
Female Desire: Defiant Text and Intercultural Context in Works by D.H. Lawrence and Eileen Chang

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First written in 1926, but published posthumously in 1930, *The Virgin and the Gipsy* was deemed as “one of [D. H.] Lawrence’s finest things” by Frank R. Leavis (288). Eileen Chang’s (張愛玲) “Lust, Caution” (“Se, jie” 色, 戒), written in the 1950s and published in 1978,¹ achieved belated fame for the author as an unconventional espionage story set in 1940s Shanghai.² For decades, it went unrecognized as a modern Chinese literary work due to its ironic twist on the nationalist narrative. Recognition at last resulted thanks to Ang Lee’s (李安) 2007 screen adaptation of the work.³ Besides achieving a similar level of fame, these works feature a female character who withdraws from society to find personal expression elsewhere.

In *The Virgin and the Gipsy*, the heroine, Yvette, falls in love with a gipsy at first sight.⁴ She betrays her social class by falling for a gipsy, who Victorian convention considered inferior. In Chang’s story, Wang Jiazhi (王佳芝), a nationalist spy during the Sino-Japanese war (1937-1945), falls in love with a Chinese traitor. The figure of the traitor has been reviled in post-war literature and film. Wang Jiazhi realizes that she is in love with the traitor when he buys her a rare ring. Despite different writing styles, Lawrence and Chang portray powerful defiance by means of sexual love.⁵ This essay’s objective is to analyze sexual defiance in both plots, the different authorial perspectives in their cultural critiques, and the different societal conventions that the female protagonists try to debunk through sexual defiance. Found similarities and differences will broaden our understanding of modern Chinese as well as Western culture in the first half of the twentieth century. This comparative project serves as an effective intercultural means to enhance our understanding of China and the West and thus to encourage us to comprehend retrospectively today’s realities in these two areas. In an age of multiculturalism and transnationalism, a comparative approach to these writers will also rejuvenate today’s stagnant studies on their works.

Lawrence and Chang come from different cultures and they handle the physical dimension of love differently, but they share remarkable affinities in how they contextualize love between individuals who are at odds with their respective societies. Lawrence, the son of a working-class miner, arose intellectually through education and persistent literary pursuit. He lived

a transitional period, that is, from the convention-laden Victorian era to today's, when obsolete moralities and social decorum are challenged and undermined. His voice, as Keith Cushman and Dennis Jackson put it, is "one of the strongest in twentieth century literature" (3). Both also value Lawrence as the "great enemy of complacency, spurring us to ask difficult questions about love and power, about the society we have constructed, about the mysterious universe we inhabit, above all about ourselves" (3). His defiance or insolence, in many people's eyes, is juxtaposed with the skepticism of the dominant cultural conceptions in the early twentieth century.

Writing thirty years later, Chang presented a comparable form of sexual love, in the Chinese context, upon witnessing the disintegration of the old order as a new one arose from the political chaos and bloodshed caused by the Sino-Japanese war. Born to a distinguished aristocratic family in 1920s China, Chang was caught between two worlds: the traditional Chinese and the modern Western.⁶ Her father educated her in the culture of exquisite classical Chinese poetry and novels; her mother, having chosen to further her studies overseas and eventually divorcing Chang's father, influenced her daughter with progressive Western thoughts and beliefs.⁷

The primary reason that Lawrence and Chang's stories surprisingly achieve the same ends is because of their similar reactions towards their transitional times; that is, they both questioned dominant ideologies by exploring and elevating the private sexual lives of their female characters. Lawrence was living in the collapse of the Victorian era and at the beginning of the modernist one, while Chang was torn by Confucianism, patriotic nationalism, and Western ideologies of modernism. China took a great leap from a feudal empire to an industrial society in the early twentieth century. Both Lawrence's novella and Chang's story, as cultural products, reflect similar individualist reactions to dramatic social changes in two differing cultural contexts. Despite the chronological difference between the two authors, they share the same pattern of modern consciousness-raising in their works. By means of a woman's sexual defiance, Lawrence challenges the false morality and social order in post-Victorian, postwar modern England. Likewise, Chang shows that the Chinese society of the 1940s subjugates individuality (women's gender and sexuality) in the name of national independence and social modernization. Refusing to participate in political activities, she nonetheless reshapes modern Chinese culture by making it receptive to individualism. To defy the public sphere through private feelings, both authors focus on women's desire in their stories. They adopt sexual love and female desire to free women from those social conventions that suppress and confine their bodies.

