Prostitute in Exile—on Wang Chia-Chih’s Prostitunity in the Novel "Lust, Caution"

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***Abstract*—**The narrative of “Lust, Caution” explores a tale of espionage, focusing on a female college student, Wang Chia-chih, who orchestrates a honey trap with her classmates, ultimately becoming emotionally entangled with Mr. Yee, the assassinated target, despite her initial intentions. Through the lens of the assassination operation, the complexities of her character are revealed, highlighting a profound erosion of her identity, accompanied by psychological turmoil, self-deception, and latent sexual repression. Throughout this process, Wang’s transformation from a college student to a figure exhibiting traits akin to those of a prostitute is evident. Like prostitutes, Wang not only commodifies her body but also exists in discordance with the grand narrative, official discourse, and her own perceptions of sex and love. This article aims to delineate a concept termed “prostitunity” through three dimensions: sexual desire, exile, and individual narrative, elucidating the interplay between the burdens Wang carries, the toll exacted upon her, and the subtle nuances permeating her innermost being. Wang Chia-chih’s “prostitunity” serves as a notable representation of a seldom-seen female character in 20th-century Chinese literature—distinct yet resonant within the complexity and chaos of her context. Finally, this article delves deeper into the theme of “Lust, Caution”— the confrontation between grand narratives and the individual lives of women.

***Index Terms*—** Lust, honey trap, Chinese literature

I. Introduction

A prostitute is a person who engage in sexual or entertaining activities either physically or mentally in exchange for payment. The concept of prostitution underwent a dynamic evolution during the Republic of China era, marked by shifting perceptions and emergent societal constructs. Initially, within the discourse of upper-class society in the early 20th century, the identity of a prostitute was often depicted with a veneer of elegance. However, as the 1920s and 1930s unfolded, portrayals increasingly emphasized the plight of victims and the perilous nature of the sex trade, ultimately culminating in its recognition as a significant social issue by the 1940s. Despite these shifts, the profession of prostitution remained distinct from that of “petty urbanites” (Xiaoshimin), a category to which many individuals, including the protagonist Wang Chia-chih in “Lust, Caution,” belonged prior to their involvement in clandestine activities. Wang Chia-chih, a student at Lingnan University, inhabited the realm of “petty urbanites” before embarking on a path of orchestrating a honey trap to eliminate traitors. In doing so, much of her involvement revolved around fulfilling physical desires, thereby assuming a dual identity that diverged significantly from that of a typical female college student. This duality not only altered her societal standing but also propelled her beyond the confines of conventional psychological analysis applied to individuals of her social stratum. Within the enigmatic and ambiguous realm of Wang Chia-chih’s psychology, an intriguing phenomenon emerges, encapsulated by the term “prostitunity.” While Wang Chia-chih herself does not fit the traditional mold of a prostitute, her actions and experiences mirror characteristic traits associated with the profession. By delving into Wang Chia-chih’s “prostitunity,” we gain insight into the intricate interplay of forces shaping her character and motivations. Understanding the ramifications of the assassination on her psyche allows us to discern the complexities of her inner world, illuminating the manifold effects of her actions and the subtle nuances that define her journey.

II. Sexual Desire

From the 1920s through the 1950s, Chinese society witnessed a debate surrounding the regulation or abolition of the prostitution industry. Widely recognized as a social issue, prostitution became the subject of numerous polemics, reflecting reformers’ determination to improve social security and the prevailing discourse on female sexuality. Central to this discourse was the dichotomy between “prostitutes,” perceived as women driven by sexual motives, and “women of good families,” whose roles were primarily defined within the context of procreation. This division served to encourage women to return to the perceived safety of familial structures, thereby bolstering national stability. Prostitutes were often portrayed as individuals driven by their own sexual desires, a stark contrast to the emphasis on procreation and the denial of normative sexual urges among women of good families. The instinctive desire displayed by Wang Chia-chih is a manifestation of her “prostitunity.”

