

The Color Words in Eileen Chang's Novels

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Abstract: The mastery of color words is a highlighted point in Eileen Chang's novels, from which we can catch a glimpse of Eileen Chang's language technique. Eileen Chang's Novels are like painting with words instead of monotonously depicting of life. She expresses her exquisite and unique perception of life through the deconstruction of cultural meanings of color words. She blended different colors in the clothes of her novel's characters and scenes, using different rhetorical devices such as synesthesia, analogy, hyperbole in the narration of psychology of the characters and events description. The color words, used as special symbols, have been an indispensable part of her novels. At the same time, the color words often play a lead role in touching the novel theme.

Keywords: Color words, Eileen Chang, Language technique, Rhetorical devices.

1. The Reason of Eileen Chang's Preference for the Color Words

Readers of Eileen Chang's novels can easily find that Eileen Chang has a persistent preference for the appearance and dress depiction of the characters when they first come out in the novel. In the early works of Eileen Chang, such as the "First Stove of Incense", "The Story of Golden Lock", "Love Story of the City", the novel structure, language, and characters draw on the experience of writing techniques from the Chinese traditional popular novels such as "A Dream in Red Mansions", "Nie Hai Hua", "Historical Romance of the Yang General Family", "Romance of Golden Bottle Plum", "Flowers of Shanghai"[1,2]. However, she was much more enjoying in depicting colors, showing her great interests in the detailed narration of coat, accessories and footwear culottes in the novel. The characters in Eileen Chang's novels are like the snow-white statues which are meticulously painted with different colors. The characters gradually become vivid and individual, and finally become pieces of fine artwork. Compared with the facial look and posture of the characters, it seems that the coloring depiction of the characters plays a more leading role. To this extent, Eileen Chang's character portrait is an organic combination of the freehand tradition of Chinese painting and the detail rendering of Western painting.

Eileen Chang, a faithful reader of the Chinese classic masterwork "A Dream in Red Mansions", in one of her books she has explained her brilliant view of the color words used in "A Dream in Red Mansions". She begins her book with the detailed analysis of the various colors of clothing of Lin Daiyu, and then makes a comparison analysis of the "red hair orangutan cloak" which Baoyu wears after he decides to become a monk and the "colored glaze and snow plum" which symbolize the intimacy between Baoyun and his sisters. We can see Eileen Chang has borrowed Cao Xueqin's successful experience in her novel creation, and then adds more delicate and complex personal experience to create more striking visual effects.

Cao Qiqiao's appearance in "The Story of Golden Lock" and Wang Xifeng's appearance in "A Dream in Red Mansions" are extremely similar. Eileen Chang is good at utilizing the montage technique, making editions and

combination freely of different images which are sculpted to present different stages of life of the protagonist, alluding to a soul, creating a life drama. Clothes are the best props in montage narration. In the novel of "The Story of Golden Lock", there are three displays of Cao Qiqiao's clothing, from the "large rolling summer blue shirt sleeve" and "white wrist" at the age of eighteen to nineteen, to the "silvering red shirt", the "embroidery of green and white colors", "the pleasant tight pants with snowing green and flashing blue" as being a young mistress, and finally to the "grey green robe with dragon pattern" at her old age, showing the tragedy life of this young lady who is being neglected, longing for love but cannot find a true love and finally fading away after long time of depression[2].

Eileen Chang is also a famous "clothes-crazy". She explained under the ruling of her Stepmother in her teenage time, she was forced to choose clothes only from a large box of old clothes brought by her stepmother. "I never forget the dark red thin padded gown, the red color of minced beef, I have to wear repeatedly, feeling like suffering from frostbite."—quoted from her article "Children's Innocent Words"[3]. When she grew up and lived an independent life, her biggest hobby was shopping for clothing, the most common colors in the cloth market were those could be hardly named. "The colors of seemingly green, seemingly gray, seemingly yellow, which could only be the background colors, the neutral colors, the so-called protection color, the civilized color and is also called the mixed color. Among the mixed colors, there is also a kind of lovely and slightly bright. Wearing this color is like getting the sunshine from another universe." This shows that Eileen Chang is sensitive to color discrimination and shows her preference in art appreciation. Inspired by Chekhov's short stories "The Man in The Sheath", Eileen Chang compares a person's clothing to a carry-on pocket drama, contending that everyone is living in their own clothes, for a person who dislikes talking, clothing is his words; from clothing and color of a person, we can get a glimpse into secret story in his inner heart.

