

Writing, Rewriting, and Miswriting: Eileen Chang's Late Style Against the Grain

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Lina Qu,

"Writing, Rewriting, and Miswriting: Eileen Chang's Late Style Against the Grain"

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Abstract: In her article "Writing, Rewriting, and Miswriting: Eileen Chang's Late Style Against the Grain," Lina Qu reconstructs Eileen Chang as a Saidian late figure and formulates the poetics and politics of lateness immanent in her late self-writing. Drawing from Said's theorization, Qu argues that Chang's late style emerges and matures in rewriting her memories into numerous autobiographical accounts. The exposé of her dysfunctional family and turbulent life metonymically constitutes a counter narrative that disenchants Chinese modernity. In contrast to the dominant modalities of evolution and revolution, her involutory discourse embodies a Deleuzian paradigm of artistic creativity and historical development. Qu also argues that Chang militates against her time through writing, rewriting, and miswriting against her family, and against her mother in particular. With dramatic externalization of emotional conflicts and blatant exposition of traumatic events, Chang interrogates what is at stake when the radical modernization of traditional familial structures occurs.

Lina Qu

Writing, Rewriting, and Miswriting: Eileen Chang's Late Style Against the Grain

The illustrious Eileen Chang (1920-1995) is arguably the most read and admired woman writer in modern Chinese literary history. Her phenomenal rise to fame in colonial Shanghai (1937-1945) has made her a legendary figure that is recurrently reconfigured by contemporary readers and scholars. Replete with stylistic devices and aestheticized details, Chang's early fiction has long been canonized and translated into many languages. Recently, the posthumous publication of her late works of bilingual self-writing—her Chinese autobiographical novel *Xiao tuanyuan* (Little reunion, henceforth *Reunion*) in 2009 and her two-volume English autobiographical novel *The Fall of the Pagoda* (henceforth *Pagoda*) and *The Book of Change* (henceforth *Change*) in 2010—again catapulted Chang to the center of public attention and scrutiny. The turning point of Chang's literary career was marked by her migration to the United States via Hong Kong in the 1950s, just a couple of years after the founding of communist China in 1949. Caught in the crossfire of the Cold War, Chang spent the ensuing four decades in self-imposed exile, and continued to write with an acute sense of temporospatial displacement.

The stark contrast between Chang's early and late works in terms of literary motif, narrative structure, and aesthetic style warrants critical investigation. Xiaojue Wang, in her study of Chang's post-1949 writing, astutely observes that a distinctive new style emerges in her late works. Wang elucidates the metamorphosis of Chang's aesthetic style: "The embellished writing style infiltrated with elaborate vocabularies and exquisite imageries, which characterized her early writings and made her a literary star in occupied Shanghai, has completely vanished, which without doubt contributed to its unfavorable reception by the readers" (291). What the readers unfavorably find plain, dry, and even forbidding in Chang's post-1949 writing is indicative of a "new idiom" acquired in the late phase of her literary career. In other words, the salient idiomatic shift in Chang's late works evidences the emergence of her late style, which I attempt to probe in this paper. In light of Edward Said's theorization of what he terms "late style," I investigate Chang's poetic and political lateness manifested by her recently excavated autobiographical novels.

As Said illustrates, while aging and approaching imminent death, some artists and writers begin to ponder the significance of fleeting time and the implication of reaching lateness in life. For them, the sense of lateness in life is symptomatic of an underlying desynchronization with their own times. Living in self-imposed exile from their times, these artists and writers configure an aesthetics of lateness against the grain of the present. With stylistic anachronism and artistic non-synthesis, the figure of lateness embodies an "untimely, scandalous, even catastrophic commentator on the present" (Said 14). The unsettling manifestation of "intransigence, difficulty, and unresolved contradiction" (7) in late style frustrates readers' expectation for serenity, coherence, and reconciliation in mature literary works. Yet, it is precisely the prerogative of late style that "it has the power to render disenchantment and pleasure without resolving the contradiction between them" (148). Drawing from Said's ideation, I attempt to reconstruct the legendary woman writer Eileen Chang as such a "late figure," and to formulate the poetics and politics of lateness immanent in her late writing. I argue that Chang's late style emerges and matures in rewriting her memories into numerous versions of autobiographical fiction, which, by offering an exposé of her dysfunctional family and her turbulent personal life, metonymically constitute a counter narrative disenchanting the optimistic and progressive discourse of Chinese modernization.