Wang Chia-chih, on the other hand, undergoes a profound transformation, transitioning from a woman valued for her potential as a child-bearer to one who, driven by revolutionary fervor, engages in sexual activities as part of her mission. Within the framework of the revolutionary narrative, patriarchal norms impose a “customized” set of rules upon Wang Chia-chih, wherein her body becomes a tool for the cause. Paradoxically, while her purity remains sacrosanct despite engaging in sexual intercourse, her actions are lauded due to their contribution to the revolutionary mission. Thus, Wang Chia-chih finds herself caught between the expectations of her revolutionary duty and the lingering mental classification

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as a "woman of good family," despite no longer fitting the traditional mold. In practice, this imposed dichotomy only serves to exploit Wang Chia-chih, offering her no viable means of escape. Her perceived transgression lies in her failure to complete the assassination of Mr. Yee, a manifestation of her individual agency conflicting with the expectations imposed upon her by both the revolutionary cause and patriarchal norms. However, what renders Wang Chia-chih truly compelling within Eileen Chang's narrative is her portrayal as a fully realized individual, a flesh-and-blood person with emotions, desires, and complexities that transcend her role as a mere pawn in the grand narrative of revolution and patriarchy.

In the article, there are two instances where Mr. Yee flirted with Wang Chia-chih verbally or physically. The first occurrence was when Mr. Yee intimately nestled against Wang Chia-chih's chest, whispering, "They weren't this big two years ago." This remark prompts a visible reaction from Wang Chia-chih, as described by the author: "blush on her face," as a response to Mr. Yee's comment. The second instance was when Mr. Yee and Wang Chia-chih were seated together in a car.

As they sat next to each other in the back of the car, he folded his arms so that his elbow nudged against the fullest part of her breast. This was a familiar trick of his: to sit primly upright while covertly enjoying the pleasurable softness of her.

These two places directly describe Wang Chia-chih's reaction after being sexually teased. From the perspective of a spy with a mission, she was supposed to eliminate all interference to achieve his goal, but Eileen Chang deliberately focused on the erotic feelings of the body's senses. This is also a normal feeling for a person and a woman and should not be suppressed.

Indeed, the portrayal of Wang Chia-chih's reactions to Mr. Yee's advances reflects elements of what can be termed "feminine writing" (Écriture féminine). This concept, rooted in French feminist literary theory, was first articulated by Hélène Cixous in her seminal work "The Laugh of Medusa." Cixous advocated for the idea that women should assert their own unique form of writing and cultivate a distinct female language.

Hélène Cixous's concept of "feminine writing" extends beyond its initial formulation, "women should write with their bodies," encompassing a call for women to write from their embodied experiences and distinct perspectives. Cixous urges women to depart from the confines of grand patriarchal narratives and instead focus on articulating their stories through the lens of their sensory experiences and physical instincts. By foregrounding Wang Chia-chih's bodily responses and emotional nuances, Eileen Chang's depiction of Wang Chia-chih's reactions to Mr. Yee's provocations resonates with the principles of "feminine writing" as articulated by Cixous.

Eileen Chang's portrayal of her protagonist, Wang Chia-chih, go further than the boundaries of "feminine writing" as outlined by Hélène Cixous. In a pivotal moment preceding the assassination plot, Wang Chia-chih and Mr. Yee find themselves together in the attic of a jewelry store. Here, Wang Chia-chih offers a direct and introspective reflection on desire, challenging conventional notions surrounding female sexuality. Her contemplation, "A well-known Chinese scholar was supposed to have added that the way to a woman's heart is through her vagina… Nor did she believe the saying was true," marks a departure from traditional narratives of female desire.

Some commentators suggested that Wang Chia-chih's reflection on sexual desire represents Eileen Chang's deliberate attempt to create distance from the intimate relationships. They interpret Wang Chia-chih's denial of her own bodily desires as a means of asserting control over her emotions and relationships. However, this article believes that Wang Chia-chih's contemplation marks the beginning of her emotional journey, particularly concerning her relationships with two men: Liang Jun-sheng and Mr. Yee. Rather than denial, Wang Chia-chih's reflection hints at a deeper emotional complexity. As she grapples with the intersection of sexual desire and romantic love, she begins to consider the authenticity of her feelings towards these men. By questioning whether "love" is merely a byproduct of "sexual desire," Wang Chia-chih demonstrates a willingness to engage with the complexities of human relationships and emotions.

