

## Diasporic Writer's Self-Orientalisation or Self-Reflexivity: American Orientalist Discourse and the Rejection of Eileen Chang's *The Rouge of the North*<sup>1</sup>

Qiao Meng<sup>2</sup>  
Ningxia University, China

### Abstract

By adopting the rules of exclusion in the Foucauldian idea of discourse, this paper explores why *The Rouge of the North* by Eileen Chang, a diasporic writer, was rejected for publication in the United States. During the early years of the Cold War, a “positive” stereotypical image of Chinese Americans as assimilable was constructed in the American Orientalist discourse, to win over Asian and American minds. Because the more negative image of the characters in the novel did not comply with this image, it was excluded from circulation. This invalidates some current accusations of Chang as self-orientalising. This paper contends that labelling diasporic writers like Chang as self-orientalising dismisses the ambivalence of the construction of the stereotypes of Orientals in Orientalist discourse. Besides, the label ignores Chang's conscious refusal to contribute to the epistemic production desired by American hegemonic power to facilitate its function. Her refusal demonstrates her self-reflexivity as an intellectual, rather than self-orientalisation.

### Keywords

Diasporic writer, American Orientalist discourse, stereotype, self-orientalisation, self-reflexivity, Eileen Chang

### Introduction

Eileen Chang (1920-95) was a bilingual writer who excelled in both English and Chinese writing and translation (Wang, “Foreword” viii). She was denigrated as “a traitor writer”<sup>3</sup> in China in the late 1940s (Chen 47-57), but was exalted by C.T. Hsia as the “the best and most important [Chinese] writer” in the United States about two decades later (389). And although Chang was a household

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<sup>2</sup> Qiao Meng is Professor of English at the School of Foreign Languages and Cultures, Ningxia University, China. She has published a book and around 20 articles. Her research interests include diasporic writing and literary translation.

<sup>3</sup> Eileen Chang married Hu Lancheng, an important official in the puppet government (1940-1945) which collaborated with the Japanese. Chang and Hu got married in 1944 and were divorced in 1947. Their relationship was one reason why she was given the humiliating title of “a woman collaborator” and “a traitor writer” in 1945 after the Japanese were defeated (Z. Chen 47-57).

name in Shanghai in her twenties, she died alone in a Los Angeles apartment after living in the United States for forty years, her body discovered only days later. Like her life, the reception of her story “The Golden Cangue” (1943) in China, which she rewrote into a novel, *The Rouge of the North* (1967), in the United States, was marked by stark contrast.

“The Golden Cangue” was published in 1943. Fu Lei, a prestigious literary critic of Chang’s time, claimed soon after its publication that “The Golden Cangue” was one of the greatest achievements in Chinese literature. He commented favourably about the diction, rhythm, structure and psychologically real characters (8-9). His recognition of Chang’s literary skills in “The Golden Cangue” was echoed at a tea party about Chang’s writing in the same year by such critics as Yao Luochuan, Wu Jiangfeng and Gu Zhengkui (Hu 75-77). C.T. Hsia claimed that it was “the greatest novelette in the history of Chinese literature” and he thought highly of Chang’s “skilful appropriation of the elements of both the native and the Western tradition” (398).

However, the same story failed to make a similar impact in a different time and space. Eileen Chang immigrated to the United States in 1955. She was among more than two million people who embarked on their diasporic journey to Taiwan, Hong Kong and the West after the Communists took over China (Wang, *The Monster* 11). Robin Cohen says that after arriving in the host land, diasporic people may intermarry with natives, convert to their religion and adopt their social and cultural practices (16). These actions are meant to help the diasporics to integrate into the host society. Chang followed this same pattern of behaviour. Her marriage to Ferdinand Reyher, an American screenwriter, and her short stint in the Centre for Chinese Studies at the University of California, Berkeley, were efforts to overcome her marginalised identity. More importantly, she tried to establish ties with the host society through her writing. She rewrote “The Golden Cangue” into an English novel – *Pink Tears* – in 1956, and submitted it to several American publishers, such as Knopf, Norton and New Grove, but was rejected by all. Among these publishers, Knopf gave the strongest criticism, claiming that all the characters in the novel were revolting, and that unlike several subtle Japanese novels which they had published, *Pink Tears* was “squalid” (see Zhou 116). Later she changed the title of the novel to *The Rouge of the North* and got it published in the UK in 1967.<sup>4</sup>