Eileen Chang's early stories published in the 1940s are known for aesthetic ambivalence: while the literary diction and narrative style are reminiscent of the traditional "linked-chapter" novel, the setting and plotting are typical of modern urban melodrama. Chang was a dazzling realist and modernist writer from the beginning in the sense that her early fiction revolves around everyday scenes of ordinary people and probes their psychological underlying. Nevertheless, she was also an unwavering adherent of the sentimentalism and mannerism that characterize traditional Chinese fiction. In his seminal work that has pioneered contemporary literary study on Chang's fiction, C. T. Hsia draws out the distinctness of her aesthetics: "Her study of Chinese fiction has led her to stress the strong persistence of traditional sensibility even in an apparently uprooted and cosmopolitan set. Sensibility evolves slowly; old manners die hard even during a period of unprecedented technological and economic change" (418). Old manners and traditional sensibilities are deliberately evoked in Chang's early fiction, distinguishing itself from the modernist mode of writing.

However, Chang's contemporaries responded in a polarized way to her early works: Zhou Shoujuan (1895-1968), a renowned writer in the School of Mandarin Ducks and Butterflies and a proponent of traditional Chinese fiction, praised her for reviving the literary legacy of *Honglou meng* (Dream of the red chamber), a masterpiece of the traditional "linked-chapter" novel written by member of the Qing

literati Cao Xueqin (1715-1763); whereas modern-minded critics like Fu Lei (1908-1966), Tan Zhengbi (1901-1991), and Ma Boliang (1933-) regarded the residue of old manners as a sign of her literary regurgitation and aesthetic limitation. Reading Chang's early fiction against the emergence of her late style, I argue that the aesthetic ambivalence of her early works is suggestive of her immanent artistic distanciation from the 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.

The hallmark of Chang's late career is her intriguing new practice of compulsive bilingual rewriting. 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 creation of multiple volumes of autobiographical fiction in both English and Chinese. As a matter of fact, Chang was engrossed in this massive self-writing project for most of her time in her late years. In 1958, shortly after her arrival in the United States, Chang began to conceive an English novel based on her own life story, which later expanded into two separate volumes, *Pagoda* and *Change*. In the two volumes, she frequently recycled tropes and vignettes from her early essays, including her award-winning English essay "What a Life! What a Girl's Life!" (henceforth "What") written in 1938 as well as her Chinese personal essays published between 1943 and 1945, "Tongyan wuji" (From the mouths of babes, henceforth "Mouths"), "Siyu" (Whispers), "Jin yu lu" (From the ashes). By 1964, Chang had given up on the prospects of publishing *Pagoda* and *Change*, and instead, she began to consider translating them into Chinese. A decade later, in 1975, Chang resumed her self-writing in Chinese. Without being a literal translation, the Chinese novel *Reunion* both echoed and expanded the narratives in *Pagoda* and *Change*. Although Chang kept editing and revising *Reunion* up until the end of her life, she was daunted by the possible consequences of publishing such a thinly veiled autobiographical novel, to the point that she once decided to bury the manuscript.

Chang's derivative and repetitive self-writing in her late years is encapsulated by David Der-wei Wang as an involutory discourse—that is, "an introverted tendency, a move that expands not through the increasingly efficient use of new inputs but through the replication and elaboration of an inherited pattern of thoughts and deeds" ("Madame White" 226). Involution is a movement of curling and rolling inward, or even turning in on itself; thus, involutory discourse is an autopoietic structure deriving its momentum from incessant introspection and self-reference. Wang interprets Chang's involutory retreat to her own memories and writings as a Freudian compulsion to revisit and eventually to expel her primal traumas. I share Wang's analysis that this Freudian complex configures the psychological mechanism undergirding Chang's late self-writing, and, in addition, I propose that her involutory discourse ought to be positioned as an antithesis of evolutionary and revolutionary discourses, both of which have exerted preponderant impacts on the formation of twentieth-century Chinese modernity.