Eileen Chang's portrayal of Wang Chia-chih's skepticism towards desire demonstrates a more nuanced and realistic psychological state. By choosing "disbelief" as Wang Chia-chih's response, Chang presents a character grappling with the complexities of her own desires in a manner that resonates with human experience. Acknowledging desire as a necessity can potentially overlook the historical context and societal position of women, trapping them in the confines of another grand narrative. Additionally, placing too much emphasis on certain traits as feminine risks proving binary opposition and reinforcing the center of patriarchal culture.

Wang Chia-chih's betrayal in "Lust, Caution" is a multifaceted phenomenon. There are several plausible factors that may have contributed to her actions: the pressure of her espionage mission, her struggle to reconcile love and sexual desire, the trauma inflicted by Liang Jun-sheng, and the societal constraints of her historical period. While "feminine writing" provides a valuable lens through which to analyze Wang Chia-chih's experiences, it alone cannot fully encapsulate the depth and complexity of her character made by discourse and irreducible ambiguity that cannot be dispersed. Eileen Chang did not let Wang Chia-chih belong to any theoretical analysis; her narrative approach allows Wang Chia-chih to exist beyond the confines of theoretical abstraction, embodying the complexities and contradictions inherent in human nature.

The most controversial sentence in the article regarding Wang Chia-chih's writing of physical desire is,

In truth, every time she was with Yee she felt cleansed, as if by a scalding hot bath; for now everything she did was for the cause.

Following the publication of "Lust, Caution," Taiwanese writer Xiguo Chang, writing under the pen name "Outlander," published an article criticizing "Lust, Caution," in the "China Times." In his critique, he singled out a particular passage from the novel, decrying its perceived absurdity: "I have never done espionage work, so I cannot understand the psychological state of female spies. But being with a traitor who is an agent is like taking a hot bath, which washes away all the depression. It is really ridiculous." In response to this criticism, Eileen Chang herself contributed an article titled "The Wool Comes from the Sheep - Eileen Chang Talks about Lust, Caution" to the same magazine. Within this rebuttal, she addressed the contentious sentence directly, providing clarification: "'Because everything

has a purpose' means 'because the sacrifice of virginity was not in vain,' which is extremely clear."

But the sexual encounter between Wang Chia-chih and Mr. Yee is far from as simple as "not sacrificing her virginity in vain." The emotional and psychological impact of their intimacy prompts Wang Chia-chih to question the nature of her feelings, as evidenced by her reflection: "Surely she hadn't fallen in love with Yee?"

Bataille's erotic theory offers a lens through which we can explore Wang Chia-chih's reflections and actions within the context of her interactions with Mr. Yee. Bataille's discussion of "the object of desire" posits that women often wield the power to incite men's desire. Within this framework, Wang Chia-chih can be seen as embodying the archetype of women who actively present themselves as objects for men's aggressive desires. Throughout her seduction of Mr. Yee, Wang Chia-chih's behavior aligns with this notion, as she strategically positions herself to attract his attention and fulfill his desires. Her actions, characterized by a willingness to wait and an eagerness to please, reflect a psychology of self-objectification, wherein she views herself through the lens of Mr. Yee's desires. For instance, while awaiting Mr. Yee's arrival, Wang Chia-chih "would be getting jittery that the shop would close; but she wouldn't be able to hurry him along, like a prostitute with a customer." This direct comparison underscores Wang Chia-chih's prostitunity—the manifestation of traits characteristic of a prostitute—while also highlighting her psychological inclination towards self-objectification.

