

# Shadow of *The Dream of the Red Chamber*: An Intertextual Critique of *The Golden Cangue*

Yin Xiaoling

## ABSTRACT

This essay, borrowing from Bloom's theory that "strong poets" purposely misread one another "so as to clear imaginative space for themselves," attempts an intertextual interpretation of Eileen Chang's *The Golden Cangue* as a "re-writing" of the classic novel, *The Dream of the Red Chamber*. While the latter is primarily social, political and psychological, and centers on the moral evil of the female character Wang Hsi-feng, *The Golden Cangue* is primarily psychological and centers on the abnormal personality of Wang's counterpart, Ch'i-ch'ao, whose mad jealousy is seen to stem from her own repressed sexual desire. Also, while material wealth is seen as something finally illusory from the metaphysical (Buddhist-Taoist) perspective of the classic novel, it is seen as an actuality, a real force of (social and psychological) corruption in Chang's work. The conclusion here is that *The Golden Cangue* is not successful as a work of art, since it lacks what Benjamin feels is essential: "its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be." That is, while *Dream of the Red Chamber* has the sense of a specific and real historical setting, its "rewritten" contemporary offspring, or rather "shadow," lacks the sense of totality ("relations to the others")—since Chang's misreading is too limited, based only on that fragment of the original which she saw clearly—and of (specific) history.

## KEY WORDS

misreading  
rewriting  
clinamen  
tessera

repression  
jealousy  
corruption  
psychoanalytic

presence  
historical  
totality

In this paper I will mainly discuss one question concerning the contemporary Western conception of intertextuality as criticism: writing as a mode of reading. The phrase "contemporary Western conception of intertextuality" here refers especially to certain ideas of Bloom about the relationship between reading and writing. A modern Chinese novella, Eileen Chang's *The Golden Cangue*<sup>1</sup>, is chosen as the basic text which is, to many<sup>2</sup>, strongly "influenced" by the classical Chinese novel, Tsao Hsueh-chin's *Dream of the Red Chamber*<sup>3</sup> written in the mid-18th century. Through my examination of the relationship between *The Golden Cangue* and *The Dream of the Red Chamber*, I try to demonstrate that intertextuality, a subject of Western aesthetics, also can be found as an aesthetic phenomenon in Eastern literature.

My discussion of writing as a mode of reading will be basically grounded on Bloom's intertextual theory of influence, or, in his own term, "misreading." In his *The Anxiety of Influence* and *A Map of Misreading*, Bloom elucidates his conception of "intra-poetic relationship" as such: the poetic history "is held to be indistinguishable from poetic influence, since strong poets make that history by misreading one another, so as to clear imaginative space for themselves."<sup>4</sup> The key term "misreading" is for Bloom the resistance on the part of the later poet against the influence from his precursor:

Influence, as I conceive it, means that there are no texts, but only relationships between texts. These relationships depend upon a critical act, a misreading or misprision, that one poet performs upon another, and that does not differ in kind from the necessary critical acts performed by every strong reader upon every text he encounters. The influence-relation governs reading as it governs writing, and reading is therefore a miswriting just as writing is a misreading.<sup>5</sup>

From this starting point, Bloom in his *The Anxiety of Influence* devises the critical tools in terms of six "revisionary ratios" as both facts and aesthetic principles. Two of the six are the most relevant to my study here: "clinamen" and "tessera." According to Bloom, "clinamen" is the strong poet's poetic misreading or misprision proper under which the poet "swerves away from his precursor, by so reading his precursor's poem as to execute a clinamen in relation to it. This appears as *a corrective movement in his own poem*" (my emphasis)<sup>6</sup>. "Tessera" refers to completion, that is, "a poet antithetically 'completes' his precursor, by so reading the parent-poem as

to retain its terms but to mean them in another sense, as though the precursor had failed to go far enough."<sup>7</sup> In other words, what catches me in *The Golden Cangue*, in regard to intertextuality, is the fact that Eileen Chang is doing there exactly what Bloom has pointed out, trying to correct and complete her precursor, Tsao Hsueh-chin, through her own writing.

My discussion of *The Golden Cangue* will focus on Eileen Chang's figuration of Ch'i-ch'ao, the heroine whose character and behaviour persistently reminds the reader of Wang Hsi-feng, the famous sharp-tongued and selfish woman of power in *Dream of the Red Chamber*.

The first step is to show why I believe that *The Golden Cangue* is overshadowed by *Dream of the Red Chamber*. The Western reader may be unfamiliar with both. To the Chinese reader (also the Japanese and the Korean), however, *Dream of the Red Chamber* represents the pinnacle of classical Chinese literature. It has been recognized by many Chinese critics as the only classical literary work that is fully imbued with the spirit of tragedy in the sense of a relentless tragic quest for the meaning of human existence in a suffering world<sup>8</sup>. The novel is plotted with a tragic love affair between two young people caught in the decline of their family. The young man, the hero of the novel, is the heir of an extremely wealthy aristocratic family which has enjoyed imperial favor for generations. The beloved girl is his sick cousin to whom her parents, both dead, have left nothing. The young man shares the tragedy of Hamlet, in the sense that his feelings and insights are beyond his time. Considered spoiled and rebellious in ideas, he is forced to marry another wealthy cousin who is trusted by the powerful members of the clan. To protest, the poor and sick girl manifests by her death her rejection of the patriarchy, and the hero renounces his primogeniture, runs away, and is converted to Buddhism. Revolving around the two unfortunate lovers there are about a hundred characters, whose activities bring home to the reader the broad social scenes and psychological experiences of 17th- and 18th-century China. Wang Hsi-feng, the figure I have mentioned earlier, is another cousin of the hero, and at the same time his sister-in-law. As the most prominent granddaughter-in-law in the huge aristocratic family, Hsi-feng occupies the office of manager of the household finances. Despite her reputation of being extremely smart and able, and selfish and fierce as well, Hsi-feng, a handsome and vivacious young woman, nevertheless languishes in ill health and dies.