At the turn of the nineteenth century, Enlightenment thinker Yan Fu's (1854-1921) rendition of *Evolution and Ethics* swept the beleaguered nation of China with a wakeup call. Appropriating Huxley's evolutionary theory for his own argument of social Darwinism, Yan promulgated the tenet of "survival of the fittest" in his translation. The influential work had shaped the dominant nationalist and reformist narratives of early twentieth-century China, which revolved around the pressing issues of national survival and social evolution. Later, with the imperialist aggressions escalating on Chinese territory, revolutionary movements burgeoned in response. China witnessed what Hannah Arendt terms "a revolutionary change in government" (15) after the strenuous effort of modernizing reforms had failed. Be it under the name of nationalism or communism, revolutionary discourses also subscribed to the teleological view of social Darwinism, albeit with a more radical and violent claim to the linear progress of human history. Underpinned by the Hegelian dialectic, revolutionary discourses prescribed a new social order that inevitably stemmed from overcoming the old one.

The linear and progressive movement that characterizes both evolution and revolution is contested by the logic of involution. Retreating from the evolutionary and revolutionary discourses that center on the future of the nation, Chang's late works look back at the familial past. In other words, she takes an involutory turn in her late writing on both temporal and spatial levels, which intervenes in the dominant social and historical scripts with the singularity of her familial scripts. Said judiciously criticizes the Hegelian dialectic as the ultimate solution and resolution, wherein "irreconcilable opposites were resolvable by means of the dialectic, with a reconciliation of opposites, a grand synthesis, at the end" (13). The replacement of the dialectic with the involutory in Chang's late works showcases a significant characteristic of late style, which makes a counter-Hegelian move with its artistic rejection

of transcendence or unity. Refuting the idea that a transcendental unity emerges out of the dialectic, late style depicts what remains irreconcilably different and apart. The singularity of Chang's familial past refuses to be subsumed by the totalizing discourse of national (r)evolution. In this sense, her ultimate failure to reach a satisfying conclusion to her repetitive self-writing is symptomatic of late style.

The repetitive rhythm of Chang's involutory discourse epitomizes the Deleuzian repetition as opposed to the revolutionary dialectic. Deleuze famously criticizes the Hegelian revolution as "the false problem" that is grounded in the negative dialectic. For him, revolution "never proceeds by way of the negative, but by way of difference and its power of affirmation" (208). The Hegelian revolution is based on negation of the past in the emergence of something new and different, whereas the Deleuzian repetition returns to and actualizes the immanent "difference in itself" (208). The Deleuzian approach proffers a new way of imagining revolution via repetitive affirmations of *a priori* difference. Chang's involutory self-writing operates as such a repetitive return to "difference in itself." In contrast to the revolutionary force of progress, she employs the generative force of repetition in her compulsive rewriting, which exemplifies an alternative paradigm of artistic creativity and historical development.

Chang's involutory discourse is also underpinned by what Said calls "a powerful autobiographical impulse" of late style (107). Moreover, it is often the autobiographical impulse that drives the counter discourse constructed by the late figure in exile. Jianhua Chen situates the emergence of Chang's late style in her familial past. He claims that Chang had witnessed the paradox of her aristocratic family's simultaneous disintegration from and integration into the emerging sociocultural modernity in early twentieth-century China. Then, after being uprooted from the homeland, her obsessive retracing of the past and the painstaking coping with the new diasporic condition reshaped her literary style. Extrapolating from Chen's synthesis, I contend that the spatiotemporal distance from her past enables Chang to scrutinize her memory critically, which mirrors her disillusion with her present situation in displacement. Thus, her late autobiographical writing is infused with a pessimistic undertone rather than with a nostalgic sentiment, for Chang refuses to reconcile emotional and social contradictions in her late works. The critical distance and emotional detachment allegorize her artistic resistance against cultural interpellation at home as well as in exile.

Marianna Hirsch's seminal study on family memory elucidates how retrospective interpretation of familial images can deconstruct and resist the social construction of meaning. She claims, "reading, rereading, and misreading thus become active forms of intervention," or "a way of contesting that construction, of rewriting the present by ways of revising the past" (193). In like fashion, Chang's writing, rewriting, and even miswriting of familial stories also constitutively recast historical narrative and social significance. The three volumes of autobiographical fiction evidence her ambition of contesting social and historical constructions. Her reconstructive effort is, first of all, intimated by the three intriguing book titles, "The Fall of the Pagoda," "The Book of Change," and "Little Reunion." Conjuring up prominent tropes and imageries in Chinese literary history, all the three terms are nevertheless redefined in Chang's literary context. According to Laikwan Pang's interpretation, "Little Reunion" stages "an ironic twist on the traditional concept of a great reunion (*datuanyuan*), the happy ending in most traditional operas in which the male hero realizes his ultimate dream, marries all the women he loves, and lives happily ever after" (182). Scholar-beauty romance is a traditional Chinese theatrical and literary genre, which has taken on new forms in the modern era such as the revolutionary romance of the 1930s. Conjugal and familial reunion is sanctified by the euphoric rhetoric of the genre as the principal index of social prosperity and progress. Chang's parodic replacement of "great" with "little" mocks the patriarchal fantasy about the normative domestic order and undermines the valence of the longstanding literary trope.

