dark power and mystery evoked fear and anxiety, but their absurdity also provoked ridicule and laughter. The emotions most associated with Gothic fiction are similarly ambivalent: objects of terror and horror not only provoke repugnance, disgust and recoil, but also engage readers' interest, fascinating and attracting them. Threats are spiced with thrills, terrors with delights, horrors with pleasures. Terror, in its sublime manifestations, is associated with subjective elevation, with the pleasures of imaginatively transcending or

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid. 4

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.6.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

overcoming fear and thereby renewing and heightening a sense of self and social value: threatened with dissolution, the self, like the social limits which define it, reconstitutes its identity against the otherness and loss presented in the moment of terror.<sup>110</sup>

Horror is what Botting outlines as the kinetic contraction of the eyeballs, the dread after the thrill; and the dynamics within arranging *terror and horror*, to an extent, to internalize or externalize fears, in a novel is the dynamics of shifts in emphasis of the objects' delineation.<sup>111</sup> In another way to say, it is captivating the shifts in the underpinning of the collective psyche in a society, in social values, mores and order via depicting transgressions of normality, as well as the restoration and purification of those transgressions.

Botting observed that the anxieties and Gothic elements continue to thrive in the twentieth century, while the genre itself has gone from underground to blooming subgenres or hybridization;

Science fiction, the adventure novel, modernist literature, romantic fiction and popular horror writing often resonate with Gothic motifs that have been transformed and displaced by different cultural anxieties. Terror and horror are diversely located in alienating bureaucratic and technological reality, in psychiatric hospitals and criminal subcultures, in scientific, future and intergalactic worlds, in fantasy and the occult. Threatening figures of

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid. 7

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

menaces, destructions and violence emerged in the form of mad scientists, psychopaths, extraterrestrials and a host of strange, supernatural or naturally monstrous mutations.<sup>112</sup>

More importantly, the prosperity of cinema has also been a medium and hub for the Gothic to transmit and evolve, for the reason that haze and anxieties are capable of channeling in visual cultural representations.<sup>113</sup>

Compared to other genres, the introduction of Gothic literature arrived relatively late in China. If there was any criticism among the translators and literary historians, it was tepid.<sup>114</sup> Regardless of it, however, the eerie ingredients of the Gothic novels were unlikely not to have been seen or read in Shanghai during 1920s and 30s, when both consumerism and the publishing industry took on a vibrant path. In that period, however, the dissent and upheaval, arising from ideological rifts, white terror against Communism in Shanghai, industrialization and urbanization, and the humiliation resulting from Shanghai's semi-colony status, were also

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid. 13

<sup>113</sup> Ibid. 14.

<sup>114</sup> According to Sun Shuo: Ann Radcliffe's novels, one of the representatives of the genre, were commented by Jin Donglei in his *Historical Outline of English Literature* (orig. 英國文學史綱) published in 1937 as "revival of medieval romance in the new form of tales of terror." [Please see: Shuo Sun, "Jane Austen and the Gothic Novels: The Reception of Northanger Abbey in China," *Concentric: Literary and Cultural Studies* 47, no. 1 (March 2021). 216.] This seems to be an intuitively clear, blanket introduction of the genre, until Sun compared the work of Radcliffe with Jane Austen's, who was known having written a parody of Gothic romance, titled *Northanger Abbey*; Jin apparently favored Austen over Radcliffe, praising Austen of her good literary taste and penmanship in "Realism"--- the style of literature which had gained momentum in China in the early twentieth century. Youths seeking for reforms sought to lay bricks to a literature which contradicts the values appreciated by Chinese genteel traditions and provides a more honest view of the societal picture of China. Hence, Austen's irony to the snobbishness of the British gentry naturally engendered better reception from the critics. And in general, one can speculate from this instance how Gothic fiction was perceived in early twentieth century China.

disconcerting. We may extrapolate that this was the milieu of Zhang's preteen and adolescence: A grotesque world that Lu Xun characterized as *Menglong* (朦朧)<sup>115</sup> that every field of public opinion has demonstrated a vague, hazy and ambiguous attitude towards politics, fearing one's view would become a weapon to be used against oneself or dragging one into the currents of extremities. For all that, it was a world of imagination, thriving popular culture, innovations and of rapid urban changes. The claustrophobic and clamorous climate undoubtedly sparked a literary topic influenced by Lu Xun and potentially translated works from overseas that transmitted features of Gothic. In Zhang Ailing's sketches and early short novels, there was a consistent desire to explore, which was expressed via a tightly structured ambiance that evoked feelings of claustrophobia.