*The Golden Cangue* is not of the same class as *Dream of the Red Chamber* either in size, in historical scope, in philosophical insight, or in aesthetic power. Therefore C. T. Hsia's praise of this novelette as the

greatest in the history of Chinese literature is not convincing at all<sup>9</sup>. Since my purpose in this paper is not to argue with C. T. Hsia about *The Golden Cangue's* place in Chinese literature, I will not go any further into this problem. However, I should agree that this novelette does bear "happy witness to its author's skillful appropriation of the elements of both the native and the Western tradition,"<sup>10</sup> though I would rather see it as a typical intertextual phenomenon in Chinese literature, and would in the sense of intertextuality prefer the term "misreading" to "appropriation." *The Golden Cangue*, published in the 1940's, is a story about the psychologically dark life of a woman, Ch'i-ch'ao, who is from a shopkeeper family and very much frustrated by her unhappy marriage to the disabled son of an aristocratic family. The marriage is possible only because the son of the wealthy family is paralyzed, hence no daughter from a family of equal stature would consent to a match with him. Therefore, this unhappy marriage is actually chosen by Ch'i-ch'ao herself, and she takes advantage of the son's sickness to become one of the family's heirs, in order to gain wealth and higher position. She finally acquires the money she wants but at the cost of losing all her happiness and even her mental health.

The shadow of *Dream of the Red Chamber* over *The Golden Cangue* can be discerned from the outset in the language and the narrative mode. For instance, a direct imitation can be found in the scene in which Ch'i-ch'ao reproaches her brother:

Ch'i-ch'ao spat and retorted: "Had I waited for your help, I would have been damned! I have seen through your calculations very clearly, — if I won, you would come up to me to get money; if I lost, you would hide yourself immediately. Never have you had the courage to confront yourself with any officials. You will, I know, pull back your head into your shell, and let me struggle alone!"<sup>11</sup>

Let us compare these lines with Yuan-yang's (the chief maid of the matriarchal grandmother, the highest ruler of the aristocratic clan) bitter attack upon her sister-in-law in *Dream of the Red Chamber*:

Yuan-yang stood up and spat hard in her sister-in-law's face. Pointing an accusing finger at her, she scolded: "Shut your foul mouth and clear off right now! I know what you mean by 'good news' and 'good fortune'! That's why you people envy

the concubines. For a concubine's whole family could be backed up as if everybody in the family became a concubine! You are so eager to push me into the fiery pit,—if I found favor, you could tyrannize outside and honor yourselves as relatives of the powerful family; but if I failed, you would just pull your neck back like a turtle, and let me struggle alone!"<sup>12</sup>

The resemblance between the two quoted passages should be quite clear, and the former is obviously the imitation of the latter. In the latter quotation, Yuan-yang is accusing her sister-in-law of consenting to the proposed marriage of Yuan-yang, a pretty teen-age girl with a strong character, to the matriarch's (the grandmother) elder son, an aged dandy, as one of his many concubines. And in the former passage, Ch'i-ch'ao, frustrated by her humiliating marriage and in-fighting with the snobbish members of the family, is giving vent to her anger by attacking her brother who has consented to her marrying the handicapped man for money.

There is an interesting touch in Eileen Chang's imitation quoted above. It is the harshness borne by Ch'i-ch'ao which is similar to that borne by Yuan-yang. For Yuan-yang is in a position higher than that of her sister-in-law (just as Ch'i-ch'ao is considered higher than her brother, because she is married into a richer family). According to the rules of aristocratic families at that time, young and unmarried female slaves are ranked higher than married female slaves (married to male slaves). The former are called "maids," the latter, "servants." The reason lies probably in the possibility that the maids could be chosen to marry the male masters in the family as their concubines. If a maid has missed such a chance, the only alternative is to be assigned to a male slave by her masters as a servant. Therefore, being a concubine is the best future for a maid. Here, Tsao points out very subtly that Yuan-yang's harshness toward her sister-in-law (an unfortunate servant, namely, a former slave-maid who has lost the chance of being a concubine) reveals that Yuan-yang is fully conscious of her own uncertain, yet possibly better, future. This subtle irony is self-evident through Yuan-yang's attitude toward Pao-yu, the hero of the novel, who is the most handsome and innocent male master in the family. That she likes the young man is seen by her allowing him to eat the makeup on her lips. Therefore it is suggested that Yuan-yang does not necessarily refuse to be a concubine in general terms; what she turns down is this particular offer to go to Chia She, a much older and dissolute man. Her reaction might have been different had the offer come from, say, Pao-yu,

since, after all, to be a concubine seems for a slave maid like her the only way out of slavery. On the other hand, Tsao's sympathy with Yuan-yang reveals itself through her harshness toward her greedy and selfish sister-in-law who hopes to benefit from Yuan-yang's becoming a concubine. As Yuan-yang points out, a concubine is only a half-slave with her fate dependent on the master-husband's interest and favor. Therefore a concubine's life is very much like gambling, with the only stake being her master-husband's favor. If she loses that favor, she will be devoured by the wife and other concubines. Hence, Yuan-yang cannot help blowing up at her sister-in-law who evidently longs to gain an opportunity to gamble with Yuan-yang as the stake.

