

# Filmic Transposition of the Roses: Stanley Kwan's Feminine Response to Eileen Chang's Women\*

Joyce Chi-Hui Liu

## ABSTRACT

Here Stanley Kwan's recent film, *Red Rose/White Rose*, is read as a "feminine" re-reading of the "feminist" writer Eileen Chang's 1994 novella, *Red Rose and White Rose*. Drawing from Bloom's theory of poetic revisionism and Bryson's theory of painting as an art which exists in a certain state of tension with its own past, both incorporating and revising it, the argument is that through Kwan's filmic re-reading and transposition the power of Chang's words, and the hidden male ideology of the madonna-whore dichotomy behind her text, is literally and figuratively challenged and canceled. Thus in effect Kwan presents a "feminine" cinema whose subtext—the substratum of its filmic space—is his commentary on Chang's reticence about the historical context. He thereby also unveils the possibility of what Chang denies, i.e., the fluidity of female desire and the growth of female subjectivity.

## KEY WORDS

return of the past

revisionism

meta-filmic criticism

off-screen space

feminine cinema

filmic space

distancing of audience



When an artist feels the pressure of the past, the past of the culture and the art tradition, the past which is loved but lost, secretly cherished but at the same time denounced, to invoke and embed in the text the styles of her/his precursors might be a necessary strategy for her/him to confront and re-locate the past. The audience, likewise, is bound to experience in the textuality and its traces of the borrowings of tradition a tense struggle between the artist and the past, as well as a critique of the current cultural and artistic context.<sup>1</sup> Norman Bryson suggests in his book *Tradition and Desire* that, like ancient Chinese painters who copy and paraphrase works by previous artists so as to present their personal refashioning of the classical images (1), Western artists, even Romantic painters such as David, Ingres, and Delacroix, also borrow heavily from their precursors and mix in their works "a multiplicity of styles" (124). Sharing Harold Bloom's theories of revisionism, Bryson proposes that the artist experiences a contest between a "viewer" who enjoys the flood of rich images of the past but risks the disaster of having his own images drowned, and a "painter" who has to resist the invasion of the past and to remake the images (5). Bryson views painting as "an art of the sign" (xviii) and "its representations were self-referring and their meanings to be found not within perception, but within representation" (xix). Bryson's semiotic approach to painting is helpful for me in extending the intertextuality from one art genre to diverse art genres. In the present case, the interart and intersemiotic dialogue is between film and literature, Stanley Kwan's film *Red Rose / White Rose* and Eileen Chang's novella *Red Rose and White Rose*.

In this paper, I argue that Stanley Kwan's recent film *Red Rose /*

White Rose (1994) should be read as his "feminine" re-reading of the "feminist" writer Eileen Chang's fiction of 1944, half a century ago. Through Kwan's filmic re-reading and transposition, the power of Chang's words, and the hidden male-dominated ideology of the madonna/whore dichotomy behind her text, is literally and figuratively challenged and canceled. Thus in effect Kwan presents before the audience a "feminine" cinema which not only maneuvers the substratum of the filmic space as his commentary on Chang's reticence about the historical context, but also unveils the possibility of the fluidity of female desire and the growth of female subjectivity, both denied by Eileen Chang.

### The Return of the Past

Eileen Chang,<sup>2</sup> unlike other feminist writers of her time, does not portray the so-called revolutionary and forward-looking New Women;<sup>3</sup> instead, her woman figures are mostly depicted as being in situations of "entrapment, destruction, and desolation" (Rey Chou 85). But, as Rey Chou points out, Chang's elaboration and indulgence in "sensuous, trivial and superfluous textual presences" of the details reveals her unspoken criticism of the "larger vision such as reform and revolution" supposedly shared collectively by the citizens of the new China in the modern era (85). Also, her women, Chou suggests, presented as negative, incomplete and cut off parts and details of the presumed "whole" of idealist notions like "Man," "Self," or "China" (114), figuratively mock the falsehood of the progressiveness of the modern society in China (120). From the description of Qiqiao in *The Golden Cangue*, Chou suggests, the audience can see a typical example of "a detail gone mad":

Shih-fang looked over his shoulder and saw a small old lady standing at the doorway with her back to the light so that he could not see her face distinctly. She wore a blue-gray gown of palace brocade embroidered with a round dragon design, and clasped with both hands a scarlet hot-

water bag; two tall amahs stood close beside her. Outside the door the setting sun was smoky yellow; and the staircase covered with turquoise plaid linoleum led up step after step to a place where there was no light. Shih-fang instinctively felt this person was mad. (Qtd. in Chou, 118)

Thus, Chang's writings, though never treating directly the contemporary historical and social background, form an oppositional force, Chou argues, a disturbing feminine view, which resists and disrupts the grand narrative of "nation building" popular in modern Chinese fiction around the 1930s and 1940s (87).