In 1942, possessing great interests in Chinese clothing, Eileen Chang wrote an English essay "Chinese life and fashions" which published by the "Twentieth Century" magazine[3]. In order to popularize the aesthetic study of Chinese traditional costumes to western readers, in her essay

she describes the changes of China fashion within three hundred years. At a later period, she rewrote this English essay in Chinese, which is her famous works "The Change of Fashions"[3]. In 5,000 words Eileen Chang made an exquisite interpretation of the styles and colors of Chinese costumes and the identity meanings embodied in different colors. Integrating her personal cultural psychology and life experience, and being exposed in both eastern and western cultures, this record of costume styles manifested double aesthetics distinctive styles from two different cultures perspectives. Clothing can be regarded as personal symbol. From the cloth, style and color collocation, we could distinguish the person's social status, living age, lifestyle and personal preference. "The Change of Fashions" is not simply the analysis of the Chinese costumes within three hundred years, to a large extent, it is the annotation of all the color words for the characters in her novels.

Eileen Chang showed great enthusiasm in painting since her childhood. In her teenage time, she was influenced by the western impressionism, she once wrote "Comments on Painting" and "The Unforgettable Paintings" to convey her understanding on the famous paintings by western modern painter, from Gauguin's works "Nevermore", Japanese Geisha drawing, to the goddess status in Europe museums. She firstly gave a general comment on the painting, then moved the focus to the different colors combination of the depicted scenery, and finally made a connection between colors and their symbolic meanings in life. In her own novels, scenery is the supporting role, which is always ready for the movement and development of the protagonist. They are both irreplaceable. Therefore, her novel's characters narration must accompany with the detailed description of the costume colors of the characters, and the scenery description must carry her subjective opinions.

2. Eileen Chang's deconstruction of Cultural Meanings of Color Words

In the scenery narration in Eileen Chang's novels, the key color tune is cool color series which are green, gray and blue, assisting with the warm-toned colors which are red, yellow, orange. Sometimes the main color of the scene is different in different novels. The color words do not only apply to the complicated costumes depiction and vivid description of scenery in her novel; a large number of color words are also used in the explanation and narration of all kinds of details in Eileen Chang's novels. "Eileen Chang has the leisure and talent that she devotes herself to playing and appreciating these trivial tiny things, these touchable colors of fresh green, bright red, light yellow, silvering black....." When she practiced writing at her young age, she had paid great attention to the color diction. In her first essay "The ideal village", composed at the age of twelve or thirteen, she imagines that the early Tang Dynasty is an orange era of prosperity and roar. The spreading narration is entirely completed with sentences of the color words.

In her essay "A talking about music" (1944)[3], Eileen Chang said "color is such a thing that it is sad and beautiful when it is colorless, but when the color can catch people's attention, it is always pleasing, and the world becomes more real." Color, as part of the substance, is explicit and revealing, giving people the sense of satisfaction and comfort. She once said "Because of doubting in everything, there is great sadness prevailing in Chinese literature. We could only find

joy and please in the material details. Therefore, facing the piles of details listed in "Romance of Golden Bottle Plum" and "A dream in Red Mansions", we could appreciate them with no tiredness, for no reason, it's just because of love. Details are often pleasing, harmonious and fascinating, while every discussion of the theme is pessimistic. All the ambiguous observation towards life leads to emptiness. "—quoted from "The religions of Chinese"[3].

This philosophy contains the pain of knowing that prosperity is like a dream, all life must turn into emptiness eventually. When Cao Xueqin sheltering in the shabby suburban areas, he recalled and signed upon his past prosperous living, he still kept a tireless attitude when describing the colorful costumes and food delicacy. Eileen Chang inherited the philosophical tradition of nihilism from "A Dream in the Red Mansion". Reflecting in details, this philosophy is shown as the narrative trait of materialism. Wang Anyi also had a keen observation on this when she talked about Eileen Chang. "Eileen Chang's outlook on life is on two extremes, one is the concrete sense of the present moment, and the other is the nihility of life." From the nineteen pieces of Chinese ancient poems to the classical masterwork "A dream in Red Mansions", the Chinese ancient scholars had never stopped seeking the ultimate value of life, however the results often lead to the philosophy of enjoying the present moment when we could have party, wine and flowers, which is truly touchable to everyone.

