

The Imperial Discourse and Roger's Tragic Death in "Aloewood Incense: Second Burning"

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Abstract

Some scholars hold that Roger's death in "Aloewood Incense: Second Burning" (1943) was caused by the repulsion from his colleagues and students, this paper, however, maintains that the imperial discourse regarding sexuality and the grand design of colonialism deprived Roger of a sense of belonging in Hong Kong and marginalised him, leaving him with nothing but alienation within the diasporic community and no choice but death. Chang's exposure of the devastating effect of imperial discourse on its expatriates denounced the superiority of the western culture, indicating her sharp vision as an intellectual.

Keywords

imperial diaspora, discourse, sexuality, alienation, Eileen Chang

1. Introduction

Eileen Chang (1920-1995) is a Chinese diasporic writer. She grew up in China when western imperial powers relegated China to a semi-colony and the Chinese to a very inferior position. The colonizers enjoyed much privilege in China so that they could keep some public places such as parks or some clubs to themselves and deny the Chinese of the entrance. Though China had been invaded by western powers since late nineteenth century, Chinese intellectuals tried to introduce the "progressive" western thoughts to generate the enlightenment. Such efforts culminated in the New Cultural Movement during the 1910s and the 1920s. In learning from the West, these intellectuals had partly internalised the superiority of the western culture (Note 1). However, Eileen Chang maintained a different stance. She could see that the so-called "progressive" western culture had its devastating side. Her insight is clearly

demonstrated in her story “Aloewood Incense: Second Burning” (henceforth “AISB”, 1943).

Some research has been done on “AISB”. Wang Bailing understands the story as reflecting the general theme of nihilism in Eileen Chang’s writing: humanity is weak, and struggling is pointless (p. 52). Other researchers interpret the story against specific Chinese historical background and Chinese notion of sex. Yao Jinlian points out that traditional Chinese society shunned away from the topic of sex, which resulted in women like Susie who castrated both themselves and men, and caused, in turn, greater damage to the society (p. 53). Zhou Fenling goes further: the New Cultural Movement intellectuals advocated individuality and the emancipation of humanity from feudal norms, and many writers wrote about the elopement of young lovers to escape the arranged marriage by the family, and they stopped at the level of spiritual love but never came to the sexual level. However, Eileen Chang made up for this lack, thus echoing the essence of New Cultural Movement (p. 218). Huang Ziping differs from the above scholars in that he thinks “AISB” reflects the differences between western and Chinese notion of sex through the narrator’s claim that only westerners regard sex as filthy (p. 86). However, Huang merely touches upon the statement fleetingly in his analysis of Eileen Chang’s several other stories. The present paper makes a further exploration on Chang’s understanding about western notion of sex, but holds that when writing a story concerning sexuality, Eileen Chang differed from the New Cultural Movement intellectuals rather than echoing the essence of their spirit.

Some scholars have also analyzed the causes of the death of Roger, the protagonist, claiming that though Susie’s innocence in sex was the direct reason, there were some latent reasons: her mom’s way of education, her elder sister’s negative impact on Roger when she asked Roger to treat Susie tenderly and not to behave in her husbands’ pervert way, as well as the pressure from Roger’s colleagues and students (Sun & Huang, p. 57). These factors did push Roger to death, but they were only the superficial ones. This paper explores the more essential reasons by analyzing how the British diasporics’ life was affected by the imperial discourse of sexuality and the burden of the grand imperial design. Although scholars generally stress the trauma that colonisation brought for the colonized, this paper will investigate the same devastating effect it had on the imperial diasporics, demonstrating Eileen Chang’s denouncement of the superiority of western culture.

2. Alien Environment and Sense of Unbelonging

“AISB” tells a story of the death of Roger, an English man in Hong Kong. Roger taught physical chemistry in a university in Hong Kong. His life in the colony had not changed for fifteen years, but he was carried away with the bliss of marrying a beautiful girl named Susie. However his marriage turned out to be disastrous. The bride was so “pure” that she couldn’t bear what he did to her on their wedding night and fled their house. Word spread among the British community that Roger was a pervert, and the consequent judgement and seclusion finally killed him.