One reason why Chang chose to rewrite “The Golden Cangue” might lie in Fu Lei and C.T. Hsia’s high evaluation of the story. It could also be out of

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<sup>4</sup> It was republished by the University of California Press in 1998. *Boston Book Review* thinks Eileen Chang is “a compulsively readable storyteller” (<http://www.bokus.com/book/9780520210875/the-rouge-of-the-north/>). Rey Chow of the University of California, Irvine, holds that the novel provides a “poignant story,” containing “some of the most notable novelistic features of Chang’s work” (from the inside flap).

her love of the story, which was based on the true story of a branch of her extended family. She grew up in that environment and was familiar and obsessed with how a decaying feudal family was able to poison the happiness of men and women, and how personal greed and desire finally led to one's ruin and that of others.

David De-wei Wang, however, suggests another explanation. He thinks that Chang chose to rewrite "The Golden Cangue" because it had "the most promising ingredients: a woman protagonist, an Orientalist allure, and a family-saga structure" ("Foreword" ix). This response indicates his assumption that Eileen Chang tried to cater to the Orientalist discourse. He mentions it only fleetingly, and does not make it a strong criticism, but some researchers have clearly labelled Chang as self-orientalising. When analysing Chang's portrayal of the characters in *The Rouge of the North*, Chen Huiqin claims,

All these magnify defects in Chinese characters such as irrationality, depravity, ridiculousness, deceit, barbarity and fatuousness. Thus [Eileen Chang] constructed Chinese people as a population of degenerate types, confirmed Western cultural prestige, and rationalized their conquest and colonisation, which evidently suggests her tendency to self-orientalisation. (40)

Borrowing from Arif Dirlik,<sup>5</sup> Chen Huiqin uses the idea of self-orientalisation to refer to the phenomenon that the Oriental elites who live in the West "consciously or unconsciously" view themselves through images constructed in the Orientalist discourse, and "confirm and perpetuate" such images in their works to pander to the West (5). Her understanding of self-orientalisation is similar to Lisa Lau's term of "Re-Orientalism" in the discussion of South Asian diasporic writers:

Orientalism is no longer only the relationship of the dominance and representation of the Oriental by the non-Oriental or Occidental, but that this role appears to have been taken over (in part at least) by other Orientals, namely, the diasporic authors. (572)

Whether self-orientalisation or re-Orientalism, both terms point to the diasporic writers' representation of the homeland in the framework of Orientalism to win the host society's recognition. But such accusations fail to

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<sup>5</sup> Arif Dirlik uses self-orientalisation in the framework of Pratt's contact zone. He maintains that the construction of the Orient in the Orientalist discourse involved not only the Occidentals but also the Oriental intellectuals. While he holds that "the contemporary 'self-orientalisation' of Asian intellectuals... is a manifestation not of powerlessness but newly-acquired power," he admits that self-orientalisation "perpetuates" and even "consolidates" the existing power relations between the West and the East (96-114).

take into consideration the context in which the text was produced. By adopting the rules of exclusion in Michel Foucault's idea of discourse, this article argues that critics should not force postcolonial theory on a text, regardless of its context, or rush to dismiss it as a self-orientalising text. The article further explores what the critics need to consider in their evaluation of a diasporic text, especially one such as Eileen Chang's *The Rouge of the North*.

### **Chinese Americans in American Orientalist Discourse during the Early Cold War Period**

It is true that negative stereotypical images of the Chinese can be found in *The Rouge of the North*: women's bound feet, prostitutes, opium and degenerate male characters. Nevertheless, did Chang really intend to "[confirm] Western cultural prestige, and [rationalise] their conquest and colonisation" (H. Chen 40)? To answer this question, we should first examine what kind of rationalisation the American Orientalist discourse needed during the time when Chang produced *The Rouge of the North*.