As Wang Chia-chih continued to think about love, her contemplation of love marked a significant evolution in her understanding of herself as a human being. As she grapples with the complexities of her relationship with Mr. Yee, she embarks on a journey of introspection that leads her to question the nature of their connection. A major theme of "Lust, Caution" is that the loud, public questions—war, revolution, national survival—that Chang had for decades been accused of sidelining are exposed as transient, alienating, and finally subordinate to the quiet, private themes of emotional loyalty, vanity, and betrayal.

Wang Chia-chih's journey of transgressing taboos unfolds gradually, from the initial blush on her face to the sensation likened to taking a hot bath, culminating in her reflection on her feelings for Mr. Yee. Through this process, Wang Chia-chih comes to a deeper understanding of her own existence and begins to ponder the questions of love, desire, and personal agency. Bataille spoke of an abyss, a discontinuity, between one individual's existence and another in his theory of eroticism. What people fear most is this kind of discontinuity. This discontinuity can only be bridged through death, but sexual behavior offers a simulation of continuity. The transition from the normal state—where women are passive and men are active—to the erotic state involves the dissolution of established existence, leading to a merging of dimensions and a disruption of self-contained identities. The whole business of eroticism is to destroy the self-contained character of the participants as they are in their normal lives.

Wang Chia-chih's contemplation of love may have been triggered by the sensation of dissolution she experienced during her intimate encounters with Mr. Yee. This feeling may be unconscious, but in Wang Chia-chih's psychological reaction, it is real. She has no way to explore the theory, but she starts to think about love and transforms from object to subject. This may be an explanation for Wang Chia-chih's psychological development.

III. Exile

Exile typically refers to the departure from one's native country or region due to various factors such as natural disasters, illegal activities, invasion, persecution (including political persecution), or other adverse circumstances. Spiritual exile, on the other hand, denotes a state of wandering and instability in one's consciousness. In the discourse surrounding prostitution during the 20th century, scholars like Gail Hershatter, as mentioned in the book "Dangerous Pleasure - Prostitution and Modernity in Shanghai in the 20th Century," observed that prostitutes themselves were not at the center of the discourse. Instead, the focus revolved around the perceived dangers and pleasures that prostitutes brought to their male clients. The official discourse provided by the state tended to overlook any categories beyond the defined class structure,

In China, at least, prodigious efforts were required before and after 1949, at the level of organization, ideology, and even language, to bring the two together… For a China historian, this legacy of official subaltern-speak complicates enormously the search for subversive voices,69 since those we might call subalterns spoke (and often came to understand their own experience) in the language of the state, which simultaneously recognizes their suffering, glorifies their resistance, and effaces any aspect of their history that does not dearly fall into the categories of suffering and resistance.

Wang Chia-chih epitomizes the prostitunity of the "subaltern," embodying the marginalized status and constrained agency of those outside the dominant narrative. Her experiences of suffering and resistance exist outside the bounds of official discourse, rendering her voiceless and powerless to articulate her anguish and defiance. Had the assassination of Mr. Yee succeeded, Wang Chia-chih would likely have faced scandal, as evidenced by the discriminatory treatment she endured from her classmates. However, the failed assassination ultimately seals Wang Chia-chih's fate, casting her as a "traitor" and a "villain" who directly opposes the official narrative. In this oppressive environment, Wang Chia-chih finds herself trapped between two colluding patriarchal discourses, both of which deny her agency and perpetuate her subjugation. Her exile is not merely physical but also spiritual, as she is silenced and marginalized within a society that denies her the language to express her suffering and rage.

