

Study on the Female Consciousness Based on Eileen Chang's Works

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Abstract: This article examines the female figures in Eileen Chang's works, exploring their female consciousness in different social environments and historical backgrounds, as well as the influence of Eileen Chang's legendary experiences on their formation. This article delves into the female consciousness depicted in Eileen Chang's works, revealing her contributions to modern Chinese literature and social culture. The female consciousness in Eileen Chang's works reflects her concern for the status of women and serves as a critique of patriarchal society and feudal culture. The female characters portrayed by Eileen Chang exhibit strong individuality and self-awareness, yet they still struggle to break free from the constraints of patriarchal society and feudal culture, losing themselves in the "foreign enclave society". Eileen Chang's legendary life greatly impacted the development of her female consciousness.

Keywords: Eileen Chang; Female Consciousness; Novel; Social Environment; Historical Background

Introduction

Eileen Chang is a legendary female writer in the history of modern Chinese literature. Her novels have portrayed numerous female characters with distinct personalities and tragic destinies, reflecting her concern for the status of women and her critique of patriarchal society. Her works reveal a strong female consciousness, which refers to women's awareness and advocacy of their own status, values, rights, and interests. This article focuses on the female figures in Eileen Chang's works, exploring their expressions of female consciousness in different social environments and historical backgrounds, analyzing their awakenings, struggles, downfalls, and self-reflections at different levels. The aim of this article is to deeply interpret the female consciousness depicted in Eileen Chang's works and reveal her contributions to modern Chinese literature and social culture.

1. The Awakening of Female Consciousness in Eileen Chang's Works

The female characters portrayed by Eileen Chang exhibit strong individuality and self-awareness. They are not satisfied with the traditional Confucian virtues of Three Obediences and Four Virtues or the passive roles dictated by patriarchal society. Instead, they strive for their own happiness and dignity. These women possess open and progressive thoughts, daring to challenge old-fashioned family norms and feudal ethics, and pursue freedom and equality in love and relationships. They display bravery and resilience, not easily giving up in the face of adversity and setbacks. They fight against unfair destinies and express their true emotions in their own ways. For instance, in *The Golden Cangue*, Wei Long, despite facing opposition from her family, marries a disabled wealthy businessman to continue her education in Hong Kong. Nevertheless, she does not abandon her desire for love and falls for her aunt's lover, Qiao Qijiao, eventually eloping with him. Though Wei Long compromises in the face of reality, she still insists on her right to love. In *Love in a Fallen City*, Bai Liu Su comes from a declining old family, influenced by feudal traditional culture, but she is not entirely traditional herself. Through her experiences in the Shanghai and Hong Kong foreign enclaves, she encounters Western civilization and gains a new understanding of gender equality. She falls in love with Fan Liu Yuan and marries him amidst the turmoil of war. Although their marriage is not happy, Bai Liu Su demonstrates her ability to control her own fate. She refuses to be controlled and dominated by Fan Liu Yuan, daring to argue with him and eventually parting ways. In *Red Rose and White Rose*, Jiao Rui is a pure and passionate woman who falls in love with the selfish and hypocritical Zhen Bao. To prove her loyalty to Zhen Bao, she resolutely divorces her husband and bears Zhen Bao a child. Although Zhen Bao later abandons her, she has no regrets about her choice,

believing that she has truly experienced love. These female characters in Eileen Chang's works exemplify the awakening of female consciousness. To varying degrees, they express the value and will of being independent individuals.

2. The Extinction of Female Consciousness in Eileen Chang's Works

While the female characters portrayed by Eileen Chang have awakened consciousness, they still struggle to break free from the constraints of patriarchal society and feudal culture. They lose themselves amidst the influence of the "foreign enclave society", the tyranny of the patriarchal system, and the shackles of money. Despite possessing progressive thoughts, they find it difficult to achieve freedom and equality in love and relationships. When faced with betrayal, deception, abandonment, or abuse from men, they can only endure in silence or escape from reality. Despite their inner strength, they remain unable to change their tragic destinies, and in the face of failed resistance or powerlessness, they can only choose death or downfall. For example, in *The Golden Cangue*, Cao Qiqiao was once a healthy, lively, ambitious, and optimistic girl before marriage. However, driven by greed for money and status, she married a disabled wealthy businessman and transformed into a selfish and ruthless shrew. Her greed for money robbed her of her humanity and conscience. In her pursuit of family property, she sacrificed her own sister and child and was ultimately destroyed by her own wickedness, dying in a fire. In *Locked Away*, Cui Yuan, a career woman with an independent and self-respecting personality, married Roger but later discovered he was unfaithful, violent, and a compulsive gambler. She refused to endure his abuse and humiliation and wanted to leave him. However, she faced pressure and obstruction from society and family, and in despair, she chose to commit suicide by poisoning. In *Aloeswood Incense: The First Brazier*, Zheng Chuan Chang was a young lady from an old family with traditional education and virtues. She and her husband Chen Bailu loved and respected each other, living a happy life. However, during the war, Chen Bailu was captured by the Japanese. In her attempt to save him, Zheng Chuan Chang ended up betraying herself to the Japanese. Misunderstanding her actions, Chen Bailu resented her and left her. Zheng Chuan Chang died in sorrow. These female characters in Eileen Chang's works exemplify the extinction of female consciousness. They lose their sense of self-worth and dignity in a patriarchal society, becoming victims and tragic figures.

