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## SYSTEM OF CHARACTERS IN THE NOVELLA “LUST, CAUTION” BY EILEEN CHANG

**Summary.** The article deals with the characteristics of female and male characters in the novella «Lust, Caution» by Eileen Chang who is one of the brightest women writers of modern Chinese literature. However, she spent most of her life in the United States, outside her native country. It is observed that there is a deconstruction of the established notion of the category of gender on the example of the main characters – Chia-chih and Mr. Yee – with the shift of the vector of the active figure of his life from man to woman. Except especially skillful realisation of the artistic and aesthetic goal, Eileen Chang manages to convey the didactic and patriotic goal, as well as to sketch the socio-political sentiment of contemporary China, and depict the features of postcolonial consciousness, which is also described in opposition to the national consciousness.

All the pre-dominant features of Eileen Chang's early prose, mentioned by researchers of the writer's work, can be traced in the analysed novella “Lust, Caution”, expressed through critical reflections on politics, and detailed study of betrayal and, finally, death. We have also analysed the peculiarities of the problem of commercialization of category of feelings as prose works by Eileen Chang pre-dominant feature. The category of eros in the novella “Lust, Caution” is expressed through the concept of power and through the appeal to the phenomenon of polygamy.

There is a certain evolution in the reproduction of Chia-chih's feelings throughout the work, from practical calculation to the manifestation of love ready for self-sacrifice. Thus, the novella's title may be interpreted in two ways, which are both symbolically depicted in the plot of the analysed work.

**Key words:** female / male character, category, commercialization of feelings, eros, novella, postcolonial consciousness.

**Introduction.** Eileen Chang has never been a productive writer, and has written only a few works during the last thirty years of her career. As for the analysed novella “Lust, Caution”, its first version was written in the 1950s, but only in 1977 it was published. It's import to mention, that the plot of the analysed work is “allegedly based on the real story of a female spy Zheng Pingru (1918–1940)” [1], but among researchers of the writer's work there is an opinion about the key role of biographical subtext in the novella: Eileen Chang was Hu Lancheng's wife (1905–1981), who was a “brilliant

intellectual and at the same time a collaborator of the puppet regime” [1], namely the Japanese-controlled Chinese government of that period.

The main female protagonist of the novella “Lust, Caution” is a young student Chia-chih Wong who appears to be a talented actress not only in the theater, but she also masterly uses her acting skills outside its walls, which allows her to “perform stage role” perfectly in the insidious spy group in Shanghai during the II World War by sacrificing her own life. However, paradoxically during her final “production”, which is the last plot scene of the analysed novella, the heroine seems to find her true “self”. The analysed creative work by Eileen Chang is, in fact, a kind of study of the feelings' evolution of the characters from the moment of acquaintance to the immediate plot.

**Analysis of the recent research works.** Unfortunately, the number of works on Chinese studies in the domestic scientific field is not numerous. Among literary studies, the most represented are retrospective studies: the problem of literature periodization, characteristic genres and genus features of the works of certain iconic writers in the context of a particular literary direction. Among the domestic works it is worth mentioning the translations and scientific research of V. Urusov [2; 3; 4], N. Isayeva [5; 6]. The latter was one of the first in Ukrainian literary criticism to analyse Chinese women's prose of the twentieth century, examining in detail not only the problem of gender, but also the ethno-national features of Chinese artistic discourse. N. Isayeva in the monograph “Chinese Women's Prose: Revision of the Canon” and in several investigations turned to the analysis of Chang Eileen's work, but a separate study on the novella “Lust, Caution” has not yet been presented, which emphasizes the relevance and novelty of the chosen topic. Moreover, the work itself has not yet been translated into Ukrainian, but we believe that this novella is one of the key works in the context of analysis of the writer's idiosyncrasy peculiarities of the “Chinese” period of her work (before moving to the United States of America) and to highlight the commercialization of the category of feelings.

A lot of European and American literary critics (especially Qu L. [7]) who have studied Chang Eileen's creative works are increasingly highlighting the above-mentioned issue of commercializing the category of feelings as a pre-dominant

feature of the writer's prose works: "Human relationship in Zhang's<sup>1</sup> world is essentially commercial, in the sense that it is dominated by interest calculation and exchange" [8]. Secondly, problem of the emotional devastation of female characters as a thorough detail of many creative works by Eileen Chang also appears to be a popular subject of analysis by many researchers. "By exploring the affective structure of desolation, the author argues desolation assumes natural value by building fatalism into its structure as a natural principle. In doing so, Zhang's aesthetics of desolation presents itself as a petty bourgeois construction for consumption" [8].