I find this characteristic effectively mirrors the themes of Gothic literature: If one looks at the "modernist" pleasure quarter belonging to Ge Weilong's aunt in "Aloeswood", the very description of its design does render a feeling of uneasiness and suffocating horror—by the presence of a mysteriously wealthy relative's formidable mansion, her perfectionistic garden and a surrealist discord generated by the cascade of colors cramped in an orderly walled space:

The story starts with Ge Weilong, a very ordinary Shanghai girl, standing on the veranda of a hillside mansion and gazing vacantly at the garden. (...) The garden itself was little more than a rectangular grass lawn, framed by a low wall of white, swastika-shaped blocks, beyond which lay a stretch of rough hillside. This garden was like a gold-lacquered serving tray lifted high amid the wild hills: one row of carefully pruned evergreens; two beds of fine, well-spaced English roses—the

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<sup>115</sup> Lu Xun, "Sui Yan Zhong De Meng Long," *Lu Xun Quan Ji*, accessed November 1, 2023, <https://www.marxists.org/chinese/reference-books/luxun/12/006.htm>.

whole arrangement severely perfect, not a hair out of place, as if the tray had been deftly adorned with a lavish painting in the fine-line style. In one corner of the lawn, a small azalea was in flower, its pink petals, touched with yellow, a bright shrimp-pink.(...)

But these glaring color clashes were not the only reason why the viewer felt such a dizzying sense of unreality. There were contrasts everywhere: all kinds of discordant settings and jumbled periods had been jammed together, making a strange, illusory domain.<sup>116</sup>

Indeed, such a vivacious scenery contradicted itself from Lu Xun's constricted and minimalistic Iron House, but isn't that overflowing of visual stimulation resonate with the Gothic novels, of the simplicity and jumbling with disorderly vices? On the other hand, (as we previously discussed in the first chapter) Zhang's touch of authenticity lies in her careful observation and establishment of the images of Shanghainese urban women, generating a sense of domesticity and private life which she deemed yet to be cherished in the turbulent wartime. This perspective may lead us to regard her as another representative of claustrophobic novels following the lineage of Lu Xun, wherein the claustrophobic enclosure of the urban rapid and vacillating life was rewritten in an ironical but not graveness-stricken formula.

David Der-wei Wang had examined on the intertextuality between Zhang's autobiographical novel *The Fall of Pagoda* and the essay "On the Fall of the Lei Feng Pagoda," another of Lu Xun's highly regarded essays—How, despite through different lenses, both writers shared the

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<sup>116</sup> Eileen Chang. *Love in a Fallen City*. Translated by Karen Kingsbury. New York: New York Review Books, 2006. *Kindle*

same views on the "incurable disease" of hierarchy and patriarchy in China.<sup>117</sup><sup>118</sup> In both works, the fall of a pagoda represents both the nostalgic past—the harmlessness of childhood listening to traditional myths and legends told by caretakers, and the ugliness that was unveiled when these narratives came into scrutiny. Through Zhang's lifeworks, Wang purports that Zhang sought writing as a way to disintegrate the construction of "monolithic discourse of a patriarchal society,"<sup>119</sup> and her habits of reusing or revising her writings produced a power of authenticity that her predecessors failed to accomplish, "Insofar as mimetic realism was the canonical form of modern Chinese literature, the way in which Zhang 'repeats' herself by traversing rhetorical, generic, and linguistic boundaries has given rise to a peculiar philosophy of writing."<sup>120</sup>

## V. Conclusion

As Walter Benjamin beholds, the transitoriness of artwork that is regarded as ubiquitous as for its likeness can be found in the life of the masses, "To pry an object from its shell, to destroy its aura, is the mark of a perception whose 'sense of the universal equality of things' has increased to such a degree that it extracts it even from a unique object by means of reproduction."<sup>121</sup> Thus, the enduring nature of a text may be ascribed to its intricacy and elusiveness. In such a case, it may be asked that why would one willingly destroy the aura of her creation from a unique period of

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<sup>117</sup> David Der-wei Wang, "Eileen Chang and The Fall of the Pagoda," *Chinese Literature Today* 1, no. 1 (September 2010): 94–100.

<sup>118</sup> David Der-wei Wang. "Ailing Zhang and The Fall of the Pagoda" .98-99.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.95.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> Walter Benjamin and Harry Zohn, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," essay, in *Illuminations =Illuminationen: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 2007), 217–53, p.223

her life? In Zhang Ailing's case, perhaps it is about the narrative: A myth of love ends in ruin, a stifling sense of cautionary tale for women which follows on the proceeding after the fall of the "pagoda," and potentially, the decomposing world in the wartime and a debated on sex and the nation.

What is presented to the general readership in "Aloeswood," for instance, is a reverse parody of Courtesan literature about the love and power of a young student losing her clutch of reality in her relationship with a man—who was an experienced client in the circle of high-class courtesans. It does not contain an explicit exposition of physical violence but the violence of manipulation, a trap which encircled the heroine and she in the end involuntarily fell in. "Jasmine Tea," on the other hand, is a story explicit of violence with a smoothen, rapid and opulent reading experience. The story is simultaneously built up by a diegetic narration voice, characters' coiled layers of psychology and the back-and-forths of dialogues which serve as an extra source of backdrop information. What is intact within the narrative is a feminine, and also feminist sense of scrutiny over the inconsistency of one's perceived identity and perception. To captivate the transiency within the languages and discourses, perhaps one thus feels the urge to rewrite.

And in conclusion, from such a vantage point, my scholarship contends that Zhang rewrites in order to utilize the immediacy and hybridity of Shanghai's commercial culture. Her persona as a "new woman", and so as to question the apparent coherence of the narratives and retain the capacity to revisit and the way she viewed the world. Her narratives successfully interrupted and rejected a sense of closure and completion of the personal histories via such form of immediacy.

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