The traces of the past in Chang's writings, I think, though they serve as resistance against the grand vision of the New China, also reveal Chang's compulsive return and consequently her fundamental emotional bondage with the past. Chang's high-modernist style of lustrous and dense layers of sensuous details and her avoidance of contemporary historical and social reference, I think, shows her purposeful borrowing from the tradition of *Honglou Meng*, and by resorting to the old literary style her complex attitudes toward the past are also revealed. This past is not only the literary style of sensuous details, but also the literary world in *Honglou Meng*, that is, the aristocratic tradition which Chang herself descends from.<sup>4</sup> Born in a declining family, in the modern era, with estranged relations with her father and her mother,<sup>5</sup> Chang must have felt a sense of alienation and loss for the past which she was too late for, which has deserted her, which she loves but also hates all her life, and which she tries to return to through her language. This displacement of the past through concrete verbal images functions like her habit of constantly masquerading herself in the costume of late Qing style which she designs and makes for herself. Wrapped up in clothing which represents the past long gone by, Chang herself is a strange mixture of detachment and attachment to the loved but also hated Other. This complex embrace of the unwanted traumatic experience explains to some degree her cynical and cold treatment of all her characters, both male and female. Chang mercilessly discloses the selfishness and triviality of

her characters, who belong to the old Chinese society. In weaving the past through detailed verbal images, like the kind the audience sees in *Qiqiao* and many others, Chang reactivates the uncanny shadows of the past.

The audience can observe in Chang's writing the deep-rooted conceptual moral distinction between good woman and bad woman, and a contempt for the desire and freedom of woman. *Qiqiao*, *Changan*, *Liusu*, and *Yenli* are all alike: they are doomed in the society in which women cannot desire.

The intent of Kwan's adaptation of Chang's *Red Rose and White Rose* puzzled his critics. The audience sees now and then the words from Eileen Chang's text projected on the celluloid screen in a very elegant calligraphy, juxtaposed with the English translation, also in an ornate and archaic style, and these two languages are divided on the screen by a decorative bar. The visual presence of the script on the screen gives the audience an impression of opening up a paper-bound book and hence reinforces the pre-existence of Eileen Chang's text. Critics thus were often misguided and complained about the filmmaker's subjection to the original text. Ruite Shih, for example, stated that the "charm" of Eileen Chang's fiction "once again conquered the audience of the celluloid screen," and that Kwan and Yihua Lin, the screen playwright, "did not propose a new or original perspective, . . . nor subvert the world in Eileen Chang's fiction" (Shih 190). Zhensu Duan, on the other hand, criticized Kwan for echoing the woman's position in Eileen Chang's time: "We see wanton women as well as dutiful women deserted in the end. Women are always the losers" (Duan 70).

These critics' misinterpretation of Kwan's film are caused by Kwan's strategic borrowing of Eileen Chang's decadent style<sup>6</sup> and his following faithfully the plot in *Red Rose and White Rose*. Through the filmic transposition of the words, I want to point out, Kwan has done just the opposite: he has taken up a post-modern position and playfully changed the story of the roses, politicized the gender issue, and highlighted in his film a feminine writing which is different from what we find in Eileen Chang's text. In the rest of this paper, I shall

show that Kwan's reading of *Red Rose and White Rose* exposes in Chang's text the denied and yet paradoxically re-affirmed patriarchal values passed on through the feudal system of ancient China. Through the intersemiotic dialogue with Chang's verbal text, Kwan establishes his feminine filmic strategies in *Red Rose / White Rose* by juxtaposing the surface text along with the marginalized latent text within the same frame, complicating the narrative by inserting heterogeneous off-screen voices, ridiculing while foregrounding the masculine discourse through visual and acoustic icons, and elaborating the feminine writing through the voice of silence.<sup>7</sup> In doing so, Kwan, unlike Eileen Chang, not only attacks the phallogocentric collective morality of traditional Chinese culture, but also proposes the possibility of the autonomy of woman's subjectivity, and hence subverts Chang's pre-possessed bias against the freedom and the growth of women's desire. Furthermore, Kwan pieces together the historical background of China during the modernization period in the 1930s and 1940s, which was never treated directly in Eileen Chang's fiction.