During the early period of the Cold War, the paramount American foreign policy was to contain Communism so as to compete with the Soviet Union (Field 2). The containment doctrine first appeared in George Kennan's "Long Telegram" in 1946, which suggested containing the expansion of the Soviet Union, and thus the domination of Communism, to fend off the possible emergence of a "Red Asia." When the Chinese Communist Party took over China in 1949, the United States felt it had "lost" China. With China's participation in the Korean War (1950-53), its danger as a threat was more strongly felt. In 1955, Secretary of State J.F. Dulles claimed that China represented a greater threat in Asia than the Soviet Union due to its large population and its cultural prestige in Asia (Kim 40-72).

A branch of the United States Information Service was set up in Hong Kong to contain the possible influence of Communism in Southeast Asia. It issued magazines and newspapers for anti-Communist ideological education, and supported the publication of about 200 novels that attacked Chinese Communism through a myriad of ways, including vilifying Communist leaders, and attacking Communist policies, human relationships, and social life (Yuan 9-10). In a word, they exposed the "evil nature" of Communists.

The negative stereotypical images of Chinese Communists could also be found in American domestic discourse. The movie *The Manchurian Candidate*, concerning the aftermath of the Korean War was a case in point. In this movie, the Chinese Communist Dr. Yen Lo brainwashed the American POWs through mental torture, turning them into extremely skilful assassins who would kill other Americans after their return to the United States. In one of the POWs' recurring nightmares, Dr. Yen Lo appeared in the form of a cat smiling like Fu

Manchu.<sup>6</sup> Fu Manchu incarnated the threat of the Yellow Peril and represented the stereotype of the Chinese as evil in American popular culture and politics. The very allusion to Fu Manchu and the term “brainwashing” represent American paranoia during the time of the Yellow Peril and Red Scare (Kim 73).

As Bhabha's notion of the ambivalence of stereotypes in colonial discourse indicates, the negative stereotypical image always co-exists with the positive one for different imperial and political purposes (82). The colonial mentality that “good natives serve, bad natives rebel” (Kim 83) still worked during the Cold War. While the image of Chinese Communists as evil served to contain the spread of Communism, the positive representation of Chinese ethnicity in American Orientalist discourse worked simultaneously during the early period of the Cold War, pushing for global integration and assimilation of racial minorities domestically (Klein 226).

There was an unprecedented expansion of US political, military and economic power in Asia from 1945 to 1961. The American presence in this area was different from colonial expansion in that it did not involve territorial occupation; rather, it was the economic market and political influence that the US aimed for. However, as with colonial occupation, the country still needed to justify itself in this cause, and to win the Asians away from Chinese Communism meant that the United States had to demonstrate its principles of racial equality. Besides, the US also needed to win over the American people so that they would not resist “such an expansive – and expensive – foreign policy agenda” (Klein 28, 226).

To show the superiority of American democracy over Chinese Communism, the American State Department decided to use the examples provided by successfully assimilated Chinese Americans (Wu 393). The decision was to incorporate the statements of the Chinese Americans into the dominant American Orientalist discourse to facilitate the function of power in this region. The Voice of America played a key role in revealing to the Asians what Chinese Americans' life was like in the United States. A weekly radio show on Voice of America (VOA) named “Chinese Activities” told stories about successful Chinese in the US (Wu 399-400). Common to all stories was that they emphasised the prospects that the country provided for racial minorities: their belonging within the country was affirmed, countering the accusations of racism against the US.

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<sup>6</sup> Fu Manchu was created by the English writer Sax Rohmer in thirteen novels from *The Insidious Dr. Fu-Manchu* (1913) to *Emperor Fu Manchu* (1959) (X. Li, 34-35). In these novels Fu Manchu was intelligent but evil, and he was determined to conquer the West. The image of Dr. Fu Manchu had a far-reaching influence in both Britain and the United States. The novels were put on screen in the United States from 1923, and lasted well into the 1940s. In 1942 when an American movie company planned another movie about Fu Manchu, the Chinese government protested. The plan was cancelled. The American government stated that they should not make their Chinese ally too embarrassed (Yu Li 132).