**Statement of the main problem.** The combination of Chinese and European elements characterizes the prose works by Eileen Chang as a unique phenomenon of that time, especially due to inherent closeness from world literary trends of the Chinese literature to that period. The writer recorded on the pages of her large and small prose works "the disappearing history of the semi-colonial metropolis"<sup>2</sup> [9, p. 101]. The atmosphere of Shanghai (and sometimes Hong Kong) has made a significant influence on the formation of idiosyncrasy in particular and the creative works by Eileen Chang in general. Her characters are, as a rule, simple citizens who lived next to the analysed author herself. Most often, autobiographical details can be traced on the example of female images: "The pages of the creative works<sup>3</sup> unfold stories about the new women of China in the first half of the twentieth century" [2, p. 101].

The twentieth century in China is characterized by a rethinking of traditional values, which were based on the principle of "believe and love antiquity" and the Taoist principle of action [2, p. 135–136] as a result of various socio-political and cultural-historical processes and events that took place during that period. New plots and images appear in the literature, uncharacteristic of previous epochs, and traditional ones began to be considered in hitherto uncharacteristic contexts. This is confirmed by the image of the main character Chia-chih from the novella "Lust, Caution" by Eileen Chang, in which the author describes a woman, destroying the traditional image of a rational / active man and emotional / passive woman, thus questioning established stereotypes about gender and its self-discovery. It is noteworthy that the ideas expressed by Eileen Chang in the analysed novella are consistent with many national European literatures of the twentieth century.

The protagonist of the novella "Lust, Caution" is a young patriotic student who was tasked with "gaining trust" to become the mistress of the country's traitor, Mr. Yee, who was a high-ranking official in the Japanese-controlled Chinese government. Due to the conscious desire to take an active part in the socio-political processes of the country, first of all, and taking into account the adventurous spirit of her youth ("Youth dreamed of adventure", "Darkness outside the window was full of bright neon signs" and "intoxicated a sense of lightness" [10]) Chia-chih appears as an active woman-creator of her life who in a relationship with her lover is guided solely by cold mind and by the idea of achieving material benefit from these relationships. In this perspective, we believe that Eileen Chang is an innovator in the sense of portraying

a woman who was able to realise herself outside of family life as an exclusively female type of existence.

In addition to the artistic and aesthetic goal, the writer through her main character, although cursory, but manages to depict the didactic and patriotic goal, which is aptly conveyed by the following quote: "They were outraged by how indifferent the locals were to the situation in the country" [10]. The above mentioned problem clearly demonstrates two different visions of the Chinese who came to power. In our opinion, Hong Kong's passivity is mostly historically motivated, as this city has long been a colony, which in fact explains to some extent the lack of an active position in defending the national idea, as well as such behavior was a result of decades of colonial consciousness.

In the novella "Lust, Caution" the writer pays special attention not so much to the depiction of general socio-political processes, not so much to detailing the life realities of the individual, as to his / her feelings. The chosen first-person narrative is of two-vector direction: the conditional first part is a long story provided by Chia-chih, and the second one is a novella of post-culminating events by Mr. Yee. It is the unfolding of the plot and the selected narrative models that are consonant with the title of the novella, where the indication of categories, namely, lust and caution, is expressed as the essential characteristics of both sexes (according to the traditional bust division).

The novella's title may be interpreted in two ways, which are both symbolically depicted in the plot of the analysed work. Firstly, as we have already mentioned, in the way of being two opposing concepts to each other: the natural human urge for both lust (here, foremost, we mean, desire), and the caution that comes with being a part of particular social unit). Secondly, the title "Lust, Caution" may also be read as "coloured ring". Thus the ring is a symbolic detail that the Eileen Chang skillfully uses in the plot of the work with the purpose of deeper characterization of her main heroine.

In order to gain sexual experience and better fulfill the task, the heroine had a sexual relationship with Leung Yeun-sang (one of the male characters, who was also a member of the spy organization depicted in the analysed novella), which justifies the desire to achieve a certain patriotic goal. Thus, the plot of seduction of a married man acquires a new sound. Chia-chih's self-sacrifice in this regard and the realisation of what awaits her after the rescue of Mr. Yee is to some extent consistent with the ideas of heroism of women in British and American literature proposed by K. Pope and K. Pearson<sup>4</sup>.