### **A Feminine Response in the Marginalized Position**

Feminine cinema, suggests Annette Kuhn, gives us a dimension of resistance similar to counter cinema by subverting the mainstream construction of cinematic pleasure, disturbing the identification with the characters, interrupting the narrative flow, and breaking the boundary between fiction and reality (Kuhn 11-13, 155-157). The audience needs to re-locate himself in the heterogenic mode of representation and thus the pleasure in feminine cinema is built upon a kind of active pleasure of "working on a puzzle" (163). More significantly, Kuhn argues, feminine cinema reveals a "feminine voice" which stresses the differences of gender (163).

In his recent films, such as *Rouge* (1988) and *Ruan Lingyu* (1991), Kwan displayed more and more disturbing traces which question Hongkong mainstream commercial movies. Kwan himself is aware of the fact that "in the cinematic system of Hongkong in which the commercial trends prevail and dominate, it is indeed difficult to

insist on something different from the mainstream movies" (Elle 76). In shooting *Rouge*, however, Kwan has begun to reconsider the problems of representation through filmic form, and he said, "however moving *Rouge* might be, it is only a film made by Stanley Kwan" (Gao 65). The studio "ghost scene" in the final moment of *Rouge*, therefore, is a parody: Kwan deliberately plays a joke upon the ghost stories popularized by commercial movies made in Hongkong.<sup>8</sup> The multilayered intertextuality in *Ruan Lingyu*, furthermore, shifts from the documentary to the fiction film, from fragments of the past to the reconstructed history, and bluntly challenges the audience's film-viewing experience.<sup>9</sup>

In *Red Rose/White Rose*, Kwan launches his meta-filmic joke on Eileen Chang through the black-and-white play-within-the-play. This segment is a quotation from the film *Taitai Nansui* (1947), directed by Sanghu, based on the screenplay by Zileen Zhang, and it is inserted in the middle of the film when Zhenbao has finished his affair with Jiaorui and is about to start a new relationship with Yenli. This play-within-the-play not only parallels the situation between Zhenbao and Jiaorui, but also mirrors Eileen Chang's narrative in a parodic way. In this scene the woman teasingly says, "Who is using my fan?" This is a playful joke Kwan plays upon Eileen Chang's borrowing of the allusion of the fan from Kong Shangren's *Peach Blossom Fan* (*Tao Hua Shan*), in which Lee Xiangjun defends her chastity by banging her head against the wall, staining the fan with her blood. But Chang changes the allusion to woman's chastity into an ironic remark on a man's self-claimed chastity:

At best, the average man's life is like the "peach blossom fan;" he bangs his head and his blood flows onto the fan. But adding some brush strokes on it would turn it into a branch of peach blossoms. Chen-pao's fan was still empty, but his pen was poised and the ink is ready; the window was clean and the table cleared. He had only to lower his pen. (3)

Eileen Chang has "used" Kong Shangren's fan and changed the moral connotation; Kwan also wants to "use" Eileen Chang's "rose" and change it into variations of the rose images on the screen. The Red Rose and the White Rose in Eileen Chang's novel have become the roses of different colors in the garden, in the vase, or the rose pattern on the floor carpet, on the sofa cover, as the wall relief, or as the bed frame decoration. Kwan's film is literally "a movie of the roses." Such excessive celluloid images of the roses alter the signifying function of the verbal signs of Red Rose/White Rose contrast, and exceed the moral boundary of the novel, and accordingly the dichotomy which distinguishes the Red Rose and the White Rose disappears.

In telling his version of the story of the roses, Kwan also inserts the contextual information related to the story. Eileen Chang never in her novels dealt with the historical and political contexts. She was even harshly criticized by Tang Wenbiao as totally isolated from her time: "refusing the historical time and escaping from the geographical environment" (Tang 65). Kwan adds the contextual information to the film, such as the dates of 1936 and 1943 shown in the Dagong Newspaper, the news report on the Sino-Japanese War, the advocacy of wartime nurse services from the radio, the vague off-screen sound of the bombing as well as the occasional pale lighting of shellfire on the screen. Kwan deliberately marginalizes this information into the substratum of the film narrative, and these background messages never rise up to the surface, nor shared or mentioned by the characters. The entire process of the Sino-Japanese War lies there as a negative narrative, hidden beneath the surface. This substratum filmic space, I find, contains Kwan's comments on the absence of the historical reference in Eileen Chang's text.