Eileen Chang seems to have read the classic novel like this, for her portrayal of Ch'i-ch'ao's psychological state motivating the reproach reflects exactly the same subtlety. Although Ch'i-ch'ao is not a slave (the slave-owning system had been out of fashion since the 1911 Revolution which overthrew the throne of the Ching dynasty), she has little hope of becoming wealthy enough to be respected by the higher society if she remains a small shopkeeper (she used to have a good chance to the wife of a pleasant pork salesman). Only if the second son of the Chiang family is too sick to match with any daughter from a rich family can Ch'i-ch'ao, a light-headed daughter of a cooking-oil shopkeeper, make her way into the aristocratic clan by marrying the sick, bedridden son. Therefore Ch'i-ch'ao is in a three-fold position: to her brother who is now still a cooking-oil shopkeeper, she, as daughter-in-law in the distinguished family, is of higher status, with the hope of inheriting part of the family's legacy; to the other members of the family, she is an inferior outsider, and a greedy opportunist as well, to be looked down upon by everyone in the family including the servants; and to herself, she has to win this position at the cost of her own happiness (she actually hates her sick husband's paralytic body, feeling that it is too much like dead flesh; but she has to hide her disgust and pretend to be a loving wife in front of the family). In this respect, Ch'i-ch'ao is apparently an alternative Yuan-yang. She shares Yuan-yang's harshness, which reflects a mixture of ambition, snobbishness, and bitterness.

Nevertheless, the above-discussed instance is a rather literal imitation, stopping short of being a so-called "subtext"<sup>13</sup> in the sense of intertextuality. It thus contributes little to the literary excellence of the work itself, beyond proving in an awkward way that *Dream of the Red Chamber* is its "parent-work." Even so, it does not necessarily mean that the whole story is just a literally imitative work. For Eileen Chang, as Bloom has described, has done

her best to *rewrite*, or, *miswrite*, her parent-text. Hence, my aim is to discover what is the "correction" of the precursor being performed by Eileen Chang's rewriting, or, what is the "subtext" of *Dream of the Red Chamber* in her eyes.

Let us begin our exploration with the following quotation from *The Golden Cangue*:

Hsiao-shuang said, "If I tell you, you should not be a big mouth to your mistress! My mistress is from the family of a cooking oil shopkeeper."

"Ah!" Feng-hsiao said, "how come? See our First Nainai, she is a daughter of a noble family, and my mistress' family, well, may be lower, but not that low . . ."

"Of course there is a reason. My master, as you have seen, is handicapped. Which official family would consent to matching their daughter with him? Our Laotaitai had no choice but to buy a concubine for him. Thus this daughter of the Tsao family was introduced. Her name is Ch'i-ch'ao since she was born in July."

"Oh," said Feng-hsiao, "she is a concubine."

"Well, originally she was supposed to be a concubine. But Laotaitai changed her mind later on. She thought that since she had no intention of finding another woman for this son, why not make the daughter his legal wife, so that she should attend her husband sincerely."

Holding the windowsill, Feng-hsiao said, "I see. Though I'm a newcomer, I have already recognized things here to a certain degree."

"A dragon's son is a dragon. This is very true." Hsiao-shuang added, "you haven't heard about how she talks. She has no control at all, even in the presence of the misses. It is lucky that this family is so prudent and well-controlled that the misses are still very innocent. Well, though they don't know anything, they are still too embarrassed to stay there."

Feng-hsiao laughed and asked, "Really? How does she know the vulgar stories? Even we servants . . ." <sup>14</sup>

This is from the beginning scene of *The Golden Cangue*. Feng-hsiao, a maid given as part of the dowry for the bride of the Chiang family's third son, is very curious about Ch'i-ch'ao, wife of the second son of the family.

And Hsiao-shuang, Ch'i-ch'ao's maid, tells her about her own mistress in a very scornful way. The story does not start with such typical gossiping women for nothing. The women's gossiping constitutes a short introduction to Ch'i-ch'ao, which is full of messages. From their little night talk we sense the structure of the family hierarchy here that is similar to that of the Chia family in *Dream of the Red Chamber*. We also have the moral norms, plots and jealousies in the family, which are also present in the classic novel. But why does the author choose to offer us those messages particularly in this way? What is the significance in and behind this opening that the author especially wants to highlight? Before I answer these questions, I would like to return to *Dream of the Red Chamber*. What is interesting is the scene of the fight between Tan-Chun and her mother, Concubine Chao. Concubine Chao's master-husband is the younger son of the "Matriarch" and the father of Pao-yu, the greatest favorite of the Matriarch, therefore of the whole clan. The story behind the fighting scene is this: Concubine Chao's brother, a servant of the family (Concubine Chao herself used to be a slave-maid of Pao-yu's father), has just died; and Hsi-ren, Pao-yu's chief maid, has lost her mother shortly before. At that time, due to Hsi-feng's being ill, Tan-chun is entrusted with the temporary responsibility of managing the finances of the family. She offers more money to Hsi-ren than to her own mother for the funerals because Hsi-ren, with her craft in showing her virtue, is Lady Wang's favorite among the maids around Pao-yu. And Lady Wang, Pao-yu's mother, is rather powerful because her husband and she, both phony and stubborn, are loved more by the Matriarch. Lady Wang, the legal wife of Tan-chun's father, has a secret hatred of her husband's concubine, Chao. Therefore, the cunning Tan-chun deliberately treats the two mourners unevenly in order to please Lady Wang. Being outraged, Concubine Chao comes to blame her daughter, but is not successful:

Concubine Chao could not find words to answer, so she changed to another subject: "Since you have the Mistress' favor, you should do more for us. But you've quite forgotten us in your eagerness to curry favor with her!"

"Who says I have forgotten you?" Tan-chun retorted, "How should I do more for you? Everybody has to work out his own salvation. Don't all mistresses like those inferiors who make themselves useful? Are there any good persons who needed others' hands to make their own virtue?"

Li Wan cut in to mediate: "Please don't be angry, madam.



It's not her fault. She's only too eager to help you, but how can she say so?"

"No!" Tan-chun cried to Li Wan, "Don't be silly. Whom do you mean I'm to help? Why should I help servants? You should know how good they are. I have no business to do with them."

"Who asked you to help others?" fumed the concubine, "If you were not in charge, I wouldn't have to come to you. Now you are in that position. I don't believe Taitai would accuse you if you gave an extra twenty or thirty taels for your uncle's funeral! Taitai does want to be merciful. It's you people who are so stingy and make her have no chance to show her kindness! Why are you so anxious, Miss? It's not your own money that you are saving. I had even expected your special care of the Chao family after you get married. Yet even before your feathers have grown you've already forgotten your own nest. You are so keen to fly to the top of the tree."

Tan-chun turned white and demanded with sobs: "Who's my uncle? My true uncle is now the Military Inspector of Nine Provinces! I never acknowledge that I have another uncle like this! Is this my reward for always being polite — to get such relatives foisted off on me? If what you said was true, why did Chao Kuo-chi have to follow Huan to attend him when Huan went out? Why couldn't he claim his position as an uncle of Huan? Everyone does know I am a child by a concubine, you really don't have to declare it every few months in order to refresh their memory. Who is insulted, you or me? It is lucky I've sense enough to remember my manners, or you'd have driven me frantic long ago!"<sup>15</sup>

What is significant in the scene quoted are the snobbishness and the unfeelingness of Tan-chun, a teen-aged girl, and the bitterness of Chao as a scorned concubine in an aristocratic family, who has no way to maintain any dignity. Tan-chun flies into such a rage out of shame at being reminded that the late servant was actually her own uncle by blood. She cruelly hurts and insults her own mother, denying that her birth mother's brother was her uncle because he was a slave. The selfish and cold girl brazenly claims that she only accepts as her uncle the brother of her father's legal wife, who is a rising general. Ignorantly enough, Concubine Chao expected that she could get some benefits by emphasizing her motherhood to Tan-chun. Yet the

only result she gets is her own daughter's scorn. By now, it is clear that the awkwardness of Ch'i-ch'ao's situation in the Chiang family is very similar to that of Concubine Chao, and that Eileen Chang's arrangement of the gossiping scene as the opening of her novelette reflects her very sensitive reading of *Dream of the Red Chamber*. The sharp irony of a daughter's scorning her own mother for her low position is reflected in the beginning of *The Golden Cangue*: the gossip of the two servants seems very snobbish.

Here we are on a position to see one of Eileen Chang's "corrections" of *The Dream of the Red Chamber*. Eileen Chang seems to believe that the power which distorts humanity (the ugly scenes in which the daughter curries favor with the powerful by sacrificing her own low-positioned mother, and in which the brother marries his sister to the disabled son of a rich family for the right of inheritance) is money which creates indifference and alienation. And money as corruptive force is projected in *Dream of the Red Chamber* only as a phenomenon, and the concepts of indifference and alienation, in the modern sense, are never really reached by Tsao Hsue-chin. His critique of money is based only on a metaphysical approach: money, like all "beings," does not really exist and thus is not worthy of being sought. With her correction of Tsao's nihilistic vision, her view that money is the major destructive force of humanity (this is the very implication of the story's title: money is a gold prison), Eileen Chang starts her rewriting of *Dream of the Red Chamber*, particularly the refiguring of Wang Hsi-feng (also of Yuan-yang and Concubine Chao) in Ch'i-ch'ao.