In *Crumbs of Ligumaloes — the First Incense Burnt*, Weilong was deeply trapped in the luxury network of money and desire waved by her aunt, later, because of falling in love with playboy Qiao Qi, she sunk into it uncontrollably, and on the thirty night of the lunar calendar, they went to Wan Chai to see the bustling of the new spring market. Wandering in the crowd, Weilong had a strange feel, in this scene, Eileen Chang described the dazzling goods in her eyes including velvet, prawn crackers, durian cake, beads, Sachet, cross and hat, they were verdant, amber, light yellow, niellos, resplendent and multicolored, with attractive appearance. But instead of joy, what she felt was boundless of desolation and horror. Looking at the dazzling products, it was only the void of material that had replaced that everlasting feeling, but she also felt a bleak comfort, because only in these small and trivial things in front of her eyes, her cringe heart could have a temporary rest and support. A similar description also appears in "Hong Luan Jubilee", when preparing dowries for Yuqing whose family was once rich but ended up bankrupt, she was also a poor girl who wasn't able to marry until she was in her old age[1]. The author carefully describes her wayward and sad heart at the same time of displaying Yuqing's repairing all kinds of dowry to show that there is nothing but material to fill and soothe her empty heart.

And all this had changed in Eileen Chang's works, she deconstructed the cultural meaning of the original specific color, put her subjective emotion into them, she even used the original stable psychology reversely, in this way, a new leaf was turned, readers are left with a special feeling. Wang Zengqi once said, "The novelist's language is unique not because he can use words that others can't use, but giving them unexpected implications others can't imagine". A famous poet Ai Qing had similarities with Eileen Chang in experiences, turning from painting to poems, color was also widely used in his poems, just as what he wrote in "Green": the wind blowing is green, the rain falling is green, the water

wandering is green, the light shining is green, which is also an example of color variability. The poet put his enthusiasm for "green" into all things. It's an expansion of a strong sense of colors. The most important thing is not to describe in detail the kind of color, but rather to express their strong feelings.

In Eileen Chang's novels, it is not only black, gray, white, or some abnormal light, which can give things the way to connect the world. Even the warm color, such as red, yellow, orange, sometimes also can suddenly appear helpless and nether world, in fact, this is using a warm tone to reflect the desolation, the so-called "contrasted control" is.

Eileen Chang once wrote in her "My own article" [3]that: "Gaudy and showy as tragic color, can form a strong contrast, but its irritation is still greater than elicitation. The reason desolate has deeper and longer after taste is that it is a mixed contrast, just like green with pink." It can be said to be the interpretation of her own use of color words and her own language preferences, believing that gaudy and showy like a Christmas tree is too blunt and lack of after taste contrast. She was keen on the lovely complex harmonic from ancient times, for example "Sapphire blue with apple green, pine tree flower color with bright red; verdant green mahogany-red with pink." She had conveyed the complex and abstract creative ideas in a visual and specific color metaphor, which was also her unique way of thinking and expression. So the contrast of color words in Eileen Chang's novels is not a simple and pure extremity, but a euphemistic and deep after taste. Compared with simple sensory stimulation, Eileen Chang was more focused on the inspiration of color contrast and the suggestive effect of association.

She liked Van Gogh's Impressionist painting, such as the sunflower under the sunlight, which seemed that the coloring is always not strong enough and needed to accumulate a large number of color, at last, oil paintings have become stereoscopic relief. So Eileen Chang also sought this kind of "brilliant" and "dazzling" color which almost becomes colorful anaglyph in her own words, for example what she said in "Extremely love": "It was a hot afternoon, looking over the most eye-catching is the giant billboards on the wharf, red, orange, pink, and reflected in the green water, a series of irritating pigments, goes up and down, and slaughters under the water. Gaudy and showy are not pure tone, but "a kind of hot red" and "a kind of glossy green that can't be contained". The sharp and strong coloring highlights the weird mood in the colonial Hong Kong's collision between China and the West.

3. The Role of Color Words in Eileen Chang's novels

3.1. The gorgeous and colorful external art

Since Dewei Wang put forward the concept of "Zhang Style", people have different opinions on what is real "Zhang Style". However, language must be an essential element. The charm of words is the main theme of "Zhang Style". And in Eileen Chang's own opinion, her writing attitude is very clear, "For colors, notes, words, I am very sensitive..." I love writing, with strong color, words with rhythm." The language of Eileen Chang's novels is just like the Chinese and Western combined foreign-style house belonging to Mrs. Liang, the widow of the rich merchant, which seems like lacquer tray, fine brushwork painting, before Eileen Chang, we had never seen such a fabulously rich color classification and collocation. According to her novels, we could even make a

color genealogy. Just like such a sentence in Qu Yuan's "Chapter Nine of Jusong": "Qing huang za rou", "Wen zhang lan xi", "Wen zhang" is referred to pattern and color, "lan" means beautiful and bright.