As Cohen points out, imperial adventurers were followed by their home governments and a large amount of migrants who came willingly or under command to populate the colonies. The settlement for

“colonial or military purposes by one power” resulted in imperial diaspora (pp. 68-69). The imperial diaspora shared most of the common diasporic features. However, it also differed from other diasporas in one feature, that is, the relationship between the diaspora and the host society. Whereas most diasporas are troubled by lack of acceptance from the host society and the “possibility that another calamity might befall the group” (Cohen, p. 17), the imperial diaspora took a dominant position in its relationship with the host society. Considering the colonizer’s departure from the homeland and rooting in the new land, it can be said that the colony or semi-colony was the colonizer’s host society. Nevertheless, in view of the power relations between the colonizer and colonized, it is ironic to use the term “host”, when the “host” was actually deprived of political, cultural and financial autonomy partially or completely by the “guests”.

Roger came to Hong Kong when it was already a settled colony for Britain. He was provided with a comfortable job in the university. He and his colleagues played tennis together and had parties together, in the mid of which the topic of keeping the authority of the whites in the colony would inevitably be brought up. Anyway, they had a world of their own though they lived in Hong Kong.

Roger’s state of life was common for the imperial diaspora, which was “marked by a continuing connection with the homeland, a deference to and imitation of its social and political institutions and a sense of forming part of a grand imperial design—whereby the group concerned assumed the self-image of a ‘chosen race’ with a global mission” (Cohen, p. 69). Members of the imperial diaspora lived and worked in social and political institutions similar to those in the homeland, keeping company to themselves and standing aloof from the locals, and they believed they were in the colony for the grand design. They were possessed with racial superiority and were confident about their civilising mission. Therefore, they did not feel strongly about the marginalisation that most diasporas suffer in the host counties, since they were at the centre of the power relations with the colonized.

The colonial discourse kept reiterating the distinction between the West and the East, until it was reinforced to such an extent that the notion became deeply embedded in the minds of all imperial diasporics. Therefore, when the later settlers came to the colony, they naturally assumed the hierarchical order. They lived in an enclosed heterotopia of their own, isolated from the host society. In “AISB”, Roger was highly aware of the geographic difference. He regarded Hong Kong as a “humid, hot and small city of the foreigners” (*Romances*, p. 270), a place unsuitable for thinking. When he just arrived in Hong Kong, he was an ambitious young man, loving his job and contemplating occasionally upon the course he taught. However, he thought the air in the colony was not suitable for contemplation:

In spring, the azalea flowers bloomed all over the hill in the lingering rain. They kept rustling and falling, leaving everywhere red all the while. In summer, when you climbed over the hill to class, you saw red and radiating hibiscus flowers along the road, like so many over-burning small suns. In autumn and winter, the air was crisp and sweet like sandwich biscuits. Wind from the sea and across the mountain whistled among the brown or silvery green trees. You were left with the only

desire to take several dogs to climb the mountain noisily and joyfully and have some strenuous sports which demanded no contemplation (*Romances*, p. 286).

Roger found that the alien environment in Hong Kong prevented him from contemplating. Eileen Chang made this ironic remark via Roger. The truth is that the unconscious acceptance of the Orientalist discourse that the torrid place did not fit the whites had framed Roger's belief and it gave Roger excuses to laze around, for the Orientalist discourse had it that "each race of man [had] its place" (Mohanram, p. 74). It was believed that the place for the white race was in the temperate zones; thus, diasporic life in the tropics was thought to be disastrous for the whites; and they were prone to disease for being displaced to an environment with alien flora and fauna, together with the extreme heat in the torrid area (*ibid*). In spite of the unbearable heat in Hong Kong, the British would cling to it as the basis to advance its exploitation of China. The superiority of the colonizer's identity stopped Roger from making any further intellectual progress. Or the lack of commitment to the host society led to his negligence to the local education, in which he was supposed to play a crucial role as a teacher. Roger had been teaching in the university in Hong Kong for fifteen years, but he never changed his lecture notes; the discipline itself had developed drastically within the fifteen years, but he never changed the text book. Even the jokes he played when coming to specific chapters remained the same.

In addition to laziness, tropical colony was thought to initiate sexual degradation. Westerners tended to create binaries in the imagination concerning the sexuality of "ours" and "theirs": "Our women (often depicted as virgins, mothers, pure) v. their women (sluts, whores, soiled). Our men (virile, strong, brave) v. their men (degenerate, weak, cowardly)" (Nagel, p. 113). If the statement was meant to find some application, nowhere else was a better place than in the colonizers' imagination. As Ann Laura Stoler states, in colonial discourse the tropics was a site of "sexual license, promiscuity, gynaecological aberrations, and general perversion" (see Milner-Thornton, p. 1117).