Defiant Female Desire in the Texts

The Virgin and the Gypsy concentrates on a woman's discovery of her

sexual desire and primal selfhood. Yvette, a bourgeois girl, is stifled by her family's false morality and the corrupt social order surrounding them. At the story's climax, she is transfigured by a flood, in a mythical sense, that symbolizes her desire for sexual freedom and reverent recognition. In his analysis, Leavis connects the flood with the change in Yvette, pointing out that "the crucial significance of desire—of vindicating desire in the sense of compelling a clear and clean and reverent recognition" (294). Before the climactic flood, the sexual energy of Yvette's primitive desire takes the form of a search for recognition. Yvette is hostile to her family's false morality: the old and blind grandma "with her insatiable greed for life, other people's life"; the pious Aunt Cissie, who is "gnawed by an inward worm"; and her unbeliever father, who recoils when he is faced with the unconventional (14, 4). Once sexually awakened by her encounter with a gipsy, Yvette becomes susceptible. The flood saves her reputation when she is on the verge of losing control, allowing Lawrence to reward her rebellion against middle-class convention and to argue for the freedom or anarchy that her encounter with the gipsy represents.

Yvette's personal transformation is depicted in a realistic style that challenges old moral codes. When she first sees him, Yvette is obsessed with the gipsy's physical appearance and his gaze: "Yvette quivered suddenly, as if she had seen his big, bold eyes upon her, with the naked insinuation of desire in them. The absolutely naked insinuation of desire made her lie prone and powerless in the bed" (28). The thought that she is desired by the gipsy releases her from the confinement of the rectory. Yvette is conscious of her own transformation after her encounter with the gipsy: "The thought of the gipsy had released the life of her limbs, and crystalized in her heart the hate of the rectory: so that now she felt potent, instead of impotent" (28). The two would have consummated their desire in the caravan had not the Eastwoods intruded. Although the failure of their consummation exempts this novella from cliché, the moment is charged with strong sexual tension. When the gipsy asks Yvette to follow him to the caravan, she "followed simply, followed the silent, secret, overpowering motion of his body in front of her. It cost her nothing. She was gone in his will" (44). Irresistible to her, he captivates her utterly and she falls under his spell. This significant encounter with the gipsy liberates Yvette and transforms her into a new woman.

Lawrence shifts our sights from the traditional male-identification of a woman's body to the female's response to a man's body. Nancy Paxton observes that "Yvette offers another example of a modern woman who begins her sexual initiation by watching an attractive man." Rejecting the English conventions that suppressed women's sexuality and individual fulfillment, "Yvette is not punished for her voyeurism or for the relationship she estab-

lishes with the gipsy” (60). Through a woman’s gaze, Lawrence empowers women to challenge the conventional gender role and liberate their own sexuality. This is also Lawrence’s subversive act to undermine the conventional representation of the gipsy woman as an exotic, erotic object of desire.

Despite the realistic details, it is metaphorical attraction and not animal instinct that fulfills interpersonal relations between Yvette and the lower-class gipsy. Surprisingly, the gipsy’s love for Yvette saves the novella from vulgarity. When Joe, the gipsy, rescues her from the flood, he indeed loves her sincerely and tenderly. Afterwards, he writes her a letter, in his broken English, revealing his true feelings: “I see in the paper you are all right after your ducking. . . . I come that day to say goodbye! And I never said it, well, the water give no time, but I live in hope” (74). In Lawrence’s story, sex and love are closely intertwined. However, because Lawrence uses the mythical flood to represent whatever consummation takes place between the lovers, critics have wondered whether Yvette loses her virginity. The answer varies among scholars. For example, according to John Turner, it “is not the physical but the spiritual aspect of virginity that counts. The great climax to *The Virgin and the Gipsy* is not the physical but the spiritual embrace of that which had been taboo” (156). Yvette, saved by the gipsy, achieves her rebirth, freedom, and fulfillment simultaneously in the flood, just as Major Eastwood, Lawrence’s alter ego in the story, claims that “desire is the most wonderful thing in life” (55). Lawrence’s mythical implication of sexual love leaves much space for readers to formulate their own interpretations; it also protects him from the censorship that banned his earlier novels due to their explicit sexual depictions.

Comparably, Chang adopts another way to indicate sexual love subtly. In “Lust, Caution,” Chang implies that Wang Jiazhi’s love for Mr. Yi (易先生), a collaborator of the Japanese puppet government in China, originates from a female sexuality, her deepest self. Love in this story presents itself as abruptly and mysteriously at the end as the flood does at *The Virgin and the Gipsy*’s conclusion. At the very moment of assassination, Mr. Yi buys Jiazhi a pink diamond ring, a symbolic promise of happiness. In the otherworldly jewelry shop, Jiazhi first sinks into contemplation and eventually slips into a dream-like state. Compared to Lawrence, Chang uses implication to reveal sexual love. Jiazhi, in the jewelry shop, exemplifies other people’s definition of love: love is connected to power and “the way to a women’s heart is through her vagina” (28).⁸ Although rejecting this observation as vulgar, Jiazhi finds herself “unable to refute that notion [that she is in love with Mr. Yi] entirely” (28).⁹ While being alone in the store with him and seeing his sad but tenderly affectionate gaze,¹⁰ Jiazhi suddenly realizes that she truly loves Mr. Yi. The ring here symbolizes a desirable, genuine, indestructible,

and permanent love for which Jiazhi's private self has been pining on the cruel war and indifferent public domain. "He really loves me, she thought. Inside, she felt a raw tremor of shock—then a vague sense of loss. It was too late . . . 'Run,' she said softly" (30).¹¹ She saves her lover at this instant when the feeling of true love shocks and awakens her deepest self. Nicole Huang comments, "at this critical moment, it is her innermost feelings that become clearer. Her longing for connectedness and intimacy is brought to the foreground, under the dreamy orange light of the jewelry store, while her moral and national obligations recede into the dark background" (218). Jiazhi discovers love, recognizes her innermost self, and liberates her female desire from the confinement of Confucian morality and national commitment in this perilous liaison.