Chang Xiguo said in his critical article that "there is no explanation of Wang Jiazhi (Wang Chia-chih)'s patriotic motives at all." Eileen Chang responded, "I am not writing these specially trained agents. Of course they are human and have normal human weaknesses." Here is an analysis of the two reasons why Wang Chia-chih decided to assassinate Mr. Yee after appearing in a patriotic drama. One interpretation posits Wang Chia-chih's decision was driven by private vanity—a desire for personal validation and gratification. This interpretation finds support in Wang Chia-chih's actions, such as leaving her phone number for Mr. Yee after their initial encounter, and her subsequent willingness to sacrifice her

virginity to Liang Jun-sheng. After Wang Chia-chih leaving her phone number, Eileen Chang wrote, "Resplendent in the high-society costume in which she had performed so supremely, she wanted everyone to stay on to celebrate with her, to carouse with her until morning." "And that evening, while she basked in the heady afterglow of her success, even Liang Jun-sheng didn't seem quite as repellent as usual." These actions, tinged with a sense of vanity and self-indulgence, highlight Wang Chia-chih's youthful impulsiveness and desire for validation, particularly within the context of her social circle and performances on stage. It seems not difficult to understand that a female college student in her twenties has her vanity satisfied on a stage surrounded by friends.

Another interpretation behind Wang Chia-chih's decision to participate in the assassination plot is her deep-seated desire for community. The article explains that the formation of this small patriotic drama group was due to "a strong, indignant sense of exile" after Lingnan University's relocation to Hong Kong. Wang Chia-chih, imbued with a sensitive and delicate disposition, found solace and belonging within this close-knit community. Her exile mentality did not translate into patriotic enthusiasm. Instead, she developed a deep attachment to this small group. Following the group's inaugural performance, Wang Chia-chih's exhilaration and reluctance to disband reflect her profound attachment to her fellow members. After the first performance, "Overexcited, unable to wind down after the curtain had fallen." This sentiment is further exemplified by her demeanor after her initial encounter with Mr. Yee, where she exudes a sense of jubilation and yearning for continued camaraderie. After the first time of seducing Mr. Yee for the first time, she was "Resplendent in the high-society costume in which she had performed so supremely, she wanted everyone to stay on to celebrate with her, to carouse with her until morning… Anything to avoid bed." Wang Chia-chih's reluctance to depart underscores her poignant longing for a sense of belonging and community, particularly in the face of her exile.

After being betrayed by his classmates, Wang Chia-chih became an even more complete exile. This betrayal began when everyone in the clique discussed Wang Chia-chih behind her back and decided to let Liang Jun-sheng have sex with her. When they were in Shanghai, "and now that she was so obviously regretting the whole business, the rest of the group began to avoid her. No one would look her in the eye." The betrayal Wang Chia-chih suffered was not only emotional alienation and isolation, but also a question of identity. Within this small group, the others were students who maintained emotional and physical purity, while Wang Chia-chih was regarded as a "female figure" who had matured and lost her virginity. The article mentioned that "From this point on, she kept her distance not only from Liang Jun-sheng, but also from their entire little group." "Even now, it stung her to recall those knowing smirks." Gender inequality is evident here. Liang Jun-sheng, also a classmate with sexual experience, even gained it through prostitution. Yet, he was not ostracized by his peers; instead, he became a mentor, teaching Wang Chia-chih how to navigate sexuality. Here, readers witness the formation of male alliances under patriarchy. The male alliance isn't solely based on gender; Lai Hsiu-chin, a woman, is part of the clique. Rather, it's an alliance formed by those with power through the oppression of certain individuals. "Women" in this context refer to those under this power dynamic. Wang Chia-chih's loss of virginity was orchestrated by this alliance, yet instead of showing her care, they used their emotions and gaze to oppress her further. Within the small group, Wang Chia-chih became an object of scrutiny, an eroticized body. Consequently, upon returning to Shanghai, "Had she been set up, she wondered, from the very beginning of this dead-end drama?" The sequence of events led Wang Chia-chih to experience love without companionship, ultimately pushing her into exile. These events also shed light on the impurity of the small group's actions - driven not only by patriotic fervor but also by a desire to witness a spectacle of sacrifice. It unveils the darker aspects of human nature and sets the stage for Wang Chia-chih's vengeful mindset.