The category of eros in the novella "Lust, Caution" is expressed through the concept of power and through the appeal to the phenomenon of polygamy (here it is worth mentioning the concept of "younger wife" – both, "younger" in age and in conditional status), common in China.

The British say that category of power is one of the strongest means of increasing sexual desire, and we trace a similar motive in the analysed novella "Lust, Caution". Chia-chih did not know whether it was true or not, but she already felt that she became dependent on Mr. Yee. We believe that the fact that he belonged to the political elite at the time also played a key role to express the category of sexual desire.

<sup>1</sup> In our article we use the most common spelling of the analysed author's surname. However, there are other possible variants in the translational tradition, like the mentioned one.

<sup>2</sup> Translation from original Ukrainian or Russian quotes into English here and hereafter is ours – Uliana Zhornokui, Oksana Zakhutska.

<sup>3</sup> Written by Chang Eileen – U. Zh., O. Z.

<sup>4</sup> We would like to emphasize the concept of 12 archetypes developed by Keroll Pearson in "Awakening the Heroes Within: Twelve Archetypes to Help Us Find Ourselves and Transform Our World", as we think it is important not only to look at the external, often imitative, side of each archetype, but also to understand the deep motives of each archetype.

As it's believed that the path to a man's heart is through the stomach, the path to a woman's heart is through sexual pleasure. This statement is attributed to a Chinese scholar, an expert in English during the times of the formation of the Chinese Democratic Republic. His name is unlikely to be remembered by Chia-chih now, but she remembers well how he, trying to defend polygamy in China, once said: "You always have several cups for one teapot, have you ever seen a teapot with only one cup?" [10].

Each writer, realising a certain artistic idea, purposefully selects words, syntactic structures, turns to phonetic means, makes them aesthetically and artistically significant in a particular text and context, which in turn actualises their connotative content and artistic meaning [11, p. 2]. It is well known that in Chinese, one of the means of syntactic expression is structures with emotional and evaluative meaning. These include some constructions that, expressing logical and semantic relations, "convey additional emotional and evaluative connections" [11, p. 3]. It is through the use of different language levels that Eileen Chang manages to portray her main character Chia-chih as a controversial figure in terms of expression and self-awareness of her feelings for Mr. Yee. "Who but him, a special service officer, knows that a smart rabbit digs three minks, as it is always important to leave something for a rainy day. He needs to believe her, because they always met where he says, and now he needs to agree to go where she says" [10].

There is a certain evolution in the reproduction of Chia-chih's feelings throughout the work, from practical calculation to the manifestation of love ready for self-sacrifice. First, she positions herself as an actress who "plays a role, but no one knows about it, so it is unlikely she will become famous ..." [10], and she does not hide the desire to gain material benefits from this situation. The girl perceives the acquaintance and further maintenance of relations with Mr. Yee as a performance on the stage (although the situation itself was conceived as a production), in which, in her opinion, Chia-chih was able to achieve a kind of real success. Although the set goal – seduction of an official – was achieved, "she left the stage, but has not yet washed off her makeup; she still felt the attention of the public; she wanted to continue, longed to return to the stage" [10]. The last image sounds quite symbolic, because it was there, "on stage", where she was able to feel real feelings for Mr. Yee, although a traitor. By the way, pursuing a very important goal – to preserve their dignity, even in the climactic scene, when Chia-chih and Mr. Yee were choosing a ring in a jewelry store, she skillfully manages to perform this episode as if he wanted to buy it himself, not her hidden hints pushed him to do so.

All the pre-dominant features of Eileen Chang's early prose (namely, a detailed study of human shortcomings, stylized portraits of the Chinese, highlighting typical national features etc.), often mentioned by researchers of the writer's work, can be traced in the analysed novella "Lust, Caution", expressed through critical reflections on politics, and detailed study of betrayal and, finally, death.