Jiazhi's eventual transformation is deeply rooted in her sexual love. If her psychology is insufficient to prove this assertion, Mr. Yi's possessive and passionate love adequately demonstrates the primitive desire between the two lovers. After executing Jiazhi, Mr. Yi ponders, "he had enjoyed the love of a beautiful woman, he could die happy—without regret. 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."¹² His extremely primitive desire for Jiazhi echoes with her previous thoughts about the connection between love and vagina. Sexual desire evolves into passionate love, for which Jiazhi could sacrifice her life and Mr. Yi would crave for his lover's eternal possession. "In essence, the domain of eroticism is the domain of violence, of violation," as Georges Bataille insists (16). Mr. Yi's idea of executing Jiazhi (death, the ultimate violence) is linked to the urge to possess. Jiazhi's individual search for mutual recognition is through love and sexuality regardless of political agenda. Like Yvette, she becomes aware of her body, heart, and self. Chang, given the strict censorship, downplayed the sexuality by insinuating an unspeakable and mysterious love.

Filmmaker Ang Lee dramatically highlights this steamily erotic desire in his NC-17 rated film.¹³ Lee boldly and explicitly visualizes the sensual desire that Chang carefully and covertly portrayed. He views the sexual relation between heroine and lover as sadomasochistic. "[Chang] revised the story for years and years—for decades—returning to it as a criminal might return to the scene of a crime, or as a victim might reenact a trauma, reaching for pleasure only by varying and reimagining the pain" (59). Lee's unique understanding is consistent with my contention that this story emphasizes sexual desire. Given Lee's acute observation and genius flair in art, his interpretation of Chang carries the ring of truth. As Hsiu-Chuang Deppman observes in her comparative studies of Lee and Chang, "Lee's adaptation as

a cinematic ‘reading’ of Chang’s ‘Lust, Caution’ deepens our understanding of Chang’s philosophy, style, and aesthetic” (155). Lee presents the intense, erotic cinematic imagination in a way that resonates with the sexual tension in Chang’s literary imagination.

Jiazhi’s love seems mystical, since Chang does not explicitly elaborate on the question of where this love emerges. This mysticism may partially arise from censorship, which likewise was a factor behind Lawrence’s mythic writing. Chang wisely hints at sex because she acknowledges the taboos in publishing. Publishers in the 1950s always avoided open mention of sex. She did offer, however, a shockingly explicit depiction of sexual desire in *The Little Reunion* (*Xiao tuanyuan*, 小团圆, 2009), written in the U.S. between 1975-76. Censorship in the 1970s was not as restrictive as that of the 1950s, partially due to the positive 1960 reception of Lawrence’s *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*. Chang’s implications and Lawrence’s mythology both fit within the symbolic mode of writing to imply more than they say overtly.

Subversive Cultural Expressions from the Private to the Public

Irving Singer comments on Lawrence’s desire, stating that “Lawrence means more than merely sexual impulse. He also means the desire to exist, to assert one’s self, to live in accordance with one’s nature, to sense one’s instinctual being and to gratify it” (228).¹⁴ Lawrence extricates himself from modern civilization because he believes it is anti-life. By indicating that genuine desire is inherently sexual and primordial, Lawrence refutes the rigid Victorian conventions and the devastating postwar, money-driven industrialism of his time. His desire to negate the cerebral is mythically embodied in the flood at the end of *The Virgin and The Gypsy*. As Kingsley Widmer affirms, “Lawrence desperately wants us, and himself, to *feel* differently, and clearly emphasizes that a change in feelings can change the world” (8). Bolstering individual pursuit and private emotion, Chang expresses her only concern about the personal dimension of life in “Writing of One’s Own”: “all I really write about are some of the trivial things that happen between men and women. . . . In my opinion, when in love people are more unpretentious and uninhibited than they are in times of war or revolution” (*Written on Water* 20). Sincere emotion lies at the center of Lawrence and Chang’s philosophy.