During Wang Chia-chih's exile, the revolutionary organization did not satisfy her desire to find a community. It is written in the article, "*Not long after reaching Shanghai, however, the students made contact with an underground worker called Wu—doubtless an alias—who, as soon as he heard about the high-ranking connection they had made, naturally encouraged them to pursue their scheme...She suspected that Wu didn't have much faith in them: he was probably afraid they were too inexperienced, that they'd get caught and fall to pieces in an interrogation, implicating other people in the process. Chia-chih was sure he was more than a one-man operation here in Shanghai, but he'd been K'uang Yu-min's only point of contact throughout.*"

Eileen Chang masterfully depicts the underlying tension and mutual distrust between Wang Chia-chih and the Underground Agent Wu with a few deft strokes. This depiction prompts readers to ponder a crucial question: If Wang Chia-chih had indeed succeeded in completing the assassination, what would the revolutionary party's next steps have been? Would they have honored her contributions or merely treated her as a disposable pawn? Remarkably, the article refrains from providing a definitive answer to this question, opting instead for intentional "non-explanation." This deliberate choice by Eileen Chang suggests Wang Chia-chih's own uncertainty about her future. The revolutionary organization offers her no assurances or promises of rewards for success; instead, it merely utilizes her as a tool to achieve its revolutionary objectives. This exploitation by both the revolution and the patriarchy ultimately serves to push Wang Chia-chih into a state of exile, both physical and spiritual.

The last stop of Wang Chia-chih's exile was her love affair with Mr. Yee. Is there love between Wang Chia-chih and Mr. Yee? This is a topic that has been discussed repeatedly. From Mr. Yee's perspective, the answer to this question is probably no. The first half of the article doesn't contain much detail about Mr. Yee. There is only one place where Mr. Yee's feelings are mentioned,

And if Chia-chih had not pursued him so energetically, he might have cast her aside. Apartments were a popular parting gift to discarded mistresses of Wang Ching-wei's ministers. He had too many temptations jostling before him; far too many for any one moment. And if one of them weren't kept constantly in view, it would slip to the back of his mind and out of sight. No: he had to be nailed—even if she had to keep his nose buried between her breasts to do it.

In the process of her exile, Wang Chia-chih continually sought love and a sense of belonging. Even at the final point of the assassination, her decision to spare Mr. Yee was not rooted in her realization of love for him, but rather in her belief that "he really loves me." In this pivotal moment, amidst heightened tension, Wang Chia-chih recalled the past with the pain and resentment of an exile. Yet, simultaneously, she harbored the illusion that the love she experienced was genuine and that Mr. Yee's affection represented the sanctuary she had long yearned for. What fueled this illusion is elucidated in the novel,

Presents, too, were essential, though they needed to be distributed at the correct moments. Given too soon, they carried within an insulting insinuation of greed. Though he knew perfectly well the rules of the game they were plaYeeng, he had to permit himself a brief moment of euphoria at the prize that had fallen into his lap; otherwise, the entire exercise was meaningless…But there was, she noted again, no cynicism in his smile just then; only sadness…He really loves me, she thought. Inside, she felt a raw tremor of shock—then a vague sense of loss.

The tragedy of Wang Chia-chih lies in her misinterpretation of Mr. Yee's narcissism as genuine affection for her, leading her to release him and ultimately meet her death. Through poignant irony, Eileen Chang contrasts the power dynamics between men in positions of authority and women who find themselves in passive roles, unable to actively pursue love. In Mr. Yee's world, he remains centered on his own desires and ego, viewing the women in his sphere as mere instruments to bolster his sense of power and indulge his narcissism. Conversely, Wang Chia-chih inhabits a world devoid of stability or security, constantly in a state of exile, yearning for the possibility of being loved. The convergence of these two worlds, albeit briefly, occurs through desire, yet ultimately leads to contrasting fates—heaven and hell.

Eileen Chang's cruel and satirical style of writing still did not stop. Her description of Mr. Yee after killing Wang Chia-chih pushed Wang Chia-chih's tragedy to a climax.

She must have hated him at the end. But real men have to be ruthless. She wouldn't have loved him if he'd been the sentimental type… He could feel her shadow forever near him, comforting him…And now he possessed her utterly, primitively— as a hunter does his quarry, a tiger his kill. Alive, her body belonged to him; dead, she was his ghost.

