A Study on the Textual Variants of Xiao Ai: Eileen Chang's Creative Shift in a Cultural-Political Context

Yihe Huang *

School of Politics and International Relations, East China Normal University, Shanghai 200000, China

* Corresponding Author Email: 10241130446@stu.ecnu.edu.cn

Abstract. Xiao Ai is the last work Eileen Chang completed before leaving Chinese mainland, and it underwent multiple revisions across different historical periods. The text went through substantial changes from the initial draft to the 1951 Friendship News serialized version, and finally to the 1987 revised edition published in Lingering Refrain. These successive versions reflect not only adjustments in artistic style but also the evolving pressures of the era and shifts in the political atmosphere. Against the backdrop of constantly transforming social ideologies, Chang sought to negotiate a balance between the self and reality in her writing—moving from accommodation, to introspection, and ultimately back to the bleak aesthetic that had long characterized her work. Differences in publishing environments inside and outside Chinese mainland, as well as the presence of contemporary taboos, imbued these revisions with complex cultural and psychological motivations, thereby generating subtle changes in the textual meaning of Xiao Ai.

Keywords: Eileen Chang, *Xiao Ai*, textual variants, revision, political writing, literary subjectivity.

1. Introduction

Xiao Ai is Eileen Chang's last novel written before her departure from Chinese mainland, and the existence of its multiple versions makes it an important text for examining her creative transformation amid political turbulence. [1] The revisions across different versions not only demonstrate the artistic evolution of the text but also reveal the author's responses to the cultural and political pressures embedded in the historical context. The textual transformations of Xiao Ai represent not merely Eileen Chang's refinement of literary technique, but also the creative reflections she undertook while navigating an increasingly oppressive political environment.

In studies on Eileen Chang, scholars such as C. T. Hsia and David Der-wei Wang have largely focused on her status within the history of the modern Chinese novel, her modernity, and the sociopolitical interpretations of her works. Research on Chang's writing under the intense political pressures of the 1950s, however, has tended to concentrate on Eighteen Springs and its later revision Half a Lifelong Romance, with scholars represented by Chen Zishan, Sang Hu, and Ke Ling generally arguing that these texts reflect Chang's temporary accommodation to contemporary ideological currents. It was not until 1952, when Chen Zishan inadvertently discovered Xiao Ai while organizing earlier manuscripts, that the work resurfaced. Subsequently, a number of scholars, represented by Chen Jianzhong and Wu Xiaoli, began to note the distinctive position of Xiao Ai within Chang's oeuvre. [2] Yet their analyses remained confined to comparing the 1951 Friendship News version and the 1987 Lingering refrained edition, overlooking the existence and significance of the author's early conceptual draft. This limitation has prevented existing scholarship from fully addressing the work's evolution across all three stages, as well as from probing the political context and publishing circumstances underlying its textual transformations. The table below presents the basic information of the three extant versions of Xiao Ai.

Table 1. Basic Information on the Three Versions of Xiao Ai

Title	Date of Publication / Serialization	Publication / Source
Xiao Ai (Conceptual Draft)	—	—
Xiao Ai (1951 Version)	4 November 1951 – 24 January 1952	Friendship News, Third Section
Xiao Ai (1987 Version)	1987	Lingering Refrain

Building on gaps in previous scholarship, this article undertakes a comparative analysis of the three major versions of Xiao Ai. The first is the original conception mentioned by Eileen Chang in her correspondence with Stephen Soong during her years in the United States (hereafter Xiao Ai [Conceptual Draft]); the second is the serialized version published in Friendship News, which was first rediscovered by Chen Zishan (hereafter Xiao Ai [1951 Version]); and the third is the abridged edition included in Lingering Refrain, the most widely circulated version today (hereafter Xiao Ai [1987 Version]). From the perspective of cultural politics, this study examines the differences among these versions and discusses how Chang reconstructed her aesthetic stance through the process of revision. In doing so, it aims to elucidate how literature negotiates and preserves artistic subjectivity and dignity under ideological pressure.