Along the same line, David Wang examines the intertextual references evoked by the book titles "The Fall of the Pagoda" and "The Book of Change." Wang contextualizes the fall of the pagoda in the revolutionary rhetoric that mobilizes an assortment of antiestablishment imageries. For revolutionaries, "As much as they may have wanted to topple the pagoda of feudal China, they shared a wish to see a new pagoda erected in its place. In this new construct, the modern pagoda can take the form of revolution, party, liberation, or nation" (D. Wang 225-26). However, for Chang, who chooses to fixate on the "eerie, desolate atmosphere" (226) surrounding the fall of the pagoda, the new construct of the modern pagoda is nothing more than illusionary. Then, naming the other book after the Chinese divination classic, *Yijing* (Book of changes), Chang foregrounds the theme of historical transience and contingency, wherein "change yields a perennial, repetitive pattern, thereby implying unchangeability" (232). The repetitive pattern of change mirrors Chang's own compulsion of rewriting, and it also belies any forms of historical teleology. Chang's appropriation of and play with these prevailing cultural imageries and literary tropes indicate her critical intervention in the dominant historical and social constructions.

An embodiment of her late style, Chang's involutory discourse manifests her poetic and political desynchronization with her own time. The emergence of a new subject matter, a stylistic shift, and a distinct historical view in her late works of bilingual self-writing illustrates her aesthetics of lateness. Therefore, I argue that Chang is a late figure in the way Said understands Theodor Adorno, "because so much of what he [she] does militated ferociously against his [her] own time" (22). In the following section, I continue to explore Chang's late style by dissecting significant details in her late autobiographical texts. In order to foreground the new idiom that she introduces into her late works, I contrast her late autobiographical novels with her early autobiographical essays. The way that Chang recasts her familial memories and refashions her familial images is the key to understanding the poetics and politics of her late style. Substantiating my former argument with textual evidence, I attempt to demonstrate how Chang militates ferociously against her own time through relentlessly writing, rewriting, and miswriting against her own family, and against her own mother in particular.

Commenting on historical implications of Chang's family narratives in *Reunion*, Shuang Shen observes, "Upon a closer look, though, we realize that underlying these 'disorderly' details of life is a larger story of the history of Chinese modernity, within which individual lives are represented as symptomatic illustrations of this traumatic historical experience" (131). The personal and familial details at the core of Chang's storytelling are indexical of the collective memory and historical trauma, which are situated in the modern restructuring of Chinese society. Via the mediation of family narratives, she comments on the national ethos of her own time. Following Shen's line of thought, I argue that Chang's late works accentuate the tension and trauma of modern familial life, which have been caused by historical contradictions and emotional conflicts. Metonymically, Chang's unorthodox family tale revolving around a dysfunctional mother-daughter relation constitutes a counter narrative that calls into question the myth making mechanism of modernization. The progressive discourse of modernity, which declares a new era of positive social changes, is contested by her personal storytelling and her new aesthetic style.

Compared with her early autobiographical texts, Chang's novel trilogy is rife with dramatic externalization of emotional conflicts and blatant exposition of controversial characters and events. It appears that Chang could not care less about downplaying her own emotional turmoil or embellishing her family's abnormalities. At the center of this turmoil is Chang's troubling relation to her western-educated and modern-minded mother Huang Yifan (1896-1957). Either her mother's eccentric and irresponsible way of parenting or her own ungracious attitude and acerbic reproach to her mother attests to the dysfunctional modern mother-daughter relation. Chang's daunting honesty and disconcerting exposé are rendered all the more abrupt and alarming by her plain and austere rhetoric, which teeters on the verge of violating social norms. Tze-lan Sang suggests that Chang's late works unflinchingly transgress cultural constraints like the Confucian doctrine of "making omissions for one's close kin," which has inordinately governed her early autobiographical texts, in particular, her early depictions of her mother. Some critics, disturbed by the appalling depiction of familial relations in Chang's novels, compare it to a haunting and inhumane horror. Even Chang herself once described *Reunion* as "of convoluting plot, very dramatic, full of shocks" in a letter to Stephen Song dated on January 25, 1976 (Song 4). However, when the shocking effect of dramatic exposé in the book was singled out as the main reason for holding back its publication, she hesitated, and eventually declined to tone it down.