Both authors even strip their heroines of social commitments to prevent them from a fully social existence. Lawrence’s Yvette refuses her societal role as an obedient daughter and an angelic wife in her bourgeois setting. Chang’s Jiazhi betrays her patriotic cause and surrenders to her authentic feeling. These authors, extensively or subtly, affirm personal desire and espouse sincere emotionalism in the private sphere. Their indulgence in the intimate self and their reluctance to reconcile the intimate and the public evince their distrust of society and authority. The significance and prima-

cy of their sexual defiance, therefore, can be extended beyond the personal realm to all social life. Their apolitical stance was inherently problematic once they declared their disinterest in politics because, in so doing, they became immediately involved in the political discourse.

Targeting a wider definition of politics, I would like to broaden the study's scope to include social and cultural affairs. Chang and Lawrence were profound interpreters of society and contributed immensely to progressive social movements. The conventions that they opposed differed greatly because of their cultural and historical realities. It is essential that this study lays bare the rich details of the cultures depicted in their stories. Behind Yvette's sexual desire is Lawrence's subversion against the false morality of the rectory that Yvette's family represents. He was critiquing post-Victorian, postwar, industrial England through the family conflict and the love relationship. Chang's immersion into the lived experience and her seemingly apolitical stance prove her insistence on individualism. Her absolute devotion to the theme of sexual love as the most heightened state of existence in "Lust, Caution" insinuatingly, but persistently, assaults the lasting Confucian ideologies and the dominant authoritative nationalist discourse.¹⁵

As significant cultural critics, they however voiced their responses to different larger sociopolitical questions. The 1920s was a decade of transformation in England. The preexisting Victorian values, the postwar frenzied psyche, and the fierce class struggle manifested by endless labor strikes following the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution, all impacted modern Western civilization. Lawrence experienced a changing, wavering, and contradictory worldview during this period. His works also include a conflicting impulse that may explain the divided criticism at the time. Gerald's suicide in *Women in Love*, published in 1920, expresses Lawrence's disapproval of modern civilization and his desire to discard civil society. In contrast, *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1928), delivers a strong utopian sense of voluptuous vitality. Similarly, *The Virgin and the Gipsy* shares the positive flow of energy and life that, as Lawrence believes, can be acquired through radical individualism. This individualism is communicated through women's sexuality that defies the Victorian asceticism, Christian morality, mechanical industrialism, and class hierarchy.

Morality was set "in collision with sexuality, the idealizing impulses of Victorian domesticity point to the culmination of Victorian asceticism," as James Adams observes (130). Tracing back to the Evangelical movement in the late eighteenth-century religious revival, sexuality was a constantly attacked. Christianity had been the "dominant sexual authority" before the Victorian era (127). Additionally, the corrupted human psyche after the First World War, the wasteland of industrialism, and the intense class struggle unfolded in a modern fallen world that led Lawrence to take a great leap of

imagination to resolve the rampant materialism and class conflict.

In *The Virgin and the Gipsy*, Lawrence challenges rigid Christian morality interwoven with the oppressive Victorian conventions that characterize the rectory's bourgeois class values. Yvette finds her home, supposedly pure and civil, nonetheless filthy and repulsive. She thinks her suitor is boring and "bestly" (7). She is horrified by the "parasitic agedness" of her grandmother, or Mater, who represents the stale social order (29). The rectory "smelt of Granny" and has the same agedness, uncleanness, and sordidness. Like the old woman, it "seemed ugly, and almost sordid, with the dank air of that middle-class, degenerated comfort which has ceased to be comfortable and has turned stuffy, unclean . . . nothing was fresh" (8).

Yvette's profound disgust at the filthy and aged rectory validates Lawrence's hostility towards false morality and puritanical convention. As an acknowledged emblem of Christianity, the rectory represents "the morality of the slaves" (Watson 136).¹⁶ Lawrence used his modified repetitiveness to describe the repulsiveness of the rectory compared to the gipsy's clean quarry. "She hated the rectory, and everything it implied. The whole stagnant, sewerage sort of life, where sewerage is never mentioned, but where it seems to smell from the centre to every two-legged inmate, from Granny to the servants, was foul. If gypsies had no bathrooms, at least they had no sewerage. There was fresh air" (27). Repulsed from the stifling social order represented by the Mater and the rectory, Lawrence symbolically terminates Granny and the rectory in the mythical flood.

In contrast to the repulsive world to which Yvette belongs, the gipsy is pure, clean, and potent. When Yvette meets the gipsy's eyes, "something hard in her registered the peculiar pure lines of his face, of his straight, pure nose, of his cheeks and temples. The curious dark, suave purity of all his body, outlined in the green jersey: a purity like a living sneer" (22). The purity of the gipsy's body reflects Lawrence's rebellion against the false purity of English society of the era. David Craig affirms, as "one who led the revolt against the long Victorian regime of strict taboo on the discussion of intimate experience, Lawrence was bitterly against the cults of innocence, 'purity', and self-sacrifice at the expense of passional fulfillment" (29). True morality, for Lawrence, is based on life. After Yvette visits the gipsy's camp, she feels as if "the thought of the gipsy had released the life of her limbs, and crystalized in her heart the hate of the rectory: so that now she felt potent, instead of impotent" (28). Yvette's attraction to the gipsy's body illustrates Lawrence's worship of life. The word "potent" strongly indicates sex, life, and the vitalizing force of reproduction. Moreover, according to John Reed, the character of the gipsy was constantly used to symbolize freedom and "a reawakened life" in Victorian literary convention (397). The gipsy, from a

primitive culture, who is full of life and emancipates Yvette from the stifling old world of dying, symbolizes this reawakening.