Beginning with the emphasis on the theme of money as evil power, however, Eileen Chang's deeper thematic concern is not so much social, political and philosophical as psychological. To follow this development in the light of intertextuality, we need, again, to take a look at *Dream of the Red Chamber*, and the portrayal of Wang Hsi-feng:

Suddenly from the backyard sprang laughter and a voice saying: "I'm late! Too bad that I haven't met our long-distance guest!" While Tai-yu was wondering who it was and why this person was so rude as others were so careful and quiet, a young woman surrounded by a group of maids came in by the back door. Tai-yu found her dressed much more richly than the girls — her gold-filigree tiara was set with jewels and pearls; her hair-clasps, in the form of five phoenixes facing the sun, had pendants of pearls, too; and she wore a necklet of pure gold with many red

tassels. Under the necklet her shaped red satin jacket was very bright with many golden butterflies woven on; from her long shining dark blue furry vest her green blue silk skirt was down to the floor. Tai-yu noticed that this dazzling young lady's pretty eyes were triangle-shaped with their outside corners pointing up, her long thin and curved brows were also pointing up. She was slim and very attractive. Yet somehow behind her bright smile there was something threatening.<sup>16</sup>

To impatient readers, this portrayal of Wang Hsi-feng might be a little too detailed. To such a reader as Eileen Chang, however, every detail, every touch here is significant and contributes to the whole design. First, Wang Hsi-feng's high voice has a double meaning — she is both outspoken and arrogant. Then, what she says is indicative of what she is cunning about — she wants to cover her indifference towards the motherless and relatively poor cousin who comes for shelter. Thirdly, Tai-yu's brooding highlights the contrast between Wang Hsi-feng's impudent manner and the carefulness of all the others in the presence of the matriarch, which reveals that Wang Hsi-feng has enjoyed the great favor of the Matriarch. Her showy air indicates that her soul is superficial and hollow. Her being escorted by the group of maids shows further that she is in the habit of being majestic-looking. And the great amount of luxurious jewels and gold she is wearing thematically points to the central characteristic of this woman — her vanity and worship of wealth. It is this feature that decides her different attitudes toward different objects. The triangle-shaped eyes, though still pretty, are actually the threatening aspect in Hsi-feng's mystic face. Triangle-shaped eyes have been generally considered in China a token of cunning and fierce character. Therefore, Hsi-feng's eyes clearly indicate the author's unfavorable judgment against her. Indeed, Wang Hsi-feng is one of the characters in the novel to whom Tsao Hsueh-chin gives the least sympathy in his deliberate way. Yet he created her.

Now, let us go back to Eileen Chang's portrayal of Ch'i-ch'ao in *The Golden Cangue*:

People were whispering and laughing when Liu-hsi lifted the door curtain and reported: "The Second Nainai." Lan-hsian and Yun-tse stood up and found a seat for her, but Tsao Ch'i-ch'ao was in no hurry to sit down. With one hand propping the door and another resting on her waist, she stood in her light rose

dress with white lace and shining purple blue pants tied at the bottom. A purple handkerchief made of imported silk was hung on one of her narrow sleeves. Her face was narrow and bony with red mouth, tiny teeth, *triangle-shaped eyes*, and brows up-curved like the shape of a hill. She looked around, smiling, and said: "Everyone is here. I must be late again today! But I cannot help it — I had to comb my hair in the dark! Who made my window facing the backyard? Why is such a room assigned to me? Anyway, my husband cannot live long in anyone's eyes. We only wait to become bullied widow and orphans!"<sup>17</sup>

This is indeed a downfallen Wang Hsi-feng. That noisy, vulgar, aggressive, cold, and fierce character in the classic novel, however, is much saddened here. And in this very change lies the thematic significance of *The Golden Cangue*. In a sense, Eileen Chang tries to answer the question of what a modern version of *Dream of the Red Chamber* would be, or, what the characters of the classic novel would look like in modern eyes. For instance, what would Wang Hsi-feng be taken for today? Namely, what is overlooked by Tsao Hsue-chin in Wang Hsi-feng, which can be antithetically completed by a modern writer? Here, we meet both "Clinamen" and "Tessera," that is, the later writer swerves away from his precursor in a corrective movement to rewrite or "miswrite," as though the precursor had failed to go far enough. Eileen Chang's "corrective movement" in her work takes place in her efforts to transform a morally defective Wang Hsi-feng into a Ch'i-ch'ao who is trapped by an unhealthy psyche. In the above portrayal of Ch'i-ch'ao, we can see a figure in inner conflict which was never represented in *Dream of the Red Chamber*. This woman is antagonistic both to the environment and herself. Snobbish and ambitious, she wants to be looked up to as an equal member of the wealthy family, but she is disdained even by the servants. Brave and aggressive, she wants to gain her dignity through her everyday challenges against the snobbish environment, but she remains a laughable one in the family for she is too vulgar and ignorant to win the battles. Frivolous and sexually active, she should be a pork shop's mistress teasing the men in the street, but she is married to the handicapped sick son of a conservative aristocratic family. All these factors make her, as we see, a harsh, fussy, and bitter woman of moods. And finally, her laughter turns into fury too soon, this being already a symptom of her unhealthy psyche. When we see Wang Hsi-feng's threatening eyes shining in Ch'i-ch'ao's

face, we can naturally read out Eileen Chang's reflections on the two women: that what saved the tyrannical woman, Wang Hsi-feng, from complete madness is merely her much better position in the Chia family plus the historical impossibility of her creator, Tsao, having access to the knowledge of psychology. Evidently, in the eyes of such a sensitive and clever reader as Eileen Chang, it is impossible to overlook the fact that in Tsao Hsue-chin's depiction Wang Hsi-feng is nevertheless a very attractive and desiring woman of strong character, and that such a woman cannot be satisfied with her unfaithful dandy husband (son of the old dandy, Chia She, who is the Matriarch's elder son, the hero's uncle). She is restrained by the rules of the society from taking action to improve her marital situation. To Eileen Chang, who has access to the knowledge of psychoanalytic phenomena, the fierceness in Wang Hsi-feng's character should be attributed more to her psychological problems than to her moral defects. On the basis of such a reading or "misreading," Eileen Chang's Ch'i-ch'ao is presented in a psychoanalytic vision rather than a moral and political critique, with the author's specific interest in the problem of how repressed unconscious desires hurt people, particularly, women, and ruin their lives.