The shot of the street scene right before the dinner scene epitomizes Kwan's undertone shots: the audience sees yellowish flashes of shellfire extended from the left-handed off-screen space, connected with the vague off-screen sound of the bombing. The fire is burning in the off-screen space, but these messages are not reconfirmed nor followed up by the plot, and the conversation in the dining room con-



tinues without acknowledging the activities pertaining to the off-screen space. The postponement, the differance, of the signification of these unsutured marginal and excessive signs adds layers as well as instability to the narrative voice. Such neglected and marginalized heterogeneous narrative voice establishes the mode of the feminine writing in Kwan's film.

The peculiar juxtaposition of the Chinese script and the English script on screen, examined with the consciousness of the marginalized messages, functions as a semiotic demarcation which forms a heterogeneous space of dual language system: one native, the other foreign. The neglected foreign space, the marginalized and suspended dimension of perception, like the neglected off-screen sounding of bombing and the off-screen unconfirmed flash of shellfire, is a textual space of the Other. The English scripts are even imprinted as if inscribed on the image of Jiaorui, at the moment when she is addressed by her husband as "they overseas Chinese." This pronoun "they" is a marker which, like the decorative bar in the middle of the screen, separates the social group outside of the Chinese culture, the social Other. The semiotic space of the textual Other is the foreign, the feminine, or Jiaorui, which challenges Zhenbao, the Male, the Self, or China.

The Male, the masculine discourse, is represented by Zhenbao through the filmic connections between Zhenbao with the visual icons such as loudspeaker, microphone, radio, platform, blackboard, newspapers, slogan cloth strips, and the acoustic images such as the moral and patriotic lessons amplified through public speeches and radio broadcasting. The dominant key of such discourse is a collective morality which is highlighted by words such as "The principal of life is to restrain oneself and to help others; the ideal of the nation is obtained through practical improvement," "Movement of constructing new family, new society, new morality, and new thoughts," "serve the nation and love the family," and so on. These details form the aura of the collective morality, linking the personal with the national, in the modernization period of China, especially during the 1930s and the 1940s in which the Sino-Japanese war was in the background.

The feminine response Kwan takes to challenge the Male is to

problematize the male authoritative voice of the off-screen third person narrator. This off-screen voice tells the story of Zhenbao, following faithfully Eileen Chang's version, in a detached and neutral tone. Kwan first visualizes the narrator's voice through projecting the scripts on the screen and disrupts the flow of images. The audience experiences a kind of visual frustration when he expects actions and dialogues. Also, the calligraphy on screen appeals to the audience's consciousness of reading. Such devices of visualization and double narrative shatter the illusions of reality and hence create what Pascal Bonitzer calls "the alienation effect" (331). The audience hence is distanced from the narrative. Kwan further unsettles the power of the off-screen narrator by making Zhao Wenxuan, the actor who plays Zhengbao, the third-person off-screen narrator. This off-screen male voice makes the audience in the position of the girl in Chang's earliest version in which the girl overhears Zhenbao's story at her aunt's place and laughs at Zhenbao's narrative.<sup>10</sup> Also, the sameness of the voice of the narrator and Zhenbao suggests the split in the representation and makes the audience suspect the authority and sincerity of the narrator.

The discrepancy between the actions on screen and the narrator's texts makes the audience further distanced from the story. One obvious example is seen in the scene in which Zhenbao's wedding talk on "serving his nation and loving his family" is undermined when the sound montage links the wedding cake icon with the off-screen obscene bed scene sound of Zhenbao and the prostitute. The irony and inconsistency behind the collective morality is even intensified in the following scene when the sound montage links the prostitute's and Zhenbao's business talk with the off-screen radio broadcasting of the advantages of collective wedding ceremony. The collective morality represented by Zhenbao is therefore challenged and criticized. The collective morality, to Kwan, exercises a certain mechanic and even compulsive pressure on people, and Kwan exaggerates this compulsive mode of communication and value judgment through radio broadcasting and loud speakers. The puritanical and militant advocacy of battlefield nurse service and the Professor's banal talk at the

wedding about serving the nation are all amplified through the inhuman mechanic loud speakers. Zhenbao's mechanic moral judgment is further dramatized in the scene in which his suspicion of the affair between his wife Yenli and the tailor Mr Gu is presented in a soap-opera manner. In Eileen Chang's text, when Zhenbao discovers the ambiguous relation between the two persons, his reaction is to justify himself and complain:

I treated her all right. I didn't love her but I have nothing to apologize for. I didn't treat her badly. The vile thing. (70)

Kwan replaces Zhenbao's interior thoughts with a segment of the monologue in a radio drama, spoken by a different voice, in a standard radio broadcasting mandarin. This scene is even shot with yellow filter and soft focus and creates the effect of a dated film; Zhenbao and Yenli are frozen into a stage performance postures. The result of this arrangement is a hilarious one: Zhenbao does not know how to react to Yenli's extra-marital affair; he then mechanically enacts a role dictated and supported by the moral majority, especially the morality presented in the radio drama and shared by the radio drama audience.

Kwan comments on Zhenbao's moral immaturity by twice framing the close-up of Zhenbao's face in juxtaposition with a child's face. Zhenbao's childish mentality is also revealed by the camera movement which links Jiaorui and Yenli respectively with the picture of Madonna on the wall in the hospital. Zhenbao's moral as well as emotional immaturity reflect the immaturity of the entire patriarchal society in China. Jiaorui's mis-pronouncing "gui" (to kneel) as "zhu" (the lord) in the train scene is a metonymic illustration of Kwan's comment in this regard. In Eileen Chang's version, it is Mrs. Nash, a British woman who is married to a "bastard," whom Jiaorui and Zhenbao meet in the street. But, in Kwan's film, the foreigner is changed into a local Shanghai old lady who speaks typical Shanghai dialect. In Kwan's arrangement, Jiaorui's marginal position as an overseas Chinese in the Chinese society is foregrounded. Mrs. Shen

talks about how she demanded her son to kneel down in front of her and her husband to show his obedience. Jiaorui cannot understand Mrs. Shen's local dialect to the extent that she misreads "kneeling" as "the lord." This innocent misinterpretation reflects an outsider's criticism against the Chinese culture in which the parents are taken as heaven, as the lord, not to be disobeyed, and the man is forever a child.

Along with the gradual process of the collapse of Zhenbao's façade of moral chastity, the narrator in the film also loses his control over the facts in the story. Though he is still following Eileen Chang's text and tells her story, the images on the screen have betrayed him. The narrator says, "Still [Yenli] made excuses. Smiling, she loyally covered for him" (74). But the shot cuts to the scene in which Yenli criticizes Zhenbao's misconduct in front of his brother Dubao, and suggests divorce: "Why not a divorce? What's wrong with divorce? . . . Otherwise I don't know how long I'm going to defend for him." This boldness and self-assurance do not exist in Eileen Chang's Yenli in *Red Rose and White Rose*, nor in any other novels by her. Kwan has remolded a different Yenli who, unlike all other women by Eileen Chang, is capable of growth.

Besides upsetting the authority of the off-screen third person narrator's voice and problematizing the Male perspective, Kwan further complicates his woman characters by instilling a certain filmic silence and opaqueness into his women, and hence creates an ambiguity and freedom in the interpretational space. Eileen Chang's narrator enters her character's mind and reveals the trivial and selfish sides in it. With Eileen Chang's ironic distance, none of her characters is allowed to grow, to develop into self-awareness, or to obtain the sympathetic identification from her reader. In Kwan's film, however, the audience has no access to the women's mind, and cannot determine for them what they think. By remaining an opaque image, Kwan's women keep a larger interpretational space. The toilet scene in Kwan's film in which Yenli sits on the toilet and stares at her naked belly, for example, is presented with an ambiguous undertone. In Chang's text, the audience reads:

[Yenli] would lower her head and gaze at her snow-white stomach, sometimes sticking out, sometimes pulled in. Her navel's appearance also changed. Sometimes it was the eye of a calm, expressionless Greek statue; sometimes it was an angry, protruding eyeball; sometimes it was a demonic idol's eye with a malicious smile; but her navel was also cute, its corners curving downward into fan-shaped wrinkles. (67)

Yenli is presented by Chang as a woman suffering from constipation, with perverse obsessions and fantasies which symptomatically reflect the morbidly oppressed conditions of women in Chinese society. In Kwan's film, however, Yenli's toilet scene is presented without any verbal commentary. Also it is juxtaposed through parallel montage with the male public bath scene and the nude male bodies, connected by the music of "Stealing Kiss" in the background. This double-track scene is crowded with unuttered desires. Without Eileen Chang's verbal interpretation, Kwan's Yenli reveals a silent fascination for her naked body, and a vague self-awareness of her erotic desire. The track of the public male bath scene ends with Zhenbao's sexual intercourse with a prostitute, while Yenli's track ends with Yenli's flood of words in her active conversation with Zhenbao's male friend.