The description of the scenery outside Roger's apartment in the moonlight was symbolic of sexual meaning: The hibiscuses were in full blossom of big and red flowers with the memory of the tropical forest. Hidden in the memory were dark monsters as well as half-civilised people's love. Under the hibiscuses were all kinds of flowers with poisonously deep colours. The description presented a place of passion, and yet such words as "dark monsters", "half-civilised people's love" and "poisonous" all indicated the sinister nature of the alien city in the eyes of the colonizers.

To guard against the degradation of the chosen race, surveillance was exercised to prevent "erotic intersections where people make intimate connections across ethnic, racial, or national borders" (Nagel, p. 113). Although away from homeland, the British discourse concerning sexuality still exerted power over the imperial diasporics.

3. Influence of Imperial Discourse of Sexuality

The body or sexuality of the woman cannot be taken for granted as innocent existence. It is not simply brought into being biologically; rather, it is a site on which social and cultural signs are represented.

Richard Dyer points out that the white woman in Britain during the Victorian period was considered to represent all the positive attributes of the Caucasian female, such as “morality, ideals, the angelic, the spiritual and the ethereal” (see Mohanram, p. 30). She stood for the essence of Britishness. The cultural rationale to make the British woman “the purest” was due to her boundary status (Mohanram, p. 34). The boundary status was achieved through her reproductive body function. She played a key role in deciding what children she brought into the ethnic group: Pure British or hybrid British, which determined if the purity of the British racial group could be kept or became diluted. Therefore, it was of crucial importance to exert strict surveillance over the British white woman’s sexuality to make her stay the “purest”.

The overreaction of Susie, Roger’s bride, on her wedding night was the result of the strict surveillance. Her mother, a widow, had been trying hard to fulfil the parenting responsibility concerning the sexuality of the children. According to Anna Davin, women in colony were the “the custodians of morality” of men; meanwhile, parenting and motherhood was “a class obligation and a duty of empire” (see Stoler, p. 135). The mother’s surveillance over the sexuality of the two girls, Susie and Milisheng, was very strict, so much so that she would check the newspapers before the girls read them, making sure that there was nothing inappropriate sexually for girls. Under such strict surveillance, Susie and Milisheng grew up to be pure and chaste girls as desired by their mother. However, when Milisheng, the elder of the two girls married Frank, a problem arose. Milisheng thought Frank was a pervert, who claimed what he had done to her was out of his love for her, but she refused to believe, and she told people that Frank was a beast. Finally she divorced him.

Now that Susie got married, the same problem arose. She ran away from her house on her wedding night. She rushed to the male students’ hostel for help and went on to seek help respectively from Bark, the Vice Chancellor of the university, and Maolishi, the director who was responsible for teaching affairs. Readers only know that she told Bark and Maolishi about what happened between her and Roger, but the content of her talk was not mentioned, except that she said that Roger was a beast. But it was enough to incite various kinds of guesses. However, after she returned home the next evening after Roger’s apology, she told him, “Oh, Roger, I want all people to know how much I love you. I want them all to see what a lovely person you are!” (*Romances*, p. 283). But she did not expect that she had already portrayed a totally opposite image of Roger in others’ imagination. Susie was happy that Roger apologised to her. She thought that Roger’s realisation of his “mistake” showed the success of her “education about love”, which she gave to him through the chaos in the day. And she dreamed to finish this “education” during their honeymoon. She told Roger that before going to bed he could kiss her once, no more. Thus, it could be seen that Susie was a successful product of the British discourse of sexuality: She was rational and objective, and tried to discipline herself and her husband according to the norms of conduct.

In fact, it was not only Susie who was willingly subjected to the British discourse; Roger was also highly aware of his identity as an Englishman, and he judged other people and himself with British

codes of conduct as well. As Cohen maintains, imperial diasporics believed they came to the colony to help fulfil the great design (p. 69). This great design was the civilising mission of colonialism. The sense of superiority reminded them of their identity all the time in the colony. In the case of Roger, he never forgot that he was an Englishman, a result of “a strong ethnic group consciousness sustained over a long time and based on a sense of distinctiveness” (ibid, p. 69).

There were two clear references to how Roger thought an Englishman should behave. Both cases were about emotion. The first was when Roger learned that Susie, her mother and her sister were crying right before the wedding. For him, the controlled sorrow at a daughter’s departure from her home and her mother was acceptable, but making a scene of crying as if it were a life-and-death separation went off the line.