2. The "Three Lives" of the Text: The Formation and Transformation of Xiao Ai's Versions

From the perspective of its initial conception, in addition to the widely circulated Xiao Ai (1951 Version) and Xiao Ai (1987 Version), Eileen Chang originally envisioned a different storyline for the work. In his preface to Lingering Refrain, Stephen Soong reproduced Chang's early idea in manuscript form:"I am very dissatisfied with Xiao Ai. Sang Hu said that it lacks narrative drive, and he was right. The original story concerned another maid (belonging to the favored concubine) who was raped and became pregnant. When the concubine discovered this, she beat and imprisoned the girl, later claiming the child as her own and selling the maid to a brothel, whereupon she disappeared without a trace. After the concubine fell out of favor, the child was raised by Mrs. Wang, yet he hated her because she bore no resentment toward the concubine and was even kind to her. Mrs. Wang's maid Xiao Ai, seven or eight years younger than he, was likewise a sullen and troubled adolescent. She once attempted to flirt with him, but their relationship never surpassed playful chasing around the house. After her marriage, Xiao Ai resembled the ambitious immigrants so often depicted in American bestsellers, striving desperately to make money. When the Communists arrived, she smiled wryly and said, 'There's no hope now.'" [3] This early framework tells the story of a maid who, after being framed by a concubine, is sold into a brothel; her child is later adopted by Mrs. Wang, and he develops a vague, youthful affection for another maid, Xiao Ai. After her marriage, Xiao Ai becomes consumed by the pursuit of wealth, only to see her aspirations collapse amid changing political circumstances. The design continues Chang's signature attention to "small matters between men and women," using the fate of lower-class women to reflect the indifference of the old household and the complexity of human nature. It also embodies Chang's creative principle, articulated in "Writing of One's Own," of "using the calmness of life as the basis for depicting life's moments of soaring emotion" [4] Based on textual clues and the chronology of publication, this "original conception" likely emerged between late 1950 and early 1951—after Chang completed the serialization of Eighteen Springs but before she began drafting the final version of Xiao Ai. During this period, the political atmosphere had not yet fully tightened, and Chang still retained a creative impulse centered on individual emotion.

From March 1950 to February 1951, Eileen Chang serialized her novel Eighteen Springs in Friendship News under the pen name Liang Jing. The novel was well received by readers. Upon its completion, the editor, Tang Yunjing, invited her to produce a new work.[5] In November 1951, Xiao Ai began serialization. Unlike the early conception and her previous style, this version of Xiao Ai resonated with the political atmosphere of the 1950s. The novel follows the tragic fate of the maid Xiao Ai, depicting her humiliation at the hands of the Xie family, her miscarriage, and, under the influence of the worker Feng Jinhua, her acceptance of progressive thought and eventual redemption in the new society. The work uses Xiao Ai's rebirth as a metaphor for the simultaneous fulfillment of personal destiny and social liberation.

In 1986, scholar Chen Zishan discovered the Xiao Ai serialized version in Friendship News while organizing Eileen Chang's earlier works. This version was subsequently published in 1987 in Ming

Pao Monthly and Taiwan's United Daily News, sparking significant attention in literary circles. Both Eileen Chang and Stephen Soong misinterpreted Chen's actions as a "mainland scheme" [6], fearing that the dissemination of this version would lead to political readings of Chang's work. As a result, Chang commissioned Soong and Crown Publishing to revise Xiao Ai, removing depictions related to the political climate, social transformation, and Feng Jinhua's ideology [6], in 1987, Xiao Ai was included in Lingering Refrain. While this version still centers on the tragic fate of the maid Xiao Ai, its narrative tone starkly contrasts with the 1951 version. It no longer continues the theme of "redemption and hope brought by the new society" present in the earlier draft; instead, it shifts to a more focused examination of individual suffering. The first half of the story remains unchanged from the 1951 version, but the revisions primarily occur in the latter half. After Feng Jinhua's return, the couple remains overshadowed by the hardships of life and the specter of illness. Near the end of her life, Xiao Ai no longer clings to the faint hope found in the earlier version but falls into a deep resentment toward fate and the world. Her tragedy is no longer a tale of individual sacrifice amid societal change, but rather an inescapable destiny. The 1987 version of Xiao Ai concludes with an open-ended tragic finale, highlighting Xiao Ai's oppressed existence within a patriarchal system.[7]

3. From "Symbols" to "Ordinary People": A Comparative Analysis of the Core Differences Across Three Versions

In order to more clearly present the evolution of Xiao Ai across different stages of creation, it is essential to conduct a horizontal comparison of the Xiao Ai (Conceptual Draft), Xiao Ai (1951 Version), and Xiao Ai (1987 Version). By comparing their themes, characters, and key revisions, we can more directly observe Eileen Chang's creative choices and shifts in her intellectual orientation within different historical contexts. The table below systematically outlines the core differences between the three versions.

