Although I have discussed Eileen Chang’s short story writing from the perspectives of psychoanalysis and feminism, I think it necessary to deal with one of the important characteristics of Chang’s narrative, that is her use of ‘castration’, or a sort of castration parody, in describing her male characters. This is obviously a writing strategy in characterized by Chang’s feminist narrative. That is why her writing distinguishes itself from other Chinese writers of the modern period and attracts the critical attention.

I. Eileen Chang’s Writing Strategy: ‘Castration Parody’ and ‘Patricidal Writing’

To explore the problem of female subjectivity in Eileen Chang’s writings is certainly most challenging in the study of Chang as well as her writing. The present paper, following my previous research on different occasions, is aimed to deal with Chang’s female writing and her use of anti-patricidal strategy by anatomizing her mode of ‘castrating’ father and other male characters in her writings. In this way, I will try to exploit the significance for the inter-relations between her men and women and the implied problem of female subjectivity in them.

In my study of Chang’s texts, I find that apart from representing the various matriarchs created by her, Chang’s female subjectivity also manifests itself in her various ‘castrated’ fathers and other male characters. Generally speaking, the way Chang deals with the traditional patriarchs and other male characters in her writing is actually of a very meaningful writing strategy. Here I just call it ‘castration parody’ and ‘patricidal writing’ for the convenience of elaborating my ideas. Patricidal writing is one of the most important problems in Chang’s writing strategy, in which she always excludes with a resolute attitude the patriarch by letting her various
matriarchs occupy the textual space with the traditional patriarch/patriarchal authority absent, thus forming a mode of de-patriarchalized text in which matriarchs function as the masters of the family and Chang’s world.

In this sort of patricidal writing, Chang obviously excludes with violence the patriarch omnipresent in the patriarchal society from her text. The traditional patriarch here becomes a silent sign without utterance, totally repressed by the narrator and even expelled from the text. It is this narrative background of depatriarchalized text that causes most of Chang’s family pictures to be fragmentary, from which the effect of this patricidal strategy manifests itself as an indispensable background in Chang’s text. It has undoubtedly offered us an important premise in dealing with her writing characterized by such castration parody. In this totalized framework of patricidal writing and depatriarchalized text, Chang’s patriarchs or male characters are confronted with her repression of another type, namely, they are narrated as the role of the ‘castrated’ in the diagram of such castration parody. That is, these men are not only impotent, incompetent, weak and timid, but are actually deprived of the authoritative personality, heroism and manhood as the traditional patriarch with little male authority. Through exploring this phenomenon, we may well achieve a better understanding of how a female writer like Chang practices her feminist writing against the patriarchal authority, thereby exposing how she interprets the significance of patricide and the female subjectivity.

Generally speaking, Chang’s female sense of subjectivity is revealed here and there in her texts as a relatively subjective significance rather than an absolute one. In her writing strategy, the subjectivity or subordination might well have close relations or interrelations with the description of her male characters. Therefore, apart from interpreting Chang’s matriarchs and patricidal writing, it would be one of the most effective ways of exploiting her female subjectivity in order to have a new understanding and interpretation of this mode of ‘castration parody’.

In fact, in Chang’s textual framework, castration parody (and patricidal writing) implies her intentional abandonment of the powerful patriarchal authority and (on the level of the unconscious) repression of the patriarchal/male personality. This undoubtedly shows signs in her own experience of growing from a little girl to the stage of maturity. From the writing perspective, we could say that the real world experience has close relations with her fictional sphere and even influences the latter. The various images of patricide in Chang’s fictional world might well be modelled on her father Chang Chih-yi (Ting Chong). Ting Chong, as the last child of a dignified family, acted indecently all his life. Appearing powerful and authoritative like a real father/patriarch, he spent extravagantly all the money left behind by his father instead of making any deeds. This type of father-image undoubtedly influenced Chang’s patricidal sense as well as her way of ironizing and deconstructing the significance of the father and all the other male characters in her stories.