Mr. Yee's response to Wang Chia-chih's release speaks volumes about his character and the power dynamics at play within the patriarchal society of wartime. Rather than feeling remorse or shame for her death, Mr. Yee perceives her demise as a testament to his own decisiveness and control. He believes that it is through her death that he can truly possess her, viewing her love and sacrifice as mere extensions of his own desires. Not only can readers feel Mr. Yee's ruthlessness as a traitor, but readers can also induce the impossibility of Wang Chia-chih finding love in Mr. Yee. Besides, Mr. Yee's callousness and disregard for Wang Chia-chih's life reflect his ruthless nature as a traitor and a man of power within the patriarchal hierarchy. He manipulates and exploits true feelings, viewing Wang Chia-chih's love and death as tools to satisfy his own ego and desires. In his eyes, her death serves only to fulfill his own sense of completeness and possession. Such a portrayal further highlights Wang Chia-chih's sadness as an exile.

Edward W. Said, in his book "Representations of the Intellectual," suggests that exile is a kind of mindset: "even if one is not an actual immigrant or expatriate, it is still possible to think as one, to imagine and investigate in spite of barriers, and always to move away from the centralizing authorities towards the margins, where you see things that are usually lost on minds that have never traveled beyond the conventional and the comfortable." Wang Chia-chih's exile can be interpreted both passively and actively. On one hand, she is forcibly enmeshed in a grand narrative, propelled by the upheaval of war. On the other hand, her exile can be viewed as an active choice—a constant quest for alternative perspectives and truths beyond the confines of societal norms. This is also the tragedy of Wang Chia-chih—the constant search for the fringing reefs turned into a backlash of a more desperate exile.

IV. Individual Narrative

Indian feminist critic Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak once proposed that "subordinate groups cannot speak." Her assertion encapsulates a profound critique of power dynamics within society. According to Spivak, individuals belonging to subordinate groups lack the agency and opportunity to articulate their own histories and experiences autonomously and independently.

It is, rather, that, both as object of colonialist historiography and as subject of insurgency, the ideological construction of gender keeps the male dominant. If, in the contest of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow.

In 20th-century China, the perception of prostitutes underwent a series of transformations, playing a significant role in ideological discourse within the upper echelons of society. These evolving perceptions were influenced by shifting societal concerns and attitudes over time. Initially, during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, men viewed prostitutes as symbols of elegance, utilizing them to showcase their social status. However, as the century progressed, prostitutes came to be perceived as disruptive to public order and carriers of sexually transmitted diseases, posing a threat to the modernization efforts of the nation. Throughout this evolution, men employed the metaphor of prostitutes to express their feelings or political stances. Prostitutes undoubtedly belong to what Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak calls a "subordinate group." Their marginalized status is further highlighted by Gail Hershatter in "Dangerous Pleasure,"

They (Prostitutes) were key elements in the stories that men told about pleasure, danger, gender, and the nation Prostitutes are brought into history embedded in the histories and the contests for power of those who first fashioned their stories.

In Wang Chia-chih's "prostitunity," she finds herself embodied within the grand revolutionary narrative, unable to articulate or even clarify her own personal narrative. Eileen Chang's crafted ending not only subjugates her within the male-centric historical framework—mercilessly slain by Mr. Yee—but also grants her a fleeting moment of personal agency and expression. With the simple yet powerful word "Run," Wang Chia-chih shatters society's illusions and expectations imposed upon her body, asserting her individuality and autonomy.

Chang deftly employs a writing style infused with individualism and achieves a high level in “Lust, Caution.”