In the scene in which Yenli is scolded by Zhenbao as stupid when she is wrapping the silver ware up with newspapers for Dubao, the description of her facial expression in Chang's text shows a "anger like a concubine's" (88). But in Kwan's film, the camera's close-up shows the ambivalent expression on Yenli's face. The reader cannot tell whether she is upset or not. In another scene in which Yenli is described in the novel as having "turned and fled" when Zhenbao sweeps the lamp and the thermos bottle onto the floor and throws the lamp's iron base at her. Zhenbao feels that "she had been completely defeated" (77). But in Kwan's film, the audience sees Yenli stepping down the stairs slowly and starts to play Jiaorui's music "The Fragrance of Roses" on the piano, again with an ambiguous and incomprehensible expression on her face. With this silence, Yenli is in full

control of the situation.

Kwan further links Yenli and Jiaorui through the music, called "The Fragrance of Roses." This music, which Jiaorui plays again and again, represents the intangibility, the invisibility and the freedom of woman's floating and mutable desire. As the lyrics say, desire grows and the roses blossom whenever you are in love. The fluidity and freedom of desire is something Yenli lacks in the beginning, and this lack of desire is symbolically concretized through Kwan's design of her bathroom, clean, neat, bright, dry, with square ceramic on the walls, as contrasted against Jiaorui's bathroom, misty, messy, dim, with irregular angular pattern on the wall. The tailor reassures to Yenli, "if the color of your dress is not right, you can always dye and change it." Yenli gradually grows out of her pale, shapeless personality, as the changes of the color on her dress. In the final shot of the scene in which Yenli shuts herself up in the toilet when her daughter is sent away from her and she goes through a stage of death-like metamorphosis, the audience is surprised to see that, following the camera's close-up, the ceramic pattern on the walls behind Yenli has cracked into the irregular and angular shape as the pattern in Jiaorui's bathroom. Yenli's acquiring the ability to play Jiaorui's music also symbolically suggests that she has grown into a mature and independent woman, like Jiaorui, with her own desire and self-awareness. *Red Rose and White Rose*, the title of Eileen Chang's novel, are no longer two separate beings linked by the conjunction word "and," but two phases of one being sutured with a slash, as suggested by Kwan's title. The moral judgement hinted by the ideology behind red rose and white rose, the dichotomy between bad woman and good woman, between the lustful whore and the chaste madonna, is dissolved in Kwan's film and changed into the flowing fragrance of the roses, the flowing subjectivity of woman.

### A Post-Modern Remark

Stanley Kwan thinks and speaks through the materiality of the film. Unlike western avant-garde counter-cinema<sup>11</sup> which rejects nar-

rative all together, Kwan retains the story-telling tradition but shifts the focus by forcing the marginalized off-screen space upon the viewer's consciousness. The subversiveness of the marginalized messages and the weight of the heterogeneous off-screen voice unsettle the center of the audience's perception. The audience has to piece together the unsutured and unconfirmed signs and allow the signifying chain to flow. The foreign, estranged system, the social Other, once suppressed and suspended, now gains its visibility and voice, in the form of an ambiguous doubleness and opaqueness. *Red Rose / White Rose*, be it a ridicule of the Male, a release of female desire, a cancellation of the words, or a post-modern joke upon the Peach Blossom Fan, exposes the power of the material. Subjectivity flows in the materiality of the text, of the flesh, between the center and the margin, in a dialectic double track. Such is the feminine and post-modern perspective Kwan, situated in Hong Kong of the 1990s holds toward the Chinese discourse of Eileen Chang's women of the early twentieth century.

## NOTES

\* The Chinese version of this paper has been published in 1996 in *Chinese Cinemas: History, Culture and Representation*, Taipei: Society for Chinese Cinema Studies & Communication Arts Research Institute, 1996.