Yvette desires and loves gipsy Joe, just as Constance Chatterley in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* loves Mellor, the gatekeeper. Both Connie and Yvette rebel against social convention and transgress class boundaries to consummate their primitive love. As Drew Milne observes, "the search for recognition through love and sex becomes a key form of the difficulty of class consciousness, combining both a sense of the physical needs understood as sexuality and the more mental forms of mutual recognition associated with love" (202). Lawrence attempts to reconcile the class conflicts in public life by glorifying a radical sexual communion between a lower-class man and a privileged lady in a private domain.

Compared to Lawrence's radical individualism at odds with his society, Chang's individualism in the form of the heroine's sexual self is conveyed with less confidence and aggression when Confucianism and nationalism had absolute power over individuals. The distinctiveness is derived from the different attitudes toward individualism between Western and Chinese cultures. It is commonly acknowledged that Western societies have highly valued individuality since the Renaissance. There have been countless thinkers (for example, Michel Eyquem de Montaigne, John Locke, Thomas Jefferson, Friedrich Nietzsche) who have conceptualized individualism in Western history. Individual rights, free thought, self-interest, and subjectivity are emphasized and respected. Radical individualists, like Lawrence, even advocate individualism over community and nation. As a firm believer of anarchy and liberalism, Lawrence illustrates this individualism in *The Virgin and the Gipsy* by depicting Yvette as a woman with free thoughts and feelings, independently pursuing her own desire and privileging sexual love over social class. In contrast, the idea of individualism was still alien to the conventional 1940s Chinese mind, which believed that all was subordinate to the nation either in its Confucian conventions or its modern nationalism.

To surpass conventional thinking, Chang develops the trope of female espionage that complies with, but in the end abruptly subverts, the traditional mode of viewing women and the state. Jiazhi plays the spy to undermine the political enemy. Yet, she is not the first female spy in Chinese culture. Politicians used women as "honey traps" throughout Chinese history. Two famous beauties in ancient China, Xi Shi 西施 and Diao Chan 貂蟬, used their beauty stratagems to assist in the defeat of political enemies. Xi Shi was a tribute from King Goujian of Yue in 490 BC to King Fuchai of Wu so that the latter, indulging himself in her beauty, would be vulnerable to Yue's attack. Diao Chan, at the end of the Eastern Han dynasty (25-220 AD), was assigned to sow discord between the tyrant Dong Zhuo 董卓 and

his foster son Lü Bu 呂布. Nevertheless, Chang does more than just allow a woman to act as a pawn in masculine political conspiracies. In traditional Confucian thinking, women are to strictly submit to a set of moral principles, three compliances and four virtues, which require a single woman to obey her father, her husband once married, her son in widowhood, and to remain virtuous until death. Both Jiazhi and Eileen Chang herself were unconsciously trying to be firm believers of traditional Chinese ideologies; however, their true selves constantly arise and disturb the Confucian discourse on women's subjugation and suppression.

Besides the preexisting Confucian morality, Chang also distanced herself from the overarching sociopolitical ethos shared by mainstream May Fourth intellectuals like Lu Xun 魯迅 and Mao Dun 茅盾. China had been enduring invasions and exploitation from Western countries since the 1840s. In the 1940s, when Chang wrote most of her successful love stories in Shanghai, China was enduring the second Sino-Japanese War (1937—1945). Many Chinese writers in twentieth-century China, starting with Liang Qichao 梁啟超 and Kang Youwei 康有為, intermixed politics with art, and even employed their art for political revolutionary purposes. The May Fourth intellectuals (1910s-1920s), the leftists (1930s-1940s), and the communists all used literature as an effective, manipulative means to invoke patriotic impulses, to mobilize people to overthrow imperial domination or Confucian authority, and to radically transform the nation into a progressive, modern society. China, like Russia, motivated by a sweeping revolutionary drive, resolutely subordinated all individualism, including gender, sexuality, ethnicity, and feelings, to the absolute political cause. Nationalism was privileged over individualism and gender in all facets of society and intellectual life. Women writers risked being discounted by leftist intellectuals for persistently centering on domestic matters, thus they too, like their male counterparts, devoted themselves to the revolutionary cause.¹⁷ Ding Ling 丁玲 (1904—1986), an outstanding woman writer, is an oft-heralded example. She boldly explored women's subjectivity and sexuality early in her career, but eventually became a nationalist and introduced national turmoil and social engagement topics into her works (Dooling 98-102).