Table 2. Comparison of the Three Versions of Xiao Ai

Aspect	Conceptual Draft	51 Version	87 Version
Theme	Through the intertwining of individual desires and tragic fate, the story reflects the cruelty of the old family and the complexity of human nature.	*Suffering and Social Redemption. The personal tragedy is attributed to the old society, and a new life is achieved through social progress brought by the new regime, completing the "reversal."*	Removes Social Redemption. Focuses on the irreversible nature of individual suffering and profound hatred for the old master.
Characters	Ordinary people	Class Symbols	Tragic Figure / Bearer of Reality
Revisions		*Feng Jinhua... everything discouraged him, corruption and profiteering, with the top leaders involved in speculation and hoarding, where is there any sign of "resisting the war and building the nation"? There was no war there at all... Now they have started the civil war again... Xiao Ai feels that he no longer talks about current affairs as much as before.*	Entire paragraph deleted.
		Prices had soared to astronomical levels... An unexpected blow felt like wasted effort... The streets were filled with vendors selling silver dollars... It was like the streets were alive with the sound of insects.	Entire paragraph deleted.
		It was the last spring of the Chiang Kai-shek regime in Shanghai; it was liberated in May... At home, they often discussed New Democracy and the history of social development. Xiao Ai... thought theory was a decorative item for men... indifferent to it. What she felt most was that prices were stable now, life was secure, but people are forgetful; after a few good days, the previous nightmare faded away.	Entire paragraph deleted.
		The next autumn, Jin Fu quit his business and excitedly returned to his hometown to engage in rural production. In October, they were going to have land reform in their village.	Entire paragraph deleted. Mentions Jin Fu returning to the countryside to participate in political land reform activities.
		Feng Jinhua said: "No, they are finished, now it's our world; we won't let you die. We won't."	Revision deleted: "They are finished, now it's our world."
		In the hospital, they specifically called in the gynecology director... Xiao Ai initially thought Dr. Cheng was really kind... Now, she truly believes in serving the people. The beautiful future is not that far off. Through study, she has broadened her horizons... When the child grows up, they might not even be able to imagine the tragic experiences of their mother.	Entire paragraph deleted. Includes Xiao Ai receiving free treatment in a public hospital, her understanding of "serving the people," her post-recovery work at a printing factory, and her optimism and outlook on raising new life in a "happy world."

From the comparison of the versions above, it is evident that the three revisions of Xiao Ai are not merely chapter deletions but represent Eileen Chang's systematic adjustments to the novel's thematic focus, character development, and narrative structure across different stages of her creative process.

The Xiao Ai (Conceptual Draft) portrays the bleakness of individual fate from the perspective of ordinary people, with a theme centered on worldly desires and life's difficulties. Xiao Ai and her husband are not social symbols but ordinary people swept along by the times, harboring simple dreams of wealth. The Xiao Ai (1951 Version) underwent a significant shift in both theme and character development. First, the theme changed from "the inevitable tragedy of individual fate" to "suffering under the old society and the redemption brought by the new society," with the overall narrative now framed within the "suffering—reversal—rebirth" structure. Secondly, the characters' class symbolism became more pronounced, with Xiao Ai's fate given social symbolic meaning, positioning her as a representative of the victims of the old society. Xiao Ai's husband was transformed from the traditional young man of the Xiao Ai (Conceptual Draft) to a politically conscious progressive. In addition, a large number of background explanations related to the change in social systems, such as inflation, political corruption, and land reform, were introduced, giving the novel a strong sense of historical direction and reinforcing the narrative logic of suffering leading to hope.

The revision in Xiao Ai (1987 Version) reversed this narrative structure once again. By comparing the initial publication of Xiao Ai in Lingering Refrain (published in Hong Kong and Taiwan) with the version edited by Chen Zishan in Tulip in 2006, I found significant differences in chapter distribution and specific content between the two versions. Shi An has pointed out these differences in his blog, which are highly valuable: "The initial publication had twenty-one chapters, but in the Lingering Refrain edition, it expanded to twenty-one to twenty-eight chapters; in the initial publication, chapters 43 and 44 were merged into chapter 39 in Lingering Refrain; chapters 46 and 47 in the initial publication became chapter 41 in Lingering Refrain; chapters 63 and 64 were reduced to chapter 57; chapters 71 and 72 in the initial publication were combined into chapter 64; chapters 74 to 76 were reduced to chapters 66 and 67; chapters 77 and 78 in the initial publication were shortened to chapter 68. Several passages in Lingering Refrain from chapters 71, 76, 77, 78, 80, and the entire 81 were deleted, approximately 1,500 words in total"[8]These deleted sections pertain to the transformation of Feng Jinhua's thoughts and depictions of the social and political background, including reflections on post-war corruption, inflation, explicit critiques of the "Chiang Kai-