<sup>1</sup> I deliberately echoed Norman Bryson's opening sentences of the chapter on Ingre in his book *Tradition and Desire*. I was indebted to Norman Bryson's insightful interpretation of the traces of borrowing and remaking of the visual past in Western art history. But, instead of analyzing the semiotic change within one art genre, as what Bryson has done with the painting, I extended my discussion to cross-genre semiotics. My emphasis is on the boundary crossing among different art genres. I shall also indicate that the semiotic shift in the textuality reveal the artist's comment on the culture of the past as well as of the present.

<sup>2</sup> Eileen Chang (1920-1995) has been praised as one of the most

influential and most important writers in modern Chinese literature. C. T. Hsia ranked her as equal in importance to Lu Xun and concluded that Chang's *Golden Cangue* is the greatest novella in Chinese literary history. David Der-wei Wang points out the significance of Chang's position in modern Chinese literature: a transition from language to images, from male voice to female utterance, from the vision of grand history to that of fragmented history (1995a).

<sup>3</sup> To name just a few examples: Feng Yuanjun, Bing Xin, Ding Ling, Hsiao Hong, Su Qing.

<sup>4</sup> Eileen Chang's grandfather, Zhang Peilun, used to serve at the Qing imperial court, and her grandmother was the daughter of the famous Qing imperial official Li Hongzhang.

<sup>5</sup> Eileen Chang was never very close with her father and mother. Her father Zhang Tingzhong appeared to be an embodiment of the vices of the past culture, such as smoking opium, drinking liquor, prostitution, gambling, etc. Once Zhang Tingzhong beat up Eileen severely and locked her up only because she had visited secretly the divorced mother. Her mother Huang Yifan, who went to France after she separates from Zhang Tingzhong, could be viewed as the incarnation of the West and the modern for the young Eileen (Hu 88-121).

<sup>6</sup> Wang teasingly addresses Chang as "grandma" and lists up to fourteen important male and female writers in Taiwan, Hong Kong and mainland China as under Chang's direct influence (1995b). Meili Cai also has pointed out the rise of the decadent pseudo-Chang style in Taiwan and Hongkong during the 1970s and 1980s (Cai 112). We can see this style in Kwan's early film *Rouge* till his recent film *Ruan Lingyu*. Kwan himself admitted that Eileen Chang is one of his most loved novelists (Law 12).

<sup>7</sup> Masculine discourse here means the phallogocentric discursive practices in the West which dominate the formation and construction of all kinds of communal language and ideologies, such as law, politics, nation, society, morality, religion, gender differences, and so on. Feminine writing, according to French feminist theorists, such as Julia Kristeva's "poetic revolution" ("The System and the Speaking Subject" 25-33), Luce Irigaray's "feminine language" ("Women's



Exile" 64), or Hélène Cixous's "feminine text" ("The Laugh of the Medusa" 258), is the alternative writing which resists the monolistic symbolic system and opens up the signifying process. Kristeva, for example, suggests that through poetic revolution, the speaking subject transgresses the boundaries and renews the rules of the language games (25-33). Iregaray, similarly, believes that "feminine language" challenges the Aristotelian logocentric masculine discourse and breaks the fixed system (64). Cixous, furthermore, states that "feminine text" can "shatter the framework of institutions, to blow up the law, and break up the truth with laughter" (258).

<sup>8</sup> Before Rouge was finalized, Kwan was literally requested by the film company to cut and add scenes and make Rouge a "real" ghost commercial (Yi Chu 17-18). Other ghost stories, such as Ah Ying, Ghost Bride, prevail the commercial market.

<sup>9</sup> Robert Ruxiu Chen pointed out the "multiple narrative" and "meta-narrative" in Ruan Lingyu (Chen 170), and Qijiang Zhang discussed the "de-framing" meta-filmic strategies in Ruan Lingyu (Zhang 82-83).