The psychological theme emerges rather early, but the complete turning point, the theme of madness appears in the following quotation:

Her husband died last year, and she attended her mother-in-law's funeral this year. Now, the Chiang family has officially asked an uncle, the Ninth elder master, to come to preside over their dividing up the family property. Thus, today is the crux of all the dreams that she had had since she was married into this family. Before, she had been locked by the golden chains for so long, she had not really had any money. Starting today, it would be different. Ch'i-ch'ao was in a white silk shirt and black skirt, and there were two red spots on her hot cheekbones as if she had some make-up on there. She raised a hand to feel her own face: it was very hot, but her body shivered with cold.<sup>18</sup>

This passage is the author's second portrayal of Ch'i-ch'ao, and the time is ten years after the first one. After the decade of sound and fury of the infighting in the family and in her own psyche, she has become sick-looking. Now she is supposed to have won the struggle, thus to have the possibility of starting a new life. So she is quite excited, feeling a mixture of vague release and indescribable fear, as if threatened by something.

The fear of something threatening is nevertheless unconscious to her, therefore only her body feels cold. The moment of fear that her mind can never comprehend is the moment of opening up to the shivery truth that money for her is a golden cangue forever. Before, she had been tormented by her longing for money which forced her to lie beside a "dead-flesh-like" man every night and to be laughed at by the family every day; from now on, she will be doomed to be haunted by the fear of losing her money, which will prevent her from taking any risks to try a new life. The scene in which her brother-in-law visits her can serve as a good example. Chiang Chi-tse used to be the object of Ch'i-ch'ao's unrequited love, which is rather passionate, for she knows from the beginning that that man, her brother-in-law and the youngest son of the family, is good for nothing but flirting around. Ironically, at the family meeting dividing up the property, it is Ch'i-ch'ao who insists the most on depriving Ch'i-tse's (who has spent out all his portion of the legacy in advance) portion of his late mother's jewels. And her action does not mean revenge but that she just simply cannot help collecting money at all costs. Therefore, Chi-tse's unexpected visit, after the cold and ugly scene of dividing the family property, is still able to cause in her some old warm feelings. But when she suddenly realizes that his true purpose is only money, her fury crushes her desire for love. The romantic drama ends with the madwoman fiercely beating the man she loves, then

Chi-tse had gone. The maids were all scolded away by her, too. The spilled plum drink on the table was dripping down drop by drop like a slow water clock at night — one drip, another drip . . . one hour, another hour . . . one year, and one hundred years. How long this still and solitary moment was. Ch'i-ch'ao stood still with her hands propping her head, and in another second she turned and ran up the stairs. She was in a big hurry, lifting her long skirt, staggering, and bumping the grave wall from time to time. Her dark blue jacket dusted along the green plaster on the wall. She must see him one more time from the window upstairs. Anyway, she had loved him before. Her love had brought her endless pain. Only for this it was worthy to be remembered. It had been so many times that she repressed herself to an extreme of physical exhaustion and pain. . . .

.....

. . . , the wind was gone, drawing the curtain to the window. She just breathed out halfway. The wind came back, pushing

the curtain over her all the way — now cool, now hot, she felt nothing but tears running down.<sup>19</sup>

No matter how ridiculous the whole event is, Ch'i-ch'ao at this moment is seemingly rather romantic. Yet, this is by no means a romantic figure, necessarily demanding sympathy. This is an ironic martyr sacrificing herself for the god mammon, money. From the image of Ch'i-ch'ao here we may sense a partly Freudian influence. To make my position clear, the psychological point of view involved here is the vision structured by the linguisticity of the text in question, which is not my own standpoint but the object of my critique. Namely, if the psychological conception in the text sounds inadequate, this is only part of the inadequacy of the text itself. Therefore, I choose the phrase "partly Freudian influence" to distinguish my approach of intertextuality from the textual psychological phenomena which can be explained neither by theoretical psychoanalysis nor by any personal experience. The image of Ch'i-ch'ao as an ironic martyr sacrificed for money reminds us of a Freudian idea, that the basic human psychological condition is the "pleasure principle" being repressed by the "reality principle." This repression causes the symptoms of neurosis of madness. And Ch'i-ch'ao's madness serves, in my view, as the principle for reducing Eileen Chang's writing to her reading.