He was an Englishman; he thought it unnecessary to let go of any feelings unless it was absolutely necessary. He was dread of real life of blood and flesh. Men, unfortunately, live as such. But anyway, the less you reflect on it, the better (*Romances*, p. 266).

Here Eileen Chang pointed to the inadequacy of the British’s reserved manners. Refraining of feelings was not something to take pride in; rather, it indicated people’s fear of real life. Roger was aware that he was an Englishman not only when he judged the mother and daughters, but also when he judged himself. The second time the British code of conducts was mentioned in the story was still about feeling. He loved Susie so much that he was afraid he might do something stupid that was non-British, such as allowing happy tears to well into his eyes or kissing her hands or her feet. The awareness of being an Englishman was always controlling him. The social norms of his homeland followed him tightly in spite of the geographic dislocation.

Roger’s rationality was in conflict with his feeling. His rationality came from his British upbringing and the British discourses; whereas his feeling for Susie was developed in the colony, where the burning flowers and sweet air symbolised passionate love. The opposing qualities of homeland and host land encountered each other in him, like ice and fire. Fire was dangerous, so it must be extinguished. As the colonized ended up being subdued by the colonizer in their encounter, the fiery passion was defeated by the icy imperial discourse concerning sexuality. British discourse concerning race and sexuality positioned a woman as the essence of Britishness, and her unchanging nature represented the unchanging nature of Britishness in the colony (Mohanram, p. 33). Susie stood for the purest white woman of the Empire, the essence of Britishness. But what was the essence of Britishness like? The readers may get a hint through Roger’s eyes:

He could see her... familiar, and yet distant and indistinct, like a picture he drew in his previous life, no, a picture he wanted to draw but couldn’t. Now the dream of his previous life was approaching him. Passing by the rosy window of the church, she became rosy; passing by the blue one, she changed to be blue; passing by the golden one, her hair and whole body seemed to burn... (*Romances*, p. 272).

Britishness was what he pursued now that he was away from his homeland. She was his dream, his

ideal. However, she was “distant and indistinct”, and she was blank and empty, so that she became whatever the imperial discourse moulded her to be. Eileen Chang further emphasised the nihilism of the so-called whiteness of British woman: When Roger was left alone with Susie in a car after the wedding, Susie smiled at him, like a big and precious doll wrapped in transparent plastic paper, surrounded by many white paper slips. The description indicated the nature of white women’s position in colonial discourse: They were precious, being positioned as the symbol of purity and honour of the empire, demonstrating the colonizer’s racial superiority to the colonized, but they were void of independent thinking.

Marrying Susie turned out to be the opposite of his dream coming true. The nightmare started. She was so pure and innocent that Roger’s sexual advances terrified her, and she ran away from their house. Roger could not find her and returned home. Looking at Susie in the photo frame, he could not help kissing her, but the cold glass separated them. Then he told himself it was not the cold glass but his hot lips that caused the separation. Again, Eileen Chang presented the conflict metaphorically: the cold glass being the impersonal British discourse of sexuality, whereas his hot lips being his true love that was finally killed by British norms. Roger realised that his passion broke the cold imperial discourse which was supposed to bring everyone under its domination. And it was then that he was stricken with the idea that Frank, Milisheng’s “pervert” husband, was nothing but an ordinary and normal person like himself. In the imperial discourse of sexuality, Frank was presented as a pervert, thus becoming a victim of the imperial regime of truth.

Despite the influence of the colonial discourse of sexuality, Roger thought on his way to pick up Susie from her mother’s home that there was still hope for them to live a life of married couple. He even thought that he could give her some “education about love” by taking her to Japan or Hawaii for a honeymoon. He hated the term “education about love”. At that moment, he would rather that he had married a bad woman who was more understanding and more experienced. The wish implied Roger’s defiance against imperial discourse. More importantly, it subverted the long-held accusation of bad women (including the colonized women): They were more understanding than the “pure” white women.

But anyway the couple made up and they planned to go for their honeymoon the next day. Nevertheless, Bark, the vice Chancellor of the university, visited him that evening, telling him that his lack of control over his own feeling and his wife’s behaviour had reduced him to an unfavourable position. It was not until then that Roger got to know that Susie and her mother had made the affair known to almost all middle class British families in Hong Kong. Roger had never expected there was such a fuss, and yet Susie was telling him happily that she allowed him to kiss her once, only once, before going to bed. Roger could bear it no more. He left the house, starting his life of exclusion.