<sup>10</sup> This narrative strategy echoes the manuscript version of Eileen Chang's *Red Rose and White Rose* which was first published on the May and June issues of Zhazhi Monthly in 1944. In this earliest edition, Eileen Chang makes Zhengbao's niece the first-person narrator who retells the story her uncle Zhenbao told which she overheard at her aunt's place. She says, "I seemed to have heard every word spoken by Uncle Zhengbao, even the things he did not utter" (125). This narrator reveals her sophisticated and even sarcastic distance from Zhenbao's story; she even "laughs out loud" when she hears Zhenbao said, "I loved only two women in my life: one is my white rose, the other is my red rose" (124). This narrative frame is later omitted by Chang in the version published the next year, compiled in the Supplementary Edition of Chuanqi in 1945, but the third-person omniscient narrator, with no sex or age identity, takes the same sophisticated and sarcastic distance shown by the girl narrator. Following the narrator's observation of Zhenbao's internal thoughts, the reader has a free access to the self-centered world in Zhenbao's

mind.

<sup>11</sup> Jean-Luc Godard's film belongs to the typical counter-cinema type. See Peter Wollen's "Godard and Counter-Cinema: Vent d'Est."

### WORKS CITED

- Bonitzer, Pascal. "The Silences of the Voice." In *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology: A Film Theory Reader*. Ed. Philip Rosen. New York, Oxford: Columbia UP, 1986. 319-334.
- Bryson, Norman. *Tradition & Desire: From David to Delacroix*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1987.
- Cai, Meili. "Mundane vs. Contemporary: Thoughts on Eileen Chang." *Contemporary* 14 (1987): 105-112.
- Chang, Eileen. *Red Rose and White Rose*. First published in the May, June and July issues of *Zhazhi Monthly* (1944). Later compiled in *The Complete Sources of Eileen Chang*. Wenbiao Jang Ed. Taipei: Shibao Wenhua Publisher, 1984. English translation by Carolyn Thompson Brown. University Microfilms International, 1992.
- Chen, Ruxiu. "A Belated Critique—Deconstructing Ruan Lingyu." *Yingxiang Film Magazine* 28 (1992): 169-172.
- Chou, Rey. *Woman and Chinese Modernity: The Politics of Reading between West and East*. Minnesota, Oxford: U of Minnesota P, 1991.
- Cixous, Hélène. "The Laugh of the Medusa." In *New French Feminism*. Eds. Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron. New York: Schocken, 1981. 245-264.
- Duan, Zhensu. "Red Rose and White Rose—the Joy of Man and the Sorrow of Woman." *Yingxiang Film Magazine* 57 (1995): 68-70.
- Eng, David L. "Love at Last Site: Waiting for Oedipus in Stanley Kwan's *Rough*." *Camera Obscura* 32 (1993): 74-101.
- Gao, Renjun. "The Self-reflection and Growth of a Director: Stanley Kwan and Ruan Lingyu." *Yingxiang Film Magazine* 23 (1991): 62-77.

- Hsia, C. T. *A History of Modern Chinese Fiction*. 2nd. ed. New Haven: Yale UP, 1971.
- Iregaray, Luce. "Women's Exile." *Ideology and Consciousness*. 1(1977): 62-76.
- Kristeva, Julia. "The System and the Speaking Subject" in *The Kristeva Reader*. Ed. Toril Moi. Oxford: Blackwell, 1987. 24-33.
- Kuhn, Annette. *Women's Pictures: Feminism and Cinema*. London, New York: Verso, 1994.
- Law Wai Ming. "Stanley Kwan: Carrying the Past Lightly." *Cinemaya* 19 (1993): 10-13.
- Shih, Ruite. "The Vile Thing—Red Rose and White Rose." *Yingxiang Film Magazine* 57 (1995): 190.
- Tang, Wenbiao, ed. *The Complete Sources of Eileen Chang*. Taipei: Shibao Wenhua Publisher, 1984.
- Wang, David Der-wei. "The Gospel of the fin de siècle," *China Times*, Literary Supplementary September 13, 1995.
- Wang, David Der-wei. "The Wheat Grain which Falls on the Ground does not Die," *China Times*, Literary Supplementary September 14, 1995.
- Wollen, Peter. "Godard and Counter-Cinema: Vent d'Est." In *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology: A Film Theory Reader*. Ed. Philip Rosen. New York: Oxford: Columbia UP, 1986. 120-129.
- Xu, Liwen. "Go Through with his Thought on Femininity: An Interview." *Elle* 17 (1993): 76-79.
- Yi Chu. "Stanley Kwan's Remorseless Job." *Film Bi-Weekly* 230 (1988): 17-19.
- Zhang, Qijiang. "The Deframing Skill and the Color Aesthetics in Ruan Lingyu and Good Man Good Woman." *Lianhe Literary Magazine* 130 (1995): 82-83.