Contrary to this highly politicized and utilitarian modern Chinese literature, Chang's decadent voice antagonizes as a counter discourse. Chang never engaged with the big historical picture in the 1940s nor did she revere patriotic aura as did other Chinese writers of the time. Leo Ou-fan Lee, in his innovative effort to study Shanghai urban culture, addresses Chang's "Cassandra-like stance" in her stories "as it runs counter to the prevailing ethos of nationalism and revolutionary progress at the time" (269). Julia Lovell also posits, "in 'Lust, Caution,' the loud, public questions—war, revolution,

national survival—that Chang had for decades been accused of sidelining are freely given centre stage, then exposed as transient, alienating, and finally subordinate to the quiet, private themes of emotional loyalty, vanity and betrayal” (159). Chang used the dramatic political commotions to interpret the theme of love and personal salvation, rather than to promote national salvation. In this sense, Chang shares Lawrence’s skepticism towards war and revolution.

Just as Yvette hates the rectory, in “Lust, Caution,” Jiazhi disdains politics, and her preference for love over politics serves as a dissenting note in the leitmotif of nationalism in early twentieth-century China. As Julia Lovell puts it, “Chang created for the first time a heroine directly swept up in the radical, patriotic politics of the 1940s, charting her exploitation in the name of nationalism and her impulsive abandonment of the cause for an illusory love” (157). Chang subtly and drily asserts that anything individual is more meaningful and important than patriotism and nationalism. Jiazhi liberates herself from political enslavement and achieves “the freedom of her real self,” as Whitney Crothers Dilley discovers in her study of the “real” Wang Jiazhi (130). Just as the heroine in the story believes, Chang also views sexual love (women’s subjectivity and sexuality in this story) as the most genuine and ultimate form of self-expression and individualism. The discourse of love and sexuality should be a legitimate subject on its own. Some critics believe that Chang’s influence is constrained to merely private, domestic spheres because of her self-proclaimed apolitical stance. However, this stance surprisingly functions as an effective means to reverse the cultural hierarchy, which is an effort to engage in lowercase-p politics. Her works contributed to the Chinese sexual revolution and added a strikingly different dimension to modern Chinese history. Nicole Huang believes that Chang was seeking “channels of self-expression at an adverse time, to tell a different sort of wartime story, and, most importantly, to challenge the existing literary hierarchy and establish a new literary order” (16). Because of a few modern writers like Eileen Chang, individualism, in the form of women’s subjectivity, sexuality, and love, has been gradually elevated to a higher level of the cultural hierarchy in contemporary China.

Unique Authorial Intentions behind the Female Gaze

Besides the dissimilar conventions that each author was shaping and was shaped by, different worldviews inform their distinctive literary narratives about women and individualism. Amplifying the female gaze, Lawrence and Chang focus on women’s desire. Each story represents a female viewpoint that disturbs and disrupts the masculine discourse about women’s bodies and sexuality. Both authors are ambitiously looking for ways to articulate what is currently viewed as a feminist perspective. However, behind the seemingly

similar feminist awareness stand different authorial intentions. This disparity is projected in the images of women in their stories. Jiazhi and Yvette differ tremendously if one delves deeper into the details. Jiazhi has conformed to her social role until her last-minute awakening, while Yvette discovers her sexual self in the beginning and consistently carries on her self-emancipation. Jiazhi's preference for her bodily and emotional self comes at the cost of her life, while Yvette's rebellion is awarded with the gipsy's lifesaving act. Whether Jiazhi's desire was met or denied remains perplexingly ambivalent but, clearly, that Yvette is empowered by her newly discovered sexuality and worldliness. In contrast to Yvette's gipsy, Jiazhi's lover terminates her life, her awakened self-knowledge, and her promised love. Her death ironically perpetuates women's marginalization, bodily effacement, and endless struggle for their own power in a male-dominated society. Chang's "Lust, Caution" is a discourse as much about powerlessness as about power. Haiyan Lee observes that "it is notoriously difficult to discern lines of oppression and victimization in Chang's fictional world. Invidious hierarchies of class, gender, and race are omnipresent, and yet they intersect in such a way as to diffuse any possibility of righteous indignation, unalloyed compassion, or solidarity-making" (Review). It is a text as much about submission as about sexual and emotional fulfillment.

Chang complicates and problematizes Jiazhi's self-sacrificial love, unveiling the tension between individual and society. An awakened woman ready to pursue her individual fulfillment is constantly threatened by unreconciled social expectations about women's sex and gender. The ambiguity about female desire, whether achieved or frustrated, problematizes the dichotomy of the private and the public in a revolutionary culture. As a woman, Chang was aware of the powerful suppressions coerced by Confucianism and patriotism that women encountered and experienced in early twentieth-century China. On the other hand, it is more difficult for Chang to revolt than it was for Lawrence, the offspring of a working-class family. As one of the last aristocrats from the Qing dynasty who was brought up in a traditional family but exposed to Western education, Eileen Chang could not totally betray the traditional moral principles, nor could she embrace the radical patriotic dogma that dethroned the previous empire. This explains the irresolution and vacillation shown by Chang's heroines including Jiazhi, and it is also why Chang's story ends with ambiguity and failure. Her gynocentric view, tentatively or unconsciously, projected the early modern feminist dilemma in China.