4. Alienation within the Diasporic Community

No one understood Roger. The local students judged from Susie's limited words—"he is a beast"—that Roger was a pervert, so they started to talk rudely to him and laughed at him in public. The usual suppressed hostility of the colonized was unveiled. But what irritated him most was the reaction of the middle class British. Compared with the students, the British group alienated Roger in a more subtle way. They pretended nothing had happened when they were together with Roger, but talked behind his back about nothing but his affair. They did not even bother to find out about the truth. They had accepted it as a fact that Roger was a pervert.

Their contempt of Roger originated from the influence of imperial discourse concerning sexuality. Only the lower class people were regarded as being capable of "sexual promiscuity and perversion" due to their poor living conditions. Mechanisms of truth such as medicine, psychiatry, pedagogy and family control worked together to rule out "all wayward or unproductive sexualities", and through the "isolation, intensification, and consolidation of peripheral sexualities", the power that was exerted over sex controlled the body, and penetrated "modes of conduct" (Foucault, pp. 897-899). But in the colony the regulation of sexuality gained new meaning. It was related to the success of "the grand design"—the colonial mission. The control of sexuality guaranteed the dignity of the white in the colony. Therefore, Roger's action was considered improper to the norms of conduct for his class and harmful for the image of the empire. His "perverse behaviour" had damaged Susie's purity and national honour that she was meant to embody. In Sommer's words, it was not only "immoral", but also "unpatriotic" (p. 87).

Roger's observation about the enlarged shadow under the light was a metaphor of surveillance, and it predicted its power over him: the light enlarged a very small movement over ten times and projected it on the wall for everybody to see, so what was seen by people was unreal. However, people who saw the shadow without realising the effect of the light could not realise it was unreal. Like people living in the cave in Plato's *Republic*, the diasporic British did not see each other as what they really were. Whatever one did was magnified for others' scrutiny. The result was the misunderstanding, and finally isolation and alienation of the scrutinized subject. He had never realised the rigidity of their diasporic life in Hong Kong. Now that he was pushed out of the white men's circle, he started to observe it with a critical vision. He found the British middle class to be nothing but a group of fools: Men were like clocks, dining, working, and even going to the toilet at certain fixed time; women were busy knitting all day long so that their faces looked as if covered with the yarns. He came to the realisation they were foolish, and yet cruel.

What Roger found most irritating was women's attitude towards him. All women in the university from secretaries to the staff members' wives stared at him, fearing that he would do something improper out of a fit of his disease. They despised him and hated him, but at the same time they secretly felt attracted to a man like him who was "cruel, barbarian and primitive" (*Romances*, p. 289). Roger knew they would push him to be such a person sooner or later if he continued to stay among them. Chang's

analysis of the unconscious reaction of these women voiced her criticism against the colonial notion that the colonized were degraded and may contaminate the white women. Those women's assumption of Roger as a pervert was wrong, as was the colonial discourse about the colonized. As Philip Mason observes, the colonial discourse projected "some dark and shadowy figure which [the colonizers] feared and hated, the desires they disapproved of most strongly in themselves" (see Stoler, p. 174). The desire for and repugnance against the racial Other occurred to both the white male and female, but in the end it was the colonized that was blamed.

The alienation and marginalisation that Roger suffered was not limited to Hong Kong. It might expand throughout the British diasporic communities in China. He resigned from the university, thinking that he could go to treaty port cities like Shanghai or Tianjing. He supposed that the British were unlikely to be out of employment in China. His assumption was very much the same as the travellers' description of the colony. Albert Memmi summarises the travellers' definition of the colony as the following:

A place where one earns more and spends less. You go to a colony because jobs are guaranteed, wages high, careers more rapid and business more profitable. The young graduate is offered a position, the public servant a higher rank, the businessman substantially lower taxes, the industrialist raw materials and labour at attractive prices (p. 48).

Roger was confident of finding a new job, most probably because his experiences proved to him that the British did enjoy privileges in China. However, Bark awakened him to another fact: the church had an important role in universities in the treaty port cities, so that the usual bias of the church might deny Roger of the chance to be employed. Bark was polite in saying that the church influences resulted in bias; what he actually implied was that Roger, a morally tainted person, did not meet the church's standard to be a professor in the university. Roger now found himself with nowhere else to go to. He used to call Hong Kong an alien city; now he realised miserably that it was his only hometown.