Wang Chia-chih’s journey is one marked by the collision of personal emotions with the grand narrative of revolution—a clash that confounds the expectations of both patriarchy and revolution alike. A group of writers represented by Chang Xiguo could not understand the reason why Wang Chia-chih finally let Mr. Yee go. Eileen Chang’s masterstroke lies in portraying a female college student participate in the revolutionary mission out of personal emotions, and finally release her assassination target because of personal desires. In this intricate web of cause and effect, Wang Chia-chih’s various motivations and ultimate decisions defy the patriarchal and revolutionary norms that seek to dictate her actions. Patriarchy, with its discourse system, attempts to mold Wang Chia-chih into a “female revolutionary” aligned with familial and national values. However, this system fails to account for her individual autonomy and well-being, instead demanding her compliance with its predefined rules. Wang Chia-chih’s actions, driven by her own desires and agency, serve as a subversion of the patriarchal expectations placed upon her. In choosing to diverge from the prescribed path of the “female revolutionary,” Wang Chia-chih embodies a defiance that challenges the very foundations of patriarchal control. In this sense, she becomes a model of “women not cooperating” with the oppressive structures that seek to confine and define her.

The debate surrounding Wang Chia-chih’s conscious intention to subvert grand narratives in “Lust, Caution” remains contentious. Did Eileen Chang place this original intention on Wang Chia-chih? Did she really achieve self-awakening at the last moment and gain freedom?

The discussion above highlights one of the primary reasons behind Wang Chia-chih’s decision to spare Mr. Yee—her mistaken belief in his love for her. Eileen Chang herself pointed out in the article “The Wool” that another factor contributing to Wang Chia-chih’s choice “was greatly stimulated by the betrayal of her classmates, and even suspected that she had been deceived, and she couldn’t tell her the pain. A bit psychopathic.” Therefore, her ultimate wavering can be viewed as a form of retaliation against her classmates. Throughout the novel, Wang Chia-chih’s lingering resentment is palpable, especially in the tense final moments. While some scholars have interpreted her last word, “run,” as a defiant act symbolizing her newfound self-awareness and rebellion against societal norms, a closer examination of Wang Chia-chih’s motivations suggests otherwise. Despite her aversion to the betrayal and her desire for vengeance, Wang Chia-chih’s actions do not align with a deliberate defiance against society, patriarchal scrutiny, or the exploitation of her body by revolutionary forces. Her revenge itself is not earth-shattering. It is not like the traditional female revenge narrative that deliberately destroys everything and is willing to die with oppression. It is just a little girl's grievance as well as her continuous pursuit of love and community. Just for a moment, she wanted to be loyal to her own value system and emotional judgment, temporarily forgot her mission, and believed that what she saw in front of her was the reality.

V. Conclusion

The complexity of Wang Chia-chih’s character defies simple categorization, and while the concept of “prostitunity” offers insight into her experiences, it cannot fully encapsulate the intricacies of her being. Instead, we can utilize her “prostitunity” as a lens through which to explore the myriad incongruities and ambiguities that define her existence. Indeed, Wang Chia-chih’s life is characterized by incongruity—she exists in discordance with the grand narrative, official discourse, and even with her own perceptions of sex and love. Perhaps it is within this framework of incongruity that Wang Chia-chih’s true essence emerges. Amidst the conflicting voices and noisy discussions, she represents a distinct force, one that is different from the obvious yet resonates loudly amidst the complexity and chaos.

At the conclusion of “Lust, Caution,” the ladies are playing mahjong as usual, while Mr. Yee “amid the raucous laughter, quietly slipped out.” Meanwhile, Wang Chia-chih finds herself unable to navigate the congested streets, symbolizing her entrapment within the confines of her circumstances. Yet, even as Wang Chia-chih remains physically confined within Eileen Chang’s silent text, her presence transcends its pages. She strides forth into the collective consciousness of millions of readers and onto the silver screen, sparking lively public discourse and debate. Despite the passage of fifty-five years since the novel’s publication, Wang Chia-chih remains a timeless figure. Like a “red, green, and white windmill” spinning relentlessly, Wang Chia-chih’s journey continues, heading towards the “Yü Garden Road” that could never be reached. Her enduring legacy serves as a poignant reminder of the enduring power of literature to capture the complexities of human experience and provoke contemplation long after the final pages have been turned

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