Compared to Chang's mild reaction towards the dominant cultural conventions, Lawrence exhibits his usual heroic, triumphant, and vigorous spirit in his cultural representation of women and sexuality. However, he is as often the target of feminists because he is celebrated as a forerunner

of modern thought. Despite harsh attacks from some feminists, Lawrence's discourse about women is more complex and fluid than it seems.¹⁹ As Carol Siegel observes, Lawrence's work seems "too fluid, changeable, and even self-contradictory to fit this developmental pattern, especially when one considers that *The Virgin and the Gipsy*, written in 1926, has in common with intentionally feminist texts like *Jane Eyre* a concern with combating the negative connotation traditionally given to female flow" (126). It is not my intention to pigeonhole Lawrence, but instead to raise and position Lawrence in a broader frame. I seek to uncover the profound implications behind Lawrence's female characters and their primitive desires. Holding a differing perspective from Chang's gynocentric angle, Lawrence intensely engaged himself with sociopolitical problems. However, the then hopelessly fallen world troubled by war, money-driven industrialism, labor strikes, and obsolete moral conventions tremendously disheartened and frustrated Lawrence. He took a radically utopian leap by retreating into the extremely private sphere where he believed life and regeneration were possible and radical individualism could offer an alternative solution to the outside world. He believed that women, sexuality, and the communion between man and woman could resolve this bleak realistic situation. "For Lawrence, the female, although it is said to be coeval with the male, would seem to be the more primitive. It is, radically, the maternal element of origins which are of the flesh and of the blood. As such, it is further associated with darkness—the darkness of the womb and of birth" (Hochman 83). Indeed, to Lawrence, women and womb serve as the path to the world's regeneration. His insistence on rebellious women and liberating sexual relations is a response to the sociopolitical tensions and problems of his time. In this sense, his literary attention was primarily drawn to the bigger questions rather than to the gender struggle that concerned Chang. Reading Lawrence thus will lead to a better understanding of him, particularly of his controversial views on women and sex. It tremendously devalues Lawrence if we merely place and evaluate him in terms of a feminist cultural agenda.

Shutting out the overwhelming noise of politics, Chang was concerned with women's subjectivity and gender relations in the private sphere. Depicting the conflict within family and love, Lawrence intended to question the social order within a larger realm. Set against Chang, Lawrence seems more determined and aggressive in his cultural critique. His heroines are portrayed as strong and invincible femme fatales. Yvette never yields or submits. The mythical flood charged with an irresistible sexual power destroys the old world and creates the possibility of a new one. Yet, his great leap of literary imagination from a dystopian England to a utopian man-woman sexual consummation can be no more than a naïve, self-indulgent fantasy or illu-

sion, compared to Chang's cold, pessimistic—but realistic—revelation of a depressing Chinese society. Chang experimented differently from Lawrence and moved away from sociopolitical expectations, thereby indicating her agency and latent resistance to social conventions created by Confucianism and nationalism.

Conclusion

History proves that D.H. Lawrence and Eileen Chang had an extraordinary impact on twentieth-century literature and society. It is commonly known that Lawrence endeavored to release English literature from sexual suppression by depicting romantic relationships driven by sexual desire in his works. Portraying women as real people with sexuality and love, Lawrence had a significant impact on sexual freedom, liberal publishing, and ushering in the second wave of feminism in the latter part of the twentieth century. As a male writer who was concerned about social conventions and politics, he adopted the subversive power of sexual love to rebel against the prevailing false morality, capitalism, and its social order. As for Chang, the individualism embodied in women's subjectivity, feelings, and love was inherited by numerous modern Chinese writers, such as Li Ang, Shi Shuqing, Zhong Xiaoyang, and Wang Anyi. In their literary creations, these Chang-school authors develop the themes of women and love in conjunction with individualism.

The Virgin and the Gipsy and "Lust, Caution" highlight sexual love as a road to freedom, though this freedom is not entirely reached. Both writers assert female desire and regenerated selfhood to rebel against the dehumanizing social orders in their respective cultures. This power of defiance deconstructs authority and rigidity, and further carves out more space for genuine feeling and active social engagement. It is significant to compare the British writer and the Chinese writer. Their similar pursuit for liberation by scrutinizing women, sexuality, and individualism bridges the gap between male and female. Because studies on Lawrence and Chang are dwindling, I hope to revitalize this research with this comparative study. The questions and concerns they raised remain unanswered. As precursors and visionaries, D.H. Lawrence and Eileen Chang deserve a rereading and a reinterpretation.

Notes

¹ According to Cai Dengshan's *Lust, Caution and Eileen*, Chang began writing the story in 1953, but it was not published until 1978.