Colorful and riotous words, and their interlacing with rhetorical devices, changing and overlying, ingeniously portray the characters, suggest the fate of the characters, exaggerate the atmosphere of the environment, and signify the development of the plot, almost used in every corner of the story so that to make Eileen Chang's novels have the same style as the western modern impressionist painting she loves, and presents a brilliant language style. Fenling Zhou spoke of her language skills in this way: "Her words is just like a lotus flower wrapped around the branch, one at the east, one at the west, too many things for the eye to see."

The discovery, creation and redeployment of words are a witness to the writing talent of modern Chinese. At that time, the so-called "modern Chinese writing" had just been derailed from classical Chinese writing, and the New Culture Movement was almost as old as Eileen Chang's age. Creativity had become an opportunity and a challenge between modern scholars, for example, Lu Xun is famous for his nonstandard words and peculiar charm of it. But for the literati, the irregularities of the language are just the gallop place of the talent. The reason that the language of Eileen Chang's novel language can form a unique "Zhang style" lies mostly in language creation and experiment. Just as the western modernist painting which is self-valued, experience-valued and performance-valued, and just as Goggi, Picasso, Matisse's bigotry and clarity preferred by Eileen Chang, color words in Eileen Chang's novel, which are strongly irritating deviate from the original traditional usage and show fresh and unique features in the new application of variability. The use of the deformable and creative use of a large number of color words is one of the most important manifestations of the new and colorful language of Eileen Chang's novels.

3.2. The implicit, graceful and restrained inner temperament

A lot of cool words and dark tones make the novel style of Eileen Chang feels gentle and graceful. Eileen Chang's color language has become a combination of the independent language of her novel, which is illustrative, allegorical and commentary, while a large number of color words carry new brand and personalized expression information, which expands the range of language. When Mr. Crystal visited Eileen Chang, he asked if there is an intention to plan over the hint of image and symbol function when she was in the creation of *Crumbs of Ligumaloes* — the First Incense Burnt. She did not make a positive reply, saying, "I only felt that the story was not enough, and I wanted to use the imagery to strengthen the strength of the story[3]." The color words in Eileen Chang's novels are mixed in the images, the environment, external objects and so on, appear to be tactful and introverted, according with Eileen Chang's pursuit of "more long aftertaste", making the novel language with poetic and scattered culture temperament, expanding the emotional connotation of the novel, and emitting a strong overall lyric tendency.

Eileen Chang once said "The sadness in Peking Opera is with clear, lively color[3]." In the same way, she also sought the comfort of color because of the "sadness" of life. She thought that people were living in an era of constant sinking and abandonment, so in order to prove the existence of one's

own, seeking a clear and friendly memory won't help, what we need was to grasp a little basic and practical thing. The interaction structure between nihilism and materialism which she had learned from the traditional literature (such as "The Story of the Stone", the Beijing opera, the Shaoxing opera, the Bengbeng opera) is the intrinsic foundation of a large number of color words in the language of her novel. The "contrasted contrast" embodied in the color words is a particular perspective of the reader's glimpse of the desolation from the prosperous.

The colorful and "gratifying" world made up of material details, such as color and light, sound and smell form a "stable foundation" of life. As the narrative reflection of Eileen Chang's nihilism philosophy, it is not only in the world, but also reflection of the tragic consciousness of life. Therefore, Eileen Chang's novel has inherited the traditional tragic consciousness since ancient times, being a kind of conflict and confusion between limitation of life and the infinity of objective world, being the search for the value of life, coming down in one continuous line and being vitally significant[4].

4. Conclusion

By all accounts, under the comprehensive influence of the sensitive nature obsessed with color, outstanding painting

attainments, the nihilistic narrative philosophy in traditional Chinese classical literature, and the contrast view of "green and peach", Eileen Chang created a colorful and implicit color feast. The personalized color is directly embedded in the flesh and blood of the novel. The dialogue with the readers reflects the desolate and gorgeous void era, which transcends the secular world aesthetic, reflects the tragic consciousness contained in life, and makes her novels have high artistic attainments and cultural values. To Explore the language achievements and causes of the formation of Eileen Chang's novels in color words is to study the writers' personalized language, which can enrich the corpus of linguistics and vocabulary, and provide more vivid cases for their research.

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