



Prostitute in Exile—On Wang Chia-chih's prostitutinity in the novel "Lust, Caution"

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Abstract

The narrative of "Lust, Caution" weaves a tale of espionage, centering on a female college student who orchestrates a honey trap alongside her classmates, ultimately culminating in a failed attempt to assassinate a traitor. Since its publication in 1978, the novel has always been controversial in both literary circles as well as film critics, particularly following its adaptation into a film by the famous director Ang Lee in 2007. In "Lust, Caution," the grand political narrative—that the author Eileen Chang had been criticized for sidelining an intensive collision with irrational emotional reality. The articulations of Chang's view emerge in an unnoticeable way in the character of the protagonist, Wang Chia-chih, subordinating a plausibly complicated female "who bears the burden of our age" as Chang said. When analyzing Wang Chia-chih's psychology, it went beyond the scope of the psychology of "petty urbanites" (Xiaoshimin). In the ambiguous and incomprehensible area of Wang Chia-chih, this article attempts to summarize a kind of "prostitutinity." While Wang Chia-chih herself is not a prostitute in the traditional sense, she exhibits traits and experiences characteristic of such a role. The intricacies of her character are unveiled through the lens of the assassination operation, which precipitates a profound erosion of her identity, accompanied by psychological turmoil, self-delusion, and latent sexual repression. This analytical framework enables us to comprehend the intricate interplay between the burdens she carries, the toll exacted upon her, and the subtle nuances that permeate her innermost being.

Keywords: Asian Literature, Chinese Literature, 20th century, Eileen Chang, Feminine Writing