3. The Profound Impact of Eileen Chang's Legendary Career on Her Formation of Female Consciousness

Eileen Chang's legendary career has had a profound impact on the formation of her female consciousness. Her childhood environment, educational background, and social experiences have shaped her unique personality and perspectives while instilling her with profound thoughts and emotions. Born into a declining old family, her childhood was dominated by the pressure of feudal ethics and family authority. Her mother and grandmother were both unfortunate women abandoned or mistreated by men, leading her to develop a strong aversion to and defiance against patriarchal society from an early age. During her childhood, Eileen Chang displayed a keen interest and talent in literature. She loved reading and writing, using words to express her feelings and thoughts, and also as a means of resistance and rebellion. For instance, at the age of twelve, she wrote a piece titled "My Dream" to reflect her dissatisfaction with her family and society. In terms of her educational background, Eileen Chang received a Western education in Shanghai and Hong Kong, being exposed to Western civilization and ideas. This exposure deepened her understanding and pursuit of women's subjectivity and equal rights, while also sparking critical reflections on Chinese traditional culture. Her time in school introduced her to various people and matters, broadening her horizons and cultivating independent thinking and creativity. She honed her writing skills and style, for instance, during her time at the University of Hong Kong where she joined literary societies and published poems, essays, and short stories. Living in a tumultuous era of war and social unrest, Eileen Chang witnessed the darkness of society and the ugliness of human nature. After experiencing failed marriages and relationships, she gained a profound awareness of and concern for women's survival status, engaging in introspection and self-examination. Amidst various challenges and setbacks in society, she gained valuable experiences and insights. She drew from her own life experiences and observations in her literary creations, incorporating influences from diverse literary genres or works. For instance, in *Half a Lifelong Romance*, she drew inspiration from the tragic love story of Lin Daiyu and Jia Baoyu in *Dream of the Red Chamber* and recreated it in a modern setting. All of these experiences endowed Eileen Chang with keen observation, sharp analysis, profound understanding, independent judgment, strong will, and freedom of expression. In her literary works, she showcased a strong and intricate female consciousness.

4. Conclusion

The female consciousness depicted in Eileen Chang's works reflects her concern for women's survival status as a female writer and serves as her critique and reflection on patriarchal society and feudal culture as a modern literary figure. Her works portray women's awakenings, struggles, downfalls, and self-examinations in different social environments and historical backgrounds, reflecting the challenges and dilemmas women face in a patriarchal society. Eileen Chang's legendary career has significantly influenced the formation of her female consciousness. Her childhood environment, educational background, and social experiences have shaped her unique personality and perspectives, endowing her with profound thoughts and emotions. This article deeply interprets the female consciousness depicted in Eileen Chang's works, revealing its contributions and value to modern Chinese literature and social culture. Through her literary creations, Eileen Chang presents an exploration of women's lives and experiences, while simultaneously critiquing the oppressive aspects of traditional societal norms. Her works have resonated with readers across generations, inspiring discussions about gender roles, social norms, and the pursuit of personal freedom and dignity. Eileen Chang's portrayal of female characters offers a nuanced and multi-dimensional representation of women's struggles and aspirations. Her narratives highlight the complexities of gender relations, providing a rich and thought-provoking exploration of the human condition. As a visionary writer, Eileen Chang's legacy continues to inspire contemporary writers and readers, fostering a deeper understanding of the complexities of female consciousness and the broader societal dynamics that shape women's lives. Her enduring literary contributions serve as a testament to the power of literature in reflecting, challenging, and transforming cultural norms and values.

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