² This story, along with its screen adaptation, gets the attention of many Chinese Studies scholars, including Ou-fan Lee, Xiaojuan Wang, Haiyan Lee, Nicole Huang, Peng Hsiao-yen, Chang Hsiao-hung, and Hsiu-Chuang Depman. Edited by Xiaoyan Peng and Whitney Crothers Dilley, *From Eileen Chang to Ang Lee: Lust/Caution* is devoted to studies of "Lust, Caution."

³The novella, politically incorrect in the Chinese context, does not feed into the patriotic narrative of twentieth-century China. Nicole Huang finds in her copious research on Republican Era literature that “Lust, Caution” is “Chang’s only story dealing with wartime politics.” The story produces “a loudly discordant tune, one that puzzles her critics and forces them to turn away from this story so as to avoid placing it within the context of the literature of her time” (218).

⁴“Gipsy” is a problematic term, but one that was historically prevalent. In Lawrence’s story, the gipsy is emblemized as an “honorable beast,” in Peter Balbert’s words (206). In Balbert’s latest interpretation of Lawrence’s marriage matrix, the gipsy is paradoxically featured with profane primitivism and religious restoration.

⁵The Chinese quotations of *Lust, Caution* are all from *Zhang Ailing diancang* 張愛玲典藏 (Taipei: Huangguan, 2010), vol. 3. I have here adopted Julia Lovell’s English translation of this Chinese novella. See Eileen Chang, *Lust, Caution and Other Stories*, trans. Julia Lovell (London: Penguin, 2007).

⁶Chang’s great-grandfather was Li Hongzhang 李鴻章, an influential official in the Qing Dynasty. However, her parents’ divorce, her father’s addiction to opium, and the domestic violence that she underwent rendered Chang’s family dysfunctional and stifling. See Chang, *Written on Water*.

⁷For further details about her life, see the discussion in C.T. Hsia, “Eileen Chang.”

⁸「到女人心裏的路通過陰道。」 *Diancang*, vol. 3, 20.

⁹那，難道她有點愛上了老易？她不信，但是也無法斬釘截鐵的說不是。 *Diancang*, vol. 3, 204.

¹⁰Haiyan Lee uses Emmanuel Levinas’s notion of “face of the other” to justify Jiazhi’s eventual betrayal and transcendence. See Haiyan Lee, “Enemy under My Skin: Eileen Chang’s *Lust, Caution* and the Politics of Transcendence,” *PMLA* 125. 3 (2010): 640-56.

¹¹這個人是真愛我的，她突然想，心下轟然一聲，若有所失。太晚了[...]「快走，」她低聲說。 *Diancang*, vol. 3, 205.

¹²得一知己，死而無憾。他覺得她的影子會永遠依傍他，安慰他[...]他們是原始的獵人與獵物的關係，虎與俚的關係，最終極的佔有。她這才是他的人，死是他的鬼。 *Diancang*, vol. 3, 210.

¹³The Motion Picture Association of America rated this film as NC-17, categorized as adults-only because it contains several highly sensual scenes.

¹⁴Irving Singer devotes three volumes to explore the nature of Western love at different times, from Greek love (*éros*, *philia*, and *agápe*), Christian love, courtly love, romantic love, to modern love.

¹⁵Perry Link also acutely senses Chang’s awareness of the political

system, especially how the system affects private thoughts. Link observes that Chang seems “like George Orwell, to have almost a sixth sense for immediate comprehension of what an authoritarian political system will do to humans in daily life. She looks past the grand political system itself and instead focuses on the lives of people—how they feel and behave as they adapt to what the system forces upon them.”

¹⁶ “Now according to Nietzsche (and Hegel before him), the slave’s morality is, at its most effective, Christianity” (Watson 136).

¹⁷ This literary policing conducted by Chinese nationalists resembles the critical blinders worn by masculinist African American intellectuals. Ann DuCille in *The Coupling Convention* examines the critical invisibility of the marriage theme, or “sexual reticence,” in early African American women writers’ novels (10). Chinese women writers in semi-colonized China faced the same double jeopardy (race and gender) as early African American women writers. Just as subversive as the “coupling convention” mobilized by the early African American women’s novels was, Chang’s stories, themed with love and marriage, also carry defiance against patriarchy and the masculinist discourse.

¹⁸ Chang’s case illustrates Fredric Jameson’s theory of national allegory. Jameson believes that private individual destiny in fiction embodies an allegory of the public third-world society (65-88).

¹⁹ Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* adopted Lawrence as one of the examples to show the prevalence of mythical representation of women. The eternal feminine is preserved in Lawrence’s works. Kate Millett in her *Sexual Politics* radically repudiates Lawrence as a misogynist sexual politician. Hilary Simpson’s *D. H. Lawrence and Feminism* maintains that Lawrence insists on male supremacy and feminine submission. Feminism in the 1970s and 1980s attacked Lawrence as a monolithic masculine monster.

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