In the process of characterization of her heroine in the analysed novella, Eileen Chang emphasizes the features that are primary in the perception of Chinese women by patriarchal society. Repeatedly, for example, the work emphasizes the importance of correct posture for a woman: "Mrs. Yee was rather a plump woman, nevertheless perfectly kept the posture" [10], or "She knew he was looking

at her, and holding as gracefully as possible, entered the open glass door in front of her" [10]. Also, men at the expense of women, wives or mistresses, try to compensate for their own shortcomings, which aptly emphasizes the main character of the analysed novella "Lust, Caution". Chia-chih has long noticed that tall men prefer short women, and vice versa, "as if trying to rise themselves with the help of a woman in the eyes of others" [10], so for meetings with Mr. Yee the girl wore heels. Separately we would like to note another characteristic of Chinese culture: women in China after marriage do not take the name of the husband, only in the process of communication, addressing the married woman, people call the name of the husband.

Characteristically, the writer depicts her characters without unnecessary "ornaments", without excessive idealization, creating the most realistic images. For example, Mrs. Yee's guests, who have traditionally gathered in their mahjong room, are portrayed primarily as materially interested, which is what motivates Eileen Chang to choose a leading detail in order to portray them: "That is why the wives of high-ranking officials from the Wang Qingwei's administration simply could not help but have such capes in their wardrobes. Probably, this fashion came from the south-west, from Chongqing because that's where black capes were considered the pinnacle of taste and sophistication" [10]. Recalling in the introductory part of "Lust, Caution" about the mentioned fashionable accessory, the writer uses it in the plot outline of the work as a metonymic way of naming female characters (such as "one of the black capes", "cape sitting at the other end of the table", etc.).

**Conclusions and prospects for further research.** In our opinion, the analysed Eileen Chang's novella through the prism of female images clearly demonstrates the desire of Chinese literature of that time to achieve pluralism, which eventually led to the formation of Chinese literature into a multipolar structure (according to term used by V. Urusov [2]).

It is important to note that the descriptions of representatives of other peoples who lived in China at that time create a semantically interesting picture in the context of imagology with different from the Eurocentric cultures features of characterization. The most expressive image of the Other in Eileen Chang's novella "Lust, Caution" is written on the example of a Hindu salesman from a jewelry store: "This man's face was black as coal and his nose was fleshy, with large nostrils" [10]. This type of nose is called "lion's" by the Chinese. In general, this character is portrayed quite neutrally, although the type of activity – fishing for jewelry during the war – is an example of negative socio-economic processes. We believe that the vector of depicting the image of the Other in the analysed work is directly related to the historical circumstances and peculiarities of China's relations with neighboring countries. For example, the image of the Japanese in the analysed novella, although cursory, but with a pronounced negative connotation.

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### **Жорнокуй У. В., Захуцька О. В. Система образів в оповіданні Чжан Айлін «Почуття, розум»**

**Анотація.** У статті проаналізовано характерні особливості жіночих і чоловічих персонажів у оповіданні «Почуття, розум» Чжан Айлін – однієї із найяскравіших жінок-письменниць нової літератури Китаю, яка більшу частину свого життя провела за межами рідної країни, у США. Простежено, що відбувається деконструкція усталеного уявлення про категорію статі на прикладі головних героїв – Цзянчи та пана І – зі зміщенням вектору активного діяча свого життя від чоловіка до жінки. Окрім майстерної реалізації художньо-естетичної цілі, Чжан Айлін вдається передати й дидактично-патріотичну ціль, а також штрихово змалювати суспільно-політичні настрої тодішнього Китаю й відтворити особливості постколоніальної свідомості, яка зображається у певній опозиції до національної ідентифікації.

Серед характерних для ранньої прози Чжан Айлін рис, що виділяють дослідники творчості письменниці, більшість було простежено в аналізованому оповіданні «Почуття, розум», де вони виражені через критичні роздуми про політику та детальне вивчення категорій зради і, нарешті, смерті. Також проаналізовано особливості відтворення проблеми комерціалізації категорії почуттів як домінантної риси прозових творів цієї китайської письменниці. Категорія еросу в оповіданні «Почуття, розум» виражена через поняття влади та через звернення до явища полігамії.

Простежено й певну еволюцію у відтворенні почуттів Цзянчи протягом усього твору – від практичного розрахунку до прояву любові, готової до самопожертви. Таким чином, назву оповідання можна тлумачити у двох напрямках дwoяко, обидва з яких символічно відтворені в сюжеті аналізованого твору.

**Ключові слова:** жіночий/чоловічий персонаж, категорія, комерціалізація почуттів, ерос, оповідання, постколоніальна свідомість.