Moreover, the State Department sent Chinese Americans to Asia on speaking tours in the 1950s. The image they conveyed during these tours must be of positive assimilation in the country; and their stories had to be characterised by the idea of hard work being rewarded with success due to the democracy and freedom prevailing in the country. Chinese Americans' ethnicity thus proved crucial in the American Orientalist discourse used by the United States to battle Communism. The US manipulated Chinese American identity to show the ethnic Chinese groups in Asia that although Chinese Americans were a racial minority in the country, they enjoyed equal rights, and chances of mobility were the same for them as for any other American.

In addition to the speech tours and radio programmes, literary texts concerning Chinese Americans which could facilitate the political agenda were published domestically. Jade Snow Wong's *The Fifth Chinese Daughter* (1950) is an autobiography in which Wong tried to present the real life of the Chinese Americans; thus, much of *The Fifth Chinese Daughter* was about Chinese cooking, upbringing of children, and customs and traditions. She wrote about the positive values her father imparted to her: how to be thrifty and independent. In addition, Wong showed appreciation for the opportunities and help mainstream society had provided for her. Thus, *The Fifth Chinese Daughter* successfully told the story of how a second-generation Chinese American fulfilled her American dream through her own efforts. It was praised by the newspapers as a portrait of a young woman who was blessed with the best qualities of two cultures (Wu 406). The State Department had it translated into different Asian languages and sent Jade Snow Wong on a speaking tour around Asia. Her speech faithfully followed the agenda of the State Department and celebrated "the promises of liberal democracy and cultural pluralism" in the United States (Wu 405-09).

Another text that was admitted into American Orientalist discourse during this period was C.Y. Lee's *Flower Drum Song* (1957). The novel revolved around generational conflicts between a father and his sons. The sons had received an American education and accepted American values of equality and individualism. The positive influence of American society was manifested through scenes in which the characters attended American universities, went to the hospital and the bank operated by Americans and graduated from a citizenship school. Apart from foregrounding the assimilation of American values, Lee emphasised the Chineseness of another family by praising the father's philosophical wisdom and the daughter's quiet modesty. The affirmation of Chineseness in the novel supported the US claim of cultural pluralism. Again, the novel told the story of assimilation so well that in 1958 a musical version was staged on Broadway, and a movie version released in 1961.

As Foucault claims, human beings' understanding of themselves, their relations to the outside world and their own position in the world are obtained through discursive statements; and their thoughts and deeds are affected,

regulated and in a way controlled by different discourses (Danaher et al. 31). During the early period of the Cold War, the US government, publishers and writers worked together to produce statements concerning evil Communists and assimilable Chinese Americans to serve the country's policy of containment and integration. But a close reading of *The Rouge of the North* shows that the novel did not fit these expectations.

### **Eileen Chang's Counter Narrative**

Eileen Chang rose to fame in the 1940s in Shanghai with her brilliant short stories and novellas that focused on the happiness and bitterness of common people, and revealed the frail relationships among human beings and the darkness of human nature. Coming from a prominent but declining feudalistic family, Eileen Chang was well aware of the ills of the Chinese patriarchal system, which was heavily influenced by Confucianism. She wrote against male-dominated civilisation and criticised the patriarchal society's oppression, humiliation and distortion of women.

After she immigrated to the US, however, she noticed an "odd literary trend." In a profile she wrote for *World Authors 1950-1970*, she pointed out that American Orientalist discourse was "tolerant, even reverential, without a closer look at the pain" inside the Chinese patriarchal system and that China tended to be idealised as a country with great Confucian philosophers, who, nevertheless, were tragically dominated by Communists (see Kao 345).

Being aware of this idealised Confucian image of China, she refused to follow suit in her own portrayals of China. In a letter to C.T. Hsia, a prominent literary critic of Chinese origin, she wrote, "What those people fancy about the Orient is exactly what I want to expose" (see Zhou 118). *The Rouge of the North* constitutes part of this project of "exposure." It was a counter narrative that opposed the idealisation of the Orient, rather than a text of self-orientalisation. It was in opposition to the dominant American discourse in that she did not model her characters according to the mainstream expectation, but tried to make the readers take "a closer look at the pain" inside the Chinese patriarchal system through her self-reflexivity.