That is, Ch'i-ch'ao's madness is a transformation of Hsi-feng's fierce temper: the development of Ch'i-ch'ao's sick psyche reflects what the author perceived in the image of Hsi-feng of *The Dream of the Red Chamber*. Hsi-feng, as pointed out previously, is an attractive and confident woman. However, the only "romantic" affair in Hsi-feng's life is but a trap for her revenge on the wild yet innocent man who has done nothing harmful to her. It is significant, to the psychology-oriented eye of Chang, that Hsi-feng, vulgar and bold, remains chaste from the beginning to the end. For in the Chia family (the main location of the narrative of *Dream of the Red Chamber*), adultery is such a common practice that it is said in the novel that all over the Chia residence only the two stone lions at the gate are clean; and Hsi-feng's closest friend in the family, Chin Ker-ch'ing (Hsi-feng's niece-in-law), commits suicide due to her sexual scandal with her father-in-law. Yet Wang Hsi-feng herself seems to have nothing to do with this kind of scandal. This is interesting since she is unlikely to be satisfied and to put up with her constantly unfaithful husband. From Ch'i-ch'ao we can see Chang's psychological view of this aspect of Hsi-feng. That is, the significance lies in the fact that Wang Hsi-feng is a self-willed, sound and reasonable woman, although

she is sometimes imprudent, showy and frivolous as well. She has sense enough to identify and protect her highest interest all the time. To her, that interest lies in power and money. At that time in China, one of the most fatal injuries to a woman's social position resulted from the discovery that she had lost her chastity. Furthermore, since the Matriarch, the most powerful figure in the family, is very strict about women's chastity, the sound-minded Wang Hsi-feng knows very well that she herself must be very careful about her reputation if she hopes to keep the favor of the moralistic Matriarch. For these reasons, Wang Hsi-feng does not simply reject Chia Ruih (a poor relative in the Chia clan, who, still young and single, is madly attracted to Hsi-feng) as a wild wooer, but punishes and mistreats him very cruelly (the poor young man dies soon after being badly mistreated by her) in order to make a show of her chastity. In the text of *Dream of the Red Chamber*, Tsao Hsueh-chin portrays Hsi-feng only as a morally corrupt figure, giving no psychological reason for her fiery temper. Evidently, in the view of Eileen Chang, there is a blind-spot in Hsi-feng's psyche, to recognize which is historically beyond the reach of Tsao Hsueh-chin who lived in the China of the 18th century. Chang's own insight into the figure of Hsi-feng is that Hsi-feng's sadism was caused by the repression of her desire for sexual pleasure by her realistic rationality. That is, in order to keep her power Hsi-feng has to do her best to highlight her chastity at the cost of personal pleasure.

Therefore, Ch'i-ch'ao, as a correction of Hsi-feng, is projected with the emphasis on her being psychologically eccentric. The significance of the scene of mourned love is that Ch'i-ch'ao's will (not in the philosophical sense of Schopenhauer as the sensual desires of man, but in the linguistic sense as the power of the rational mind) finally and decisively destroys her last hope for pleasure, which, being inextinguishable, will torture her unconsciously all the rest of her life. This is why the tears run down Ch'i-ch'ao's face, but she herself can never understand the reason. Furthermore, through Ch'i-ch'ao's hysterical helplessness, the author prepares us for the further development of the heroine's psychosis.

It is very easy to give the psychological reason for Ch'i-ch'ao's being extremely malicious in treating her children (she has a son and a daughter, and later her son gets married), particularly her daughter and daughters-in-law. Here we sense "something Freudian" again: since her son inspires some vague illusions in her as to her possession of a man, she treats him better than anyone else in her own way — she allows him to gamble and drop out of school. She gets him married only to stop him from spending money



on prostitutes. But the daughter and the daughters-in-law are doomed to be victims of the mother's jealousy which has become abnormally vast and terrifying.

Chi-shou, the daughter-in-law of Ch'i-ch'ao, is a slow and innocent girl from an old-fashioned family where she was trained to obey her elders and the males unconditionally. Her marriage is decided by Ch'i-ch'ao and her parents and is ironic and doomed from the very beginning: she is chosen by Ch'i-ch'ao to be her son's wife for the reason that she is ugly so she cannot attract her son. This irony is terrifying: the mother chooses an ignorant and ugly girl to marry her son because of her own repressed sexual desire. The poor girl dies several years later, after endless extraordinary tortures by Ch'i-ch'ao. The revengeful mother's tactics are extremely mean and cruel. She separates the young couple (because she cannot stand the idea that the ugly girl has a man!) by detaining her son in her bedroom all night long and stimulating him with opium so that he describes the young couple's sexual affairs to her. The outcome of the odd night talks between the mother and the son will be the subject of her entertaining conversation with her company in the living room next day, her audience including the young wife's mother who must pretend, as a restrained conservative housewife, to enjoy being insulted.

Yet Ch'i-ch'ao's jealousy is most punishing to her own daughter, Chang-an. This reminds the reader of Wang Hsi-feng again. In *Dream of the Red Chamber*, Wang Hsi-feng is the embodiment of jealousy. Out of jealousy, the cold woman has forced at least two women to commit suicide (her husband's new concubine and the wife of a servant, who has an affair with Wang Hsi-feng's husband). In Ch'i-ch'ao's jealousy we see that, according to Eileen Chang's reading, Wang Hsi-feng's jealousy should be taken as a psychopathic symptom. In this sense, Ch'i-ch'ao's jealousy develops to such an extreme that the psychological sickness becomes moral evilness. The scene in which her thirteen-year-old daughter is held by her cousin, a simple young man, when she falls down from a stool arouses Ch'i-ch'ao's jealousy of her own daughter for the first time. She pushes the young man out of the house and explains to her daughter that all men only want their money. The psychological theme is very clear here: the idea of guarding her money has been Ch'i-ch'ao's comfort in her own sexual frustration and the excuse for her jealousy of her daughter as a possible bride. In her mad jealousy, Ch'i-ch'ao binds the already teen-aged girl's feet to cripple her (after the 1911 democratic revolution, binding little girls' feet was

considered too old-fashioned as well as an inhuman custom); she also encourages her to become an opium addict, and thus unattractive to men and spares no pains to kill the only marriage proposed to her (when she is in her thirties). Ch'i-ch'ao does all these things consciously. She knows that everybody in the family hates her (both the son and the daughter realize that their mother cannot allow them to have happy marriages, and that they have to wait till she dies), but she cannot help being malicious and cruel, as she cannot stop her hysterics over her lover.