Suffice it to say that this dramatic effect is a unique literary component of Chang's late style, which she strived to preserve in her autobiographical novels. I believe that the emotional dramatization is intended to rattle readers with disturbing realism. In Said's terms, it "provides an occasion to stir up more anxiety, tamper irrevocably with the possibility of closure, and leave the audience more perplexed and unsettled than before" (7). Chang's unsettling depiction of her unusual relationship with her mother constitutes "a moment when the artist who is fully in command of his [her] medium nevertheless abandons communication with the established social order of which he [she] is a part and achieves a contradictory, alienated relationship with it" (8). What Chang alienates herself from in her late works is not just the long-established morals undergirding Chinese society, but also the new *Zeitgeist* of her own time. While Chang's early fiction upholds the aesthetic values of the traditional through the hybridization of modern narrative and old-fashioned storytelling, her autobiographical novels interrogate what is at stake when the radical modernization of the traditional family structure occurs. Her alienated stance is most pronounced in her emotionally charged representation of her modern yet eccentric mother. The unresolved tension between Chang and her mother bespeaks the former's contentious relationship with modernity as it is embodied by the modern mother figure.

Coming of age at the historical juncture of China's sociocultural remaking in the early Republican era (1912-1948), Chang's mother Huang Yifan "was simultaneously a gentlewoman of the *ancient regime* and a New Woman of May-Fourth China ...a Chinese Nora who would scarcely wait to walk out on her

husband" (Panm 230) and would not be stopped from following her personal dream and wanderlust. She rebelliously walked away from her aristocratic family and her arranged marriage in order to travel all over the world. This categorical New Woman in pursuit of individual freedom and rationality, "is a characteristic representation of Chinese modernity" (Shen 131). Infatuated with being fashionably modern, Chang used to idolize her mother "with a passion bordering on the romantic" ("Mouths" 4) until the emotional cost of being mothered by a self-centered and self-righteous person came to a head. Finding herself more at ease in Europe and among modernized westerners, Huang spent most of her years away from her own family and children, which had become a liability or even an obstacle to her pursuit of a modern womanhood. Chang's early autobiographical essays cast a cursory glance at the falling-out between mother and daughter, with minimal exposure of conflicts and in a moderately critical tone. Only in her late works does Chang expose the contentious relation and put her modern mother on trial. In *Pagoda* and *Change*, she gradually unmasks her mother's elegant disguise, and then in *Reunion*, she executes a rigorous and unrelenting judgment on her mother, to the extent that Xu Zidong considers her depiction of a mother-daughter relation "is rarely seen in the history of modern Chinese literature" ("The Mother-Daughter Relation" 19).

Thus, the alienating effect of Chang's late style is more compelling when her autobiographical novels are read against her early autobiographical essays, especially when her later retelling of an event is contrasted to the earlier versions. Scholars have pointed out Chang's inclination to reiterate the primal traumas of her life, arguing that these fragments of memory play a crucial role in constituting her subjectivity as well as her intersubjective relations. They have given paramount attention to the incident of Chang's six-month home quarantine ordered by her tyrannical and depraved father. This gothic episode has been reiterated three times throughout her literary career, respectively in "What," "Whisper," and *Pagoda*. Each time of revisiting this traumatic experience, Chang adapts her narrative into a different literary genre or a different language. Berating her oppressive father, she positions herself as both a victim to and a rebel against patriarchal family. I concur in examining these recurring traumatic moments in Chang's self-writing in order to elucidate her psychological typography and critical stance. However, I focus on how an incidence of trauma is constantly being reconfigured in the process of recalling and rewriting, and how the refashioning of traumatic memory in Chang's late works illustrates her late style.