### **Negative Characters in Opposition to Mainstream Expectation**

*The Rouge of the North* depicts the morbid life of a declining feudal family in China. The poor protagonist Yindi was married to the Second Master of the rich Yao family, who was blind and bedridden. After marriage, she was seduced by her handsome brother-in-law, the Third Master. The half-way affair with him filled her with shame and fear, so she tried to commit suicide but was saved. In spite of her own suffering at the hands of patriarchal expectations, she later exerted these same expectations in order to control the lives of her son and daughter-in-law when she was old.

The novel did not provide “Orientalist allure” as claimed by David Wang (*The Monster* ix). As far as the subject matter was concerned, post-war texts related to Asia were not interested in Asia *per se*, but in America and its relationship to Asia (Klein 10). However, the story of *The Rouge of the North* had nothing to do with the United States, so it could not help to create bonds between Asians and Americans. Moreover, though the story took place in China, it did not concern any description of Communism, nor were there idealised Confucian philosophers oppressed by Communists, so it made no contribution to containing Communism.

Besides, the characters were far from being the positive and assimilable type desired by American Orientalist discourse. Chang had always portrayed her male characters as selfish, weak, hypocritical, and either physically or spiritually disabled, bringing no hope or happiness to people around them; she made no exception in *The Rouge of the North*. Yindi’s blind and bedridden husband, the Second Master, was selfish and lacking in resilience. He chose to withdraw to his big and exquisite bed, taking others’ care and service for granted. He ignored Yindi’s difficult position in the family and failed to support her where necessary. The Third Master was worse. He had no sense of responsibility to the family. He loved neither his wife nor Yindi. He was interested only in going to the brothel, squandering money, stealing and cheating family members when desperate. Yindi’s son was a petty young man who was dependent on his mother, showing no concern about the changes in society. These men were completely corrupt. They did not strive for a better and more meaningful life, thus making them totally different from the image of the successful Chinese Americans in the dominant American Orientalist discourse during the early Cold War, who worked hard and took the chances offered by American society to make upward mobility possible.

Moreover, Eileen Chang depicted a particularly negative character: the respectable Ninth Old Master. He was a homosexual who liked the Peking Opera female impersonators. His only son was actually the son of a servant, because he let “him loose on the wife” (*The Rouge of the North* 114). Such an image could not be accepted by the dominant American Orientalist discourse at the time. The early Cold War period in the United States was marked by anti-Communist hysteria and fear of the atomic bomb, so a certain domestic ideal was put in place to counter this uncertainty. Heterosexual nuclear families were encouraged while homosexuality was marginalised. The stereotypical image of the bachelor society of Chinatown<sup>7</sup> changed with the growing presence of Chinese women in the United States after World War II; it changed further with

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<sup>7</sup> Page Law issued in 1875 and the following Chinese Exclusion Acts barred Chinese women from entering the United States with the exception of merchants, students and diplomats (Yeh 411); therefore, quite a large number of men in Chinatown remained single throughout their lives.



the government's policy that all racial minorities had the equal right to move to the suburbs like the middle class whites. Some Chinese American families moved out of Chinatown and the newspaper featured the happy nuclear family with caring parents and lovely kids. This was also to show that Chinese Americans were assimilable: they were like the whites with similar values and goals about family (Cheng 1069-81). Given this scenario, the homosexual Ninth Old Master did not fit in the happy picture. Little wonder, then, that the Knopf editor claimed in his letter of rejection that the characters in *The Rouge of the North* were squalid (see Zhou 116).