The last straw that broke Roger's back was the news he got at a party. He was told that Frank, Milisheng's ex-husband, committed suicide because he could not find a job. The news struck him dumbfounded, leaving him with only one thought: people had cornered Frank to death. Frank's destiny was his future. He left the party abruptly when his colleagues were arguing about the independence of India and were about to come to the problem of dignity of the white in the colony. His sudden departure invited only one comment, "It's good that he is gone; otherwise he might do something and scare the ladies when he is so drunk" (*Romances*, p. 294). The description of his way back home from the party is chilling:

It was another moon-lit night. The dark island lied on the sea beyond the mountains. There were mountains on the island. Beyond the mountains was again the sea. And further beyond were the mountains again. The moon gave out cold and bright light that seemed to be a wailing flute. The light covered the sea, the mountains and the leaves of the trees; Roger, however, felt darkness befell wherever he went (*Romances*, p. 294).

After he got back to his empty house, he killed himself and became a ghost in the alien land forever.

Why did not Roger choose to return to his homeland? As Memmi points out that once the settler started planning his journey home, the fear of “disorientation” arose because he was away so long that no living acquaintances were still there, whereas his children grew up here and his dead were buried here; however, a more important reason was that the settler would not give up the financial benefit in the colony (pp. 49-50). Roger’s unwillingness to return, nonetheless, was not totally the same. His mother was still alive in Britain. He had been visiting her every four or five years, but he felt uncomfortable back there. Homeland for him was geographically distant—it lied at the end of world, behind endless mountains and seas, and it was emotionally elusive—maybe beyond the endlessness was a whole vast emptiness, nothing. With the same cold and impersonal imperial discourse regulating one’s behaviour, homeland would not promise him the understanding and justification that he deserved in the colony. There was no home for him to go back to.

5. Conclusion

“Aloewood Incense: Second Burning” was Chang’s criticism of imperial discourse. Roger’s alienation in the British diasporic community challenged the imperial grand design from within. To be the “chosen race” to implement the great mission endowed the British in the colony with the sense of superiority. But like a double-edged sword, it brought them harm as well. The imperial power dominated the colonized, and meanwhile it exerted control over its expatriates, too, so that they could all serve to maintain the smooth function of the colonial machine. The colonial domination of the colony depended on the notion that the white was superior to the non-white races. In Rudyard Kipling’s words, it was “the white man’s burden” to civilise other races. Hence, it was necessary to maintain the white man’s dignity in the colony. The diasporic British were all obliged to the duty, so much so that they kept an eye on each other to fend against any behaviour that might tarnish the dignity of the empire. The surveillance transgressed the public space and penetrated into the private one. The private (emotional) space became an “ideologically constructed universe, which required its agents to act according to precise mechanisms of power/truth” (Marinelli, p. 409). The imperial discourse of sexuality continued to exert surveillance over its diasporics to make them better serve the grand design of colonialism.

Eileen Chang’s castigation of how the diasporic colonizer fell victim to imperial discourse subverted the myth of the purity and superiority of the white race. She made the readers see that when its purity was maintained at the cost of reducing a woman to ignorance and depriving a man’s life, it was not civilisation; it was barbarity. Her clear awareness of the rigidity and cruelty of the imperial discourse demonstrated that she was able to maintain her agential subjectivity and intellectual reflexivity. She understood that metropolitan Western culture was embodied in the culture of the colonizers through their notions and behaviours (Note 2). The harm that the colonial Western culture generated on the colonizer and the colonized bespoke the impossibility of the innocence of the metropolitan Western culture. Therefore, compared with her New Cultural Movement predecessors’ eagerness to introduce

western “progressive” ideas to generate enlightenment in China, Eileen Chang had a clearer and sharper vision regarding the problems of the western culture. “AISB” was her denouncement of the superiority of the western culture.

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Notes

Note 1. Paradoxically, the New Cultural Movement intellectuals tried to introduce Western culture into China as the source of enlightenment, when the West was the source that relegated China to a semi-colony in the first place. Shih Shu-Mei offers an explanation to this paradox. She understands semicolonialism in China as “multiple, layered, intensified, as well as incomplete and fragmentary” (p. 34). The “incomplete and fragmentary” nature of colonial control meant that there was no central colonial government in China, and consequently, it was hard for the natives to target the enemy.

Note 2. The distinction originates from Shih Shu-mei’s terms of the metropolitan West and the colonial West (p. 36).