I observe such a telling moment in Chang's primal memory in regard to her mother, which has also been rewritten three times, respectively in "Mouths," *Pagoda*, and *Reunion*. The trivial and transient incidence of holding hands with her mother, who had just returned from a four-year stay in Europe, is nevertheless constitutive of her affective memory and critical perception of her formative years. I maintain that Chang's fixation on this incidental motherly touch, which is a somatic and semiotic register of her primal trauma, sheds light on her complex relation with her mother, as well as on her conflicted attitude towards her own time. Conspicuously, the three versions of retelling differ from each other in terms of narrative voice and emotional undertone. In "Mouths," the narrative foregrounds the innocent voice of a nine-year-old child, who is savoring a rare moment of maternal tenderness. The child's perspective is then undercut by that of an adult narrator in *Pagoda*, who retrospectively scrutinizes the momentary touch to untangle her strong but convoluted feelings towards her mother. Finally, *Reunion* completely recasts this piece of memory in an antagonistic light, from the perspective of a touchy and spiteful adult narrator. Disparities among the three versions evidence the transmutation of Chang's literary style, from the period of her main frame to her late period. Diving into the undercurrents of her memory and emotion in her late works, Chang exposes "a nonharmonious, nonserene tension" (Said 7) underlying the mother-daughter relation. The intersubjective conflict and contention emblemize the unresolved contradictions engendered by the sudden and dramatic restructuring of the domestic sphere in the modern era.

Chang wrote "Mouths" in 1944, right after the publication of her most influential early stories had elevated her to an astonishing level of fame in colonial Shanghai. Riding a wave of the burgeoning press culture, she immediately became a legendary talent and a cultural icon in the public eye. Her personal essays divulged intimate details of her private life that were insatiably devoured by her enthusiastic readers and fans. At the age of 24, Chang had already endured her parents' divorce and her father's domestic violence and had survived Japan's bombing of Shanghai and invasion of Hong Kong. Returning to Shanghai from Hong Kong in 1941 after the Pacific War abruptly interrupted her college education, she had to lodge in her aunt's apartment. At that time Chang became homeless through having publicly repudiated her abusive father and having been abandoned by her wanderlust mother. However, in her essays, Chang turns her tumultuous and arduous life into curious anecdotes saturated with insightful observation and witty commentary, and she manages to make a personal myth out of her less-than-desirable condition of living. Commenting on how Chang deploys the literary form of personal essay in

promoting and mystifying her self-image, Nicole Huang argues that these essays are "the building blocks of Eileen Chang the legend," which weave "a complex inner life together with a mounting public persona" (128).

Chang's embellished depictions of her family and her everyday life in the early essays "manifest not only a dynamic inner life, but also a new social identity in formation" (Huang 128). The representation of her modern mother is also woven into the literary construction of her self-image. In "Mouths," Chang describes her mother at length for the first time, and touches upon the incident of holding her hand:

She was a beautiful and sensitive woman, and I had had very little opportunity to be with her because she had gone abroad when I was four, coming home only infrequently and going away again soon after each visit. Through a child's eyes, she seemed a distant and mysterious figure. There were a couple of times she took me out when, merely by taking my hand in hers as we crossed the street, she would send an unfamiliar thrill through my body. (4)

Representing her mother as a "beautiful and sensitive" figure sojourning in a foreign land, Chang fabricates a modern imagery of outlandish mystery. The exoticization and romanticization of the cosmopolitan mother downplays her maternal role—that is, her earthly responsibilities to her own children. Therefore, the modern mother figure, who prioritizes her personal yearnings over her family and children, is candidly admired by her daughter from a distance. While the thrilling haptic sensation stimulated by the accidental touch is highlighted in the essay, the daughter's long-term deprivation of maternal intimacy is vaguely implied. The rare moment of holding hands with her mother is saturated with *jouissance*, a physical and mental pleasure derived from temporarily transgressing the distance between the modern mother and the daughter left behind, in the geographical, bodily, and emotional senses. Chang deliberately limits the narrative point of view to that of an innocent child who yearns for maternal love. Her construction of a mysterious mother figure in the essay parallels her own myth making in the public realm.

Chang's romanticization of her modern mother is demystified in her late works, as her recollection of the mesmerizing maternal touch is tarnished by a retrospective critique. In *Pagoda*, the incident is reiterated through a third-person narrative, wherein the mother and the daughter go by the names of Dew and Lute. The circumstance that necessitates the hand holding is first revealed: facing "the widest and busiest street in Shanghai" (128), Dew is concerned about Lute's safety. Then, the narrative accentuates the emotional upheavals caused by the unexpected and forced physical contact:

She studied the tangle of cars and trams and trucks with rickshaws and delivery bicycles ducking in and out. When her opening came Lute sensed her slight hesitation and her almost inaudible cluck of annoyance before she reached down and grabbed Lute's hand petulantly, having decided it was too much risk to get her across without holding her by the hand. She gripped it tight as though fearful that she would wriggle away. The bunched bones of her thin fingers made the grip seem still harder. Lute was in turmoil; it was the first time her mother had ever held her by the hand that she could remember. It was a strange feeling but it made her very happy. (128)

Unlike the endearing recount in "Mouths," here, the daughter's yearning for maternal love is offset by her mother's hesitance to hold her hand. Instead, the affect of frustration is transmitted between Dew and Lute.

This passage exemplifies the externalization and dramatization of emotional conflict in Chang's late works. Dew's unconscious resistance to the physical contact with her own daughter is revealed, and her internal struggling is dramatically staged by a sequence of cranky and fastidious acts: "cluck," "grab," "grip," and "wriggle away." The unpleasant touch is experienced and memorized by Lute as the bunched bones of her mother's fingers pressing into her skin, void of maternal tenderness. In light of Xu Zidong's analysis of Chang's rhetorical devices, I argue that the tangible and concrete image of "bunched bones" objectifies the desolate relation between Dew and Lute ("Objectifying Desolation" 162). The metaphorical device evidences the inharmonious mother-daughter interaction and foregrounds the physical and emotional alienation between the two. Suffice it to say that revisiting this memorable incident of her childhood in the 1950s, right after the death of her mother, Chang rediscovered a traumatizing moment. The retrospectively constructed memory brings to the fore her entrenched physical and emotional estrangement in a desolate life, which mirrors her newly found diasporic condition of being motherless, nationless, and rootless.

Nevertheless, this version of recount still concludes on a happy note: as strange as the mother-daughter interaction is, Lute feels contented with the brief intimate contact. The child's innocent and romantic feelings toward her modern mother are once again invoked to balance the sophisticated and

critical perspective of an adult. The juxtaposition of two competing voices in *Pagoda* suggests Chang's transition into her late period when she begins to unmask familial tensions and conflicts beneath the veneer of reconciliation and harmony. Peeling off layers of ambivalence, Chang retells the incidence once again in *Reunion*, albeit through an unequivocal adult narrator who is relentlessly scrutinizing the past:

 Jiuli, at the age of nine, was falling into sleep from sitting too long. After checking out a few department stores, they were standing on the sidewalk to cross the street. Ruiqiu was about to say, "Follow me; be careful and make sure no cars are coming from either way..." when an opening suddenly came. Before heading forward, she hesitated and seemed to realize the imperative of holding Jiuli's hand. Clenching her teeth, she gripped her hand, only too tightly. Jiuli was in turmoil, with Ruiqiu's unexpectedly bony fingers poking into her fingers like bunched bamboo sticks. They navigated through cars to cross Nanjing Road in haste. As soon as they reached the other sidewalk, Ruiqiu dropped her hand. Jiuli was much agitated, as she sensed Ruiqiu's internal struggle. It was their only physical contact during her stay this time. Apparently, she was also a bit disgusted. (108, translation mine, L. Q.)

Reunion reveals more details about the occasion: it is the year 1929 when the nine-year-old daughter, now renamed Jiuli and her mother, renamed Ruiqiu, are about to cross Nanjing Road in Shanghai's busiest commercial district after shopping. The pronounced sense of awkwardness and frustration in the mother-daughter interaction resonates with that in *Pagoda*, whereas the romantic sentiment surrounding the modern mother figure vanishes. The traumatic effect of the incident is amplified by the candid expression of mutual disgust between Ruiqiu and Jiuli. More importantly, the traumatic shock is not softened by sentimental retrospection, for the sober tone of this recount refutes any nostalgic reconciliation. The unembellished rhetoric, together with the forbidding narrative tone, is characteristic of the mature form of Chang's late style, which comprises "a compelling authenticity and an unyielding ascetic principle that rules out sentimentality and nostalgia" (Said 107).