More importantly, Eileen Chang did not model her female protagonist according to the requirements of the dominant discourse. Right after World War II, women who worked during the Great Depression and the war were encouraged to return to domesticity and leave the job opportunities open for the returning veterans (Cheng 1076; Yeh 411). Some Hollywood films suggested American women "take the Western imagination's creation of the passive Asian beauty as the feminine ideal" (Yeh 411). This American feminine ideal was in fact very close to the Chinese American revival and valorisation of the three obediences and four virtues in Confucian teachings. That was why the public media such as the *San Francisco Chronicle* praised the Confucian requirements, saying these were the qualities women should have (Yeh 411). According to the three obediences and four virtues, women should be submissive, take orders from men and be virtuous. Yindi, though a Chinese woman in a feudal family, was not such a figure.

Chang did not portray Yindi as a submissive woman. Yindi did not want to merely accept the life that seemed to be destined for her. Being born in a poor family, she decided to transgress the class boundary and marry the Second Master of the Yao family. She was looked down upon in the big family because of her poor origins, but she fought back whenever possible. She also rejected the role of virtuous womanhood required by Confucian teachings. Her husband stayed in a huge and exquisite bed which had everything he needed. He never got out of the bed, so the soles of his shoes were forever white and clean. She hated it. The very whiteness and cleanness indicated the absence of passion in their marriage. Therefore, when her handsome brother-in-law seduced her, she easily gave in. Just standing close to him intoxicated her. It was due to her desire for love that she agreed to their rendezvous in the temple when she was young, and listened to his "confession" of love for her during her middle age. However, she eventually found out that he had never taken her seriously.

With these negative characters, Chang produced a counter narrative to the dominant American Orientalist discourse. Naturally the novel could not help in the American integration project. On the contrary, the society or family in *The Rouge of the North* was one that had no love, sympathy, sense of responsibility, or concern and respect for others, which was why the editor of Knopf said that if

China had actually been like this, the Communists would have been the saviours of the country (see Zhou 116). The assumed justification of communism was another reason why the novel got rejected by the American Orientalist discourse. Knopf was not the only publisher that rejected the novel on this pretext; Norton did the same (Zhou 116).

Foucault contends that the production of discourse is “controlled, selected, organised and redistributed according to a certain number of procedures, whose role is to avert its powers and its dangers” (“Orders of Discourse” 8). He identifies three principles of exclusion that decide what can be said and what cannot: prohibition, the division between reason and folly, and the division between true and false (“Orders of Discourse” 8-10). Among the three rules of exclusion, the last is the most important. Only the statements made by those with institutional support or those in line with the dominant discourse are regarded as true, while others are excluded as false. Such division relies on institutions such as publishing houses, libraries, academies and government agencies (Foucault, “Orders of Discourse” 11). All these institutions exercise the exclusionary rules to remove what they think of as false from circulation, while promoting the distribution of statements that they regard as true. In the case of *The Rouge of the North*, the novel was excluded by the publisher because it failed to make the kind of statements that were desired or deemed as true. Nevertheless, though rejected by publishers, and clearly aware of the literary trend of idealising Confucian China, Chang refused to change. *The Rouge of the North* represented her self-reflexivity on the problems in her homeland culture.

### **Eileen Chang’s Self-Reflexivity**

The diasporic experience helped Eileen Chang gain a clearer vision of her homeland, where she was both an insider and an outsider – the in-betweenness of her identity enabled her to both have a direct experience of the life in China and articulate the problems with detachment. Her writing in the United States manifested her self-reflexivity on the negative aspects of Chinese people, events and thoughts. As she stated, she intended to expose as false what the American mainstream discourse said about China (see Zhou 118). In her two other novels written in the United States – *The Fall of the Pagoda* and *The Book of Change*<sup>8</sup> – Chang criticised the hierarchical Confucian order, mainly for reducing the female to an inferior position. Because she was embedded in a different place and culture, Chang could call readers’ attention to what Confucian practices could do to human nature; these practices had become so familiar to Chinese readers that they might not be critiqued, but Chang’s position allowed her to do so, as she does in *The Rouge of the North*.

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<sup>8</sup> Both the novels were published posthumously in 2013.

