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***Love, Lust, Caution: Centennial Celebration of the Cross-Cultural Legacies of Eileen Chang***  
**愛與誠：張愛玲跨文化遺產百年慶典**  
**November 20, 2020**

**Response to Presentations by Professor Brian Bernardis, Professor Jenny Lin  
and Professor Yunwen Gao**

It is an honor and joy for me to participate in this Centennial Celebration of Eileen Chang's life and work today. The three wonderful presentations we have just heard are a clear testament to the fact that Eileen Chang's legacy is vibrantly alive, and continues to exert a potent force upon thinkers, writers, and creative innovators in fields as diverse as literary fiction, design, art, and fashion. What Brian, Jenny and Yunwen also reveal is that Eileen Chang herself moved among and across a variety of very different spaces, which each affected her sensibilities and her work in distinct ways. She began her writing life in Shanghai, the city she loved the most, where she was a "chronicler" of sorts, not of political issues of the day, but of stories of love and everyday life, particularly the everyday life of middle-class "petty urbanite" (*xiao shimin* 小市民) women in Shanghai in the 1940's. One outstanding example of her work during this early period is the story "Sealed Off" (*Fengsuo* 封鎖, 1941) in which she beautifully evokes the psychological depth that lies beneath the surface of external reality. Due to the trauma of war and historical circumstance, Eileen Chang then lived and wrote in Hong Kong, where she constructed an "alternative narrative of war" in the indelible story *Love in a Fallen City* (*Qingcheng zhilian* 傾城之戀) in 1942. Denigrated and misunderstood, she was then forced to leave her homeland and spend the rest of her life in exile in Los Angeles, where she spent many years writing, revising, and also translating her great novella *Lust, Caution* (*Se, jie* 色, 戒, 1979).

The reason why I remind you once more of this itinerary of Eileen Chang's life is to draw your attention to her unwavering efforts to perceive, reflect and refract true, authentic, lived reality. No matter where in the world she finds herself, she succeeds in revealing the inner desolation (*huangliang* 荒涼) within people's minds and hearts, by focusing on the intricacies of love between one man and one woman; the pain of betrayal; and the loss of certitude and even self-knowledge amid the turmoil of war. At the same time, Chang also constantly engages in the kind of cosmopolitan "trans-writing" that both Brian and Yunwen have highlighted. As Yunwen shows us, her work in "translation, annotation and bi-lingual writing" in fact enriches her literary artistry, while also expanding immeasurably the repertoire of and possibilities for contemporary and future writers – in particular Chinese women writers. In other words, as Brian, Jenny and Yunwen reveal, it is precisely this oftentimes painful but necessary movement between different spaces in a discordant world that accounts for the enduring power of Eileen Chang's cross-cultural legacy.

Throughout Eileen Chang's entire oeuvre, it is clear that her main priority is to stay as close as possible to authentic, true lived reality by means of focusing on details. In her essay

“My Own Writing” (*Ziji de wenzhang* 自己的文章), Chang writes: “In my fiction . . . My characters are not heroes, but they carry the general burden of this age. Although they are not absolute, they are serious. They have no tragic grandeur; they have only desolation. Tragic grandeur is a form of closure, but desolation is revelation . . .” (Eileen Chang, “My Own Writing”). In the same essay, she declares: “I know that my works lack force, yet since I am a fiction writer, I can only express the energies of the characters in my fiction but cannot create force on their behalf. Besides, I believe that although they are weak – the average people are not as forceful as heroes – it is precisely these average people who can better represent, more so than heroes, the sum total of this age.” (Eileen Chang, “My Own Writing”). Finally, she declares confidently: “I like simplicity and plainness, but I can only describe the basic human simplicity that filters through the modern fashion and ideas . . . . I don’t make falsehood and truth into stark opposites” (Eileen Chang, “My Own Writing”).

In his book *Shanghai Modern*, Leo Lee allows us to gain insight into Eileen Chang’s feeling use of a multitude of details: “With her details, Chang forces our attention to those material “signifiers” that serve not only to tell a different story about Shanghai’s urban life but also to reconfigure the spaces of the city – private, public, small and large – in accordance with her own vision.”

Rey Chow, in her critical work *Woman and Chinese Modernity*, further deepens our understanding of the importance of quotidian detail in Chang’s texts: “Chang’s “world of detail” is always already broken from a presumed “whole”. It is “that which is itself cut off, incomplete, desolate, but which is at the same time sensuously local and immediate – rather than the wholeness of idealist notions like “Man,” “Self,” or “China.” (Rey Chow, *Woman and Chinese Modernity* in Leo Lee, *Shanghai Modern*, p.271). Rey Chow shows us that Chang portrays “these sensuous, trivial, and superfluous textual presences that exist in ambiguous relation with some larger vision such as reform and revolution, which seeks to subordinate them but which is displaced by their surprising returns.” (Rey Chow, *Woman and Chinese Modernity*).

As Brian, Jenny and Yunwen have shown us today, this concern with authenticity; a hesitancy to draw a clear distinction between falsehood and truth; revelation of desolation; and her feeling use of the technique of “contrast in de-cadence” (*cenci de duizhao* 參差的對照) very much lie at the heart of Eileen Chang’s literary texts and thoughts about writing, as well as her reflections on art, design, space and architecture.

Finally, I would like to conclude by evoking a central metaphor for Eileen Chang’s works: they are words “written on water.” As Nicole Huang points out in the introduction to *Written on Water*, a wonderful collection of Chang’s essays translated by Andrew Jones, Eileen Chang explains the implications of the metaphor in one of her essays: She does not expect her writing to endure; instead, her work should be thought of as words written on water – or “flowing words,” a more literal translation of *liuyan* 流言 – lingering momentarily and eventually fading. But she also hopes that her writing will be endowed with the spirit of “rumors” or “gossip” – a second denotation of the word *liuyan* – flowing freely and swiftly in order to reach the widest possible audience.” (Nicole Huang, “Introduction” in *Written on Water*, xi)。