The story ends with Ch'i-ch'ao's lonely death, which finally allows the children to lead their own lives. To our surprise, the social critique theme, the critique of money as destructive force dominating the society throughout history, after its submergence for quite a while, suddenly comes back in the last sentence:

The moon seen thirty years ago was gone long long ago,  
and the person who saw the moon thirty years ago now is dead,  
too. But the story, beginning thirty years ago, has not finished  
yet — it just cannot finish.<sup>20</sup>

This is clearly an attempt to bring the whole work together. The last sentence obviously implies the influence of the past, of history, and suggests that the story of Ch'i-ch'ao contains more than merely a personal experience. It, however, only raises more questions. First of all, what kind of story is it? A psychologically viewed moral story aimed at a critique of certain historical and cultural burdens? Then why is it that only the story beginning thirty years ago (around 1911) cannot finish, if it implies the general threat of a decaying Chinese culture? If it is a story aimed at reflecting a specific moment in human culture and psychology, historical, then why is the whole setting identical with that of *Dream of the Red Chamber* except for the time? What makes this specific historical moment psychologically distinctive? Or, if it is a purely psychoanalytic work aimed at revealing the dark world of the unconscious, then, again, why is a specific historical moment involved, which obviously suggests the shadow of tradition, and of the past? With all these questions unanswered, the reader is left in the dark if he or she attempts to interpret the central theme of the work.

I have discussed three intertextual aspects of Chang's (re)writing of *The Golden Cangue*: her imitation, correction (clinamen), and completion

(tessera) of *Dream of the Red Chamber*. But I feel Chang's "rewritten" work is not a successful work of art. We remember that Bloom only applies his theory to "the strong poet."<sup>21</sup> The fatal problem of *The Golden Cangue* lies in an inadequacy of totality (relations to the others) or, in Benjamin's terms, in "lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at *the place* where it happens to be. This unique existence of the work of art determined *the history* to which it was subject throughout the time of its existence" (my emphases).<sup>22</sup> But the questions raised by the ending of *The Golden Cangue* clearly show that Eileen Chang does not know when and where her story fits. The story, in spite of its many unique details and great sensitivity, is not grounded in a unique and a specific history. For it is neither abstract nor specific in the sense of time and space. Hence, the story of Ch'i-ch'ao, inspired by *The Dream in the Red Chamber*, turns out to be just the trivial gossip of a skillful story-teller, full of vivid details and psychological observation, yet empty in meaning. To come back to our intertextual point of view, Eileen Chang's not very successful rewriting of *The Dream of the Red Chamber* can be reduced to her limited misreading of the classic. That is, she only sees a fragment; therefore, no matter how hard she tries to "correct" it, if there is no totality (relations to the others) involved, the work is at best a perfect fragment.



### Notes:

1. 《張愛玲短篇小說選》，臺北，一九五五年  
*Eileen Chang's Short Stories* (Taipei), 1955 (ECSS)
2. 見水晶著《張愛玲小說的藝術》，香港，一九七六年，第一七一頁  
See Shui Jing, *The Art of Eileen Chang*. (Hong Kong, 1976), 171
3. 《紅樓夢》，〈清〉，北京，一九八一  
*Dream of the Red Chamber*, [Ching dynasty] (Peking, 1981) (DRC)
4. H. Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence*. (New York, 1973), 5
5. H. Bloom, *A Map of Misreading* (New York, 1975), 3
6. *The Anxiety of Influence*, 14
7. Ibid
8. C. T. Hsia, *The Classic Chinese Novel* (New York and London, 1968), 246
9. C. T. Hsia, *The History of Modern Chinese Fiction* (New Haven and London, 1971), 398
10. Ibid
11. My translation. Original: 《張愛玲短篇小說選》第一六六頁 (ECSS p. 166)
12. My translation. Original: 《紅樓夢》第五七二頁 (DRC p. 572)
13. See F. Jameson, *The Political Unconscious* (Ithaca, New York, 1981), 81:

The type of interpretation here proposed is more satisfactorily grasped as the rewriting of the literary text in such a way that the latter may itself be seen as

the rewriting or restructuring of a prior historical or ideological subtext, it being always understood that "subtext" is not immediately present as such, not some common-sense external reality, nor even the conventional narratives of history manuals, but rather must itself be (re)constructed after the fact.

14. Original: 《張愛玲短篇小說選》, 151-52. (ECSS).
15. Original: 《紅樓夢》, 698-699. (DRC)
16. Original: 《紅樓夢》, 29. (DRC)
17. Original: 《張愛玲短篇小說選》, 155-156. (ECSS)
18. Original: 《張愛玲短篇小說選》, 168-169. (ECSS)
19. Original: 《張愛玲短篇小說選》, 177. (ECSS)
20. Original: 《張愛玲短篇小說選》, 202. (ECSS)
21. See (5)
22. W. Benjamin, *Illuminations*, ed. H. Arendt (New York, 1968), 220.