Growing up in a declining feudal family herself, Eileen Chang was familiar with its material grandeur and spiritual decay. *The Rouge of the North* demonstrated to the readers the corruption of feudalism. The ancestor of the Yao's was a prominent official in a feudal society which was slowly coming to an end; thus, though his offspring were not involved in any serious business, the hierarchical society could still guarantee them privilege, comfort and wealth, thus allowing them to live a life consisting of little more than fooling around and whoring. The same hierarchical system caused Yindi's life of misery. Yindi was the younger sister of a small businessman, a profession traditionally despised in China, so she received no respect in the household. Her mother-in-law claimed that Yindi was a southerner, thus differing from them, as northerners, in terms of societal rules. Yindi was clearly aware that "the real difference between her world and theirs was not geographical" (*The Rouge of the North* 34). Her two sisters-in-law felt uneasy when she tried to joke with them, and the relatives ignored her.

Chang thus showed how a hierarchical feudal family erased people's humanity, making them cruel and dead to all feelings. The difficulty and embarrassment of living in a family to whose class Yindi did not belong was such that she would rather evade the extended family, and she often fired old servants and hired new ones because the latter did not know about her origin and would not laugh at her secretly. Life in the big family turned the girl who was at least considerate to her grandparents into a mean and selfish woman. Yindi's own bitterness could only find an outlet in destroying other people's happiness. She made her daughter-in-law work like a servant. Worse, she laughed at her daughter-in-law in front of her son for being ugly. When her daughter-in-law was found to have tuberculosis, Yindi arranged for one of the maids to be her son's concubine to continue the family line, which her daughter-in-law was no longer deemed capable of. Her daughter-in-law died from a lack of medical treatment and humiliation in the end, but Yindi did not feel in the least guilty. It was through Yindi that Eileen Chang manifested the horror and darkness of human nature.

Moreover, Chang criticised the expunging of women's individuality in traditional Chinese culture, which dictated that after a Chinese woman got married, she was formally addressed by her husband's and her own family names, while her first name disappeared. When Yindi saw rows of women donors' names engraved following this practice on an incense pot in a temple, she "had the feeling that if she had looked more closely she would find her own name there, cast in iron" (*The Rouge of the North* 79). Yindi's dizziness and uncertainty represent Chang's denouncement of the Confucian idea that a woman's individual existence was of no value unless she was attached to her father or her husband. Besides, Chang's self-reflexivity was directed at the inequality between man and woman. Yindi felt as if she had committed a crime

after the unsuccessful affair with the Third Master, so she tried to commit suicide. However, what almost cost her life meant nothing to the Third Master. He went on with his old ways of whoring and fun-seeking. His wife could do nothing about his degeneration, and she had to lie for him in front of his mother, the Old Mistress. No one ever tried to judge him in the name of family rules or moralities. After all, it was a world for men, and only women were oppressed in it.

However, women's inferior position in the hierarchical gender order did not turn them into mere targets of sympathy. Though victims themselves, they waited for their turn to victimise others. Eileen Chang went further than merely sympathising with women. Rather, she demonstrated that without women's collusion, feudal families and the patriarchal system would not have been so successful. The Old Mistress disciplined her daughters-in-law strictly by Confucian teachings and would allow no violation of any patriarchal rules which had endowed her with absolute authority in the family. And though Yindi suffered great mental stress under her mother-in-law's "reign," she knew her turn to control had come when she became a mother-in-law, and she exerted her power even more brutally. Through the portrait of Yindi, Eileen Chang complicated the gender politics, toppling any totalising expectation of traditional Chinese women.

Thus, *The Rouge of the North* represents Chang's self-reflexive position on the homeland culture of which she was a part. She loved her culture and her people, so she could not remain silent about its ills. She wrote to expose these ailments, to make her people aware of the problems inherent in their culture. As stated by Dew, a diasporic character in another novel of hers says, "It's because we love China that we can't stand it not being better and stronger" (*The Fall of the Pagoda* 134). Like the New Culture Movement<sup>9</sup> intellectuals, Chang saw the problems of traditional Chinese culture, and tried to expose them. Nevertheless, she differed from those intellectuals in that she was devoid of their eager, yet unrealistic optimism. They expected that once the "progressive" Western culture was introduced into China, there would be a radical change, but Chang realised that Western culture would not work miracles. Her self-reflexivity made her see that the West was not the gallant warrior for the "feminine" China, and would not generate a fundamental change. That Chang had Yindi follow "the old ways" while the outside world was changing partly under the influence of the West indicated her denial of the superiority of Western culture. A similar kind of denial could be found in another short story she wrote in 1956 – "Stale

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<sup>9</sup> The New Culture Movement was launched in China from the mid 1910s to 1920s by intellectuals who tried to enlighten the masses by advocating Western idea of science and democracy and criticising the feudal system and morality.

