

PANEL PROPOSAL

**Title: Revisiting Diaspora in Translation**

The fact that the Chinese diaspora is a polylingual entity points to the central role of translation in the formation of communities and identities, as well as the possibility and maintenance of ongoing ties between diaspora communities and those in China (broadly defined). For many in the Chinese diaspora, translation is a daily practice necessary for work and survival; at the same time, translation is itself an aesthetic and literary practice, the complexities of which point to ongoing points of contention within communities themselves, as well as with other groups. This panel explores the multifaceted meaning of translation in the Chinese diaspora by attending to various textual and contextual particulars. In her paper, Jessica Tsui Yan Li explores the role of translation in the work of the iconic author Eileen Chang. Li suggests that for Chang, translation not only involves writing between languages, but names the ways in which she moved between cultures reflected upon them in this institial space between languages. Her bilingualism, then, informs her articulations of self and opens a fascinating window in the broader implications of translation. Chris Lee's paper focuses on a roughly contemporaneous figure, the prominent literary critic T.A. Hsia. While Hsia was invested in attempts to reconstruct a Chinese yet worldly literary culture in Taiwan, his later work in the United States revolved around the demands of Area Studies and the need to translate Communist discourse for strategic reasons. Lee's paper draws a connection between these two stages of his life in order to consider the political implications of translation during the Cold War.

Moderator and Discussant:

**Evelyn HU-DEHART**

Department of History, Center for the Study of Race and Ethnicity in America,  
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Panel Members:

**Jessica Tsui Yan Li**

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**Paper Proposal**

**Eileen Chang: Self-Translation of the Diaspora**

Eileen Chang (Zhang Ailing 1920-1995), a legendary modern Chinese writer, translated her life and works from the Chinese language and culture into the Anglophone ones and vice versa in an equivocal manner during her diasporic journey. Chang was born in Shanghai in 1920. After having received her primary and secondary education in her hometown, she studied at the University of Hong Kong in 1939. Due to the Sino-Japanese War, she was forced to move back to Shanghai in 1941 before finishing her bachelor degree. In 1952, she left Shanghai to Hong Kong once more, where she worked as a translator for the United States Information Services for three years. She then emigrated to the U.S. in 1955. She briefly headed to Taiwan and Hong Kong for more job opportunities in 1961. After returning to the U.S. in 1962, she had never returned to China again.

Chang's extreme diasporic experience was manifested in her writing in English, a foreign language that bears alienated cultural coding. Though writing in English for Anglophone readers, her works largely retain Chinese literary and cultural traditions. She also wrote in Chinese, her mother tongue, but she depicted the Chinese culture from an unfamiliar perspective. Having translated her own life experience and works from one language into another, Chang's literary achievements are in part a result of her bilingualism, which has received insufficient attention.

In this paper, I study Eileen Chang's self-translations by investigating the paradoxical relationship between the translated texts and the translations, the authorship, and the significance of her works in a globalized context. I argue that her rewriting and self-translations are situated in a liminal space, in-between the Chinese and Anglophone linguistic and cultural discourses, the new and the old, as well as life and fiction. Her writings serve as her retrospective means of looking at Chinese modernity and her own past in China. Meanwhile, her self-translations present her equivocal diasporic experience under constant negotiation amid moments of historical transformation.

**Chris Lee**

Assistant Professor, Department of English  
Associate Principal of St. John's College  
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**Paper Proposal****Ethnicity in Transit: Eileen Chang, Translation, and Cold War America**

Eileen Chang's long personal and professional relationship is well known. From her earliest writings in the Anglophone press in Shanghai to her work for the United States Information Service to her monumental translation of *Flowers of China* into English and standard modern Chinese, translation was a form of creative and intellectual labor, a strategy for survival, as well as an existential condition necessitated by the quotidian crossing of linguistic, cultural, and political boundaries. This paper situates Chang's relationship to translation in relationship to the cultural politics of Cold War America. In that context, she entered the American literary market as a native informant who could supposedly provide otherwise inaccessible information on conditions in the People's Republic of China. I trace how these assumptions are thematized in her 1963 English essay "Return to the Frontier," the Chinese translation of which was posthumously published as 重訪邊城. I borrow Naoki Sakai's description of the translator as a "subject in transit" to suggest that this text demonstrates how the interplay between singularity and indeterminacy gets turned inward as she engages in self-translation. But while Chang never imagines herself as anything but Chinese—she does not think of herself as American or Chinese American—her excessive interest in the instabilities of this category highlights its discontinuity despite the semblance of singularity. I conclude by exploring how her treatment of *ethnic* subjectivity in transit provides an instructive entrée into the discursive conditions for Asian American writing during the Cold War.

**Xuanmin Luo (罗选民)**

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### **Paper Proposal**

#### **Translation as Cultural Negotiation: On Eileen Chang's Adaptation of her Own Novels**

Eileen Chang was commonly considered to be one of the best writers in Chinese literature in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Her novels were largely read, reprinted, and adapted into films and dramas. However, the translation of her own novels during her living in the States as a Diaspora has not been adequately discussed. This paper will focus on Eileen Chang's self-translation of her own Chinese novels in American context.

Eileen Chang studied western literature and read the major English-language authors when she was young, so she had a good knowledge of the West and was aware of western readers' expectations in their reading of Chinese literature. She admired Lin Yutang whose English writing about China in the English world and his translation of his own novels was of a great success and set a good example for other Chinese writers in America. After her emigration on American soil, Chang translated her novels into English. Adaptation was made so as to meet the needs of target language readers. As a result, her translation, growing in a new narrative context, turned out to be a transplanting, negotiation and manipulation, reflected her keen awareness of the alien culture.

The success of her translation can set up a good example as how modern Chinese literature can be culturally translated and be accepted on a more universal level. The translation in her case can demonstrate that language competence is not enough for a literary translator. "Translation is never merely a matter of verbal shift between two languages, it is a cultural performance." (Luo, 2007, ix) In a new country, one has to be adaptive to the new culture and the new environment. The adaptation may be painful, yet one has to take it without bargain. This was true with Eileen Chang's translation, wherein we can find the inner struggles in the heart of the novelist/ translator in a foreign country. After a close inspection of the plot, the choices of words, and changes made here and there in her translation, we can venture to conclude that Chang's translation is trans-writing in nature, and her translation performance was in fact an effort in negotiation between Chinese and American cultures