The transmutation of Chang's rhetoric through the three different versions of recalling demonstrates the emergence of her late style as she gets more invested in writing against the modern ideology of family. In depicting the mother-daughter relation in crisis, Chang interrogates emotional implications of restructuring the domestic order against the social engineering of Chinese modernity. Dissipating the modern mirage of her unorthodox mother who repudiates any traditional and familial roles prescribed to women, she casts doubt on the idolization of self-emancipating New Woman. As Xu Zidong contends, Chang's interrogation of the modern mother figure draws out China's cultural dilemma after the Enlightenment era—that is, the mismatch between the unproblematic embrace of western modernity and the inescapable and irreducible reality of Chinese society ("The Mother-Daughter Relation" 27). Living in a temporospatial distance from both her mother and the motherland in her late years, Chang comes to realize and crystalize her self-imposed exile from her own time. Her fixation on the traumatic contact with her mother attests to "the hefty emotional price exacted from the younger generation by an individualistic Chinese Nora who walks out of her husband's cage-life bourgeois home, and who, not surprisingly, is also self-centered in her relationship with her children" (Sang 204). Revealing "the complexity of individualism and women's liberation," Chang explodes "the naïveté and hypocrisy" (204) of the modern discourse. She militates ferociously against her own time through unrelentingly writing against her own mother.

Finally, I want to briefly touch upon another telling moment in Chang's autobiographical novels, which is also indicative of her late style. For Said, late style is prompted by the awareness of approaching death, but it "does not admit the definite cadences of death; instead, death appears in a refracted mode, as irony" (24). Chang's awareness of and meditation on approaching death in her late works is intimated by the fictional death of her alter ego—that is, her brother, given the name of Hill. Hill's death from tuberculosis is the most conspicuous deviation from Chang's actual life in the autobiographical novels. In *Pagoda*, Hill is trapped in the bleak house of the father, for the divorced mother cannot afford to get custody of her son. Hill then contracts tuberculosis through drinking from the same cup as the opium-using and contagious stepmother. In making her brother a casualty of the corrupted domestic life, Chang seems to accuse her declining traditional family on her father's side of killing the younger generation out of ignorance and malice. However, a closer look at Hill's death discloses a more complex issue with regard to her modern mother. When Lute, in Dew's company, receives the shocking news of Hill's sudden death, she retreats to her own thought:

 This is the way things come, Lute thought. When a big thing happens it's always like this, requiring nothing of her except to look awed and keep quiet, and in the most unlikely place like here in the little bathroom where her mother gave her educational talks before the mirror and always a pair of tiny Cinderella shoes

standing on the scales. Her brother no longer existed. In the beginning they had been the only two people in the world. Now there was only she. She felt cold and lost somewhere in her middle. (281)

The little bathroom in Dew's apartment is the hearth of a modern domestic space, where she often has private conversations with Lute. Dew often turns these intimate moments into informal lectures on the topics of western scientific knowledge such as hygiene, health, and diet. As a matter of fact, the most effective communication between Dew and her children is mediated through such educational talks. Whenever Hill visits her in the apartment, Dew always anxiously lectures him on "eating the right things" (217) and warns him about the risk of tuberculosis contamination. However, this didactic way of disseminating modern science and medicine does not prevent Hill from contracting the fatal disease, since empty words and disembodied knowledge can barely compensate for the absence of maternal nursing and caring.

While Lute's traumatic memory of maternal touch testifies to the emotional cost and psychological damage caused by a radically modern mother, the fictional death of Hill emblemizes the tangible loss experienced by a dysfunctional modern family. David Wang's introduction to *Pagoda* remarks that the refracted representation of death or the miswriting of the loss of her brother "is where Chang asserts her power as a fiction writer" (xi). Stephen Song also mentions in his introduction to *Reunion* that in crafting her autobiographical novels, Chang took in C. T. Hsia's opinion that the distinction between fiction and biography can be tenuous (6). The hybrid genre of autobiographical novel undercuts the oppositional binary of authenticity and falsity. Weaving indexical and fictional representations together, autobiographical fiction approximates the complexity and fluctuation of human emotion and relation to a higher degree. That is to say, a dramatic touch or a fictional addition brings to the fore what is often suppressed by subliminal self-control or social constraints. It is through asserting her power as a fiction writer in remaking her memory and story that Chang discovers the unique literary language and form for her late style.

Through dramatizing internal struggles and fabricating a tragic death, Chang transgresses personal boundaries and cultural constraints to expose the contentious undercurrents of her family memory in her late works. Her relentless interrogation of the modern maternal subject embodied by no other than her own mother rattles the readers and provokes them to revise their habituated view on modernity and maternity. The ideologies of modern progress and new womanhood are hollowed out by the costliness of unintended consequences on personal and familial levels. Chang's alienated stance of critique and her alienating rhetoric constitute the new idiom of her late style, which emphatically renounces any reconciliation with her own time.

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