Mates: A Short Story Set in Time When Love Came to China”<sup>10</sup> – in which the young Chinese intellectuals during the New Culture Movement ended up falling into the pit of traditional Chinese culture though they started by fighting against its fetters under the influence of Western norms of love. In her ironical way, Chang made the readers see that the so called “progressive” Western thoughts did not really bring love into China and could change nothing.

### Conclusion

In *The Rouge of the North*, none of the characters was noble or righteous. They were calculative, and the plight of others was of no concern to them. Rich people were forever pursuing greater material comfort, without ever knowing the real meaning of happiness, and the poor did not fare well, either; they were selfish and greedy. Therefore, there was no sublimity whatsoever in the novel, only desolation and hollowness. Eileen Chang's exposure of the darkness of human nature was superbly manifested through her characters. Nevertheless, since these characters were radically different from the positive image of the Chinese constructed in American Orientalist discourse during the early period of the Cold War, *The Rouge of the North* was not accepted for publication.

As discussed previously, the construction of the image of the Chinese in American Orientalist discourse can be explained by Bahbah's notion of the ambivalence of stereotypes. During the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a time of economic depression, the Chinese were thought of as taking the job opportunities of the whites, so they were portrayed as “odious and degrading” (Pfaelzer 29). But decades later, when the political agenda necessitated an assimilable image of the Chinese Americans to show America's cultural pluralism and superiority, the stereotypical image was changed to something positive in the American Orientalist discourse. Finally, then, what is the truth of the image of the Chinese or Chinese Americans? Foucault acutely points out the important features of truth in modern society:

‘Truth’ is subject to constant economic and political incitement; it is the object of immense diffusion and consumption; it is produced and transmitted under control, dominant if not exclusive, of a few great political and economic apparatuses.... (*Power* 131-32)

The stereotypical image of the Chinese is merely the consequence of the “political incitement” of different times and different discourses, and it is only

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<sup>10</sup> The male protagonist fought against the traditional Chinese notion of marriage to pursue his true love, a beautiful young lady who possessed progressive Western thoughts like himself. In the end, though he married his true love, they both agreed to take back his two ex-wives, whom he had spent eleven years to divorce. People envied him because he could still live with three wives in a nice house though it was an age “that was at least nominally monogamous” (*Traces of Love and Other Stories* 136).

the object of consumption. Only the statements that meet the demands of the “political and economic apparatuses” get circulated. In the case of *The Rouge of the North*, the editor and the publisher were not interested in exploring something that was a true representation of the Chinese, but they were concerned that they should work within the regime of truth. Since the novel did not fit in the regime of truth at the time, it could not be supported. Eileen Chang’s refusal to contribute to the epistemic production to facilitate the imperial project was not a symbol of self-orientalisation; rather, it spoke of her self-reflexivity necessary for an independent intellectual.

Hence, when it comes to the evaluation of diasporic writers, critics should be aware of the ambivalent construction of stereotypes of Orientals in the Orientalist discourse. The Orientals are not always represented as the backward barbarians; instead, their image be positive in Orientalist representations. However, this kind of positive image is manipulated to demonstrate the superiority of the West, or to facilitate the functioning of imperial agenda. Therefore, critics should not distort the literary texts to allow the application of postcolonial theory and rush to tag diasporic writers as self-orientalising once they identify the negative images of the Orientals in the texts. This kind of approach simplifies the study of diasporic writers, fails to incorporate diasporic writers’ self-reflexivity about the homeland people and culture, and neglects the ambivalent nature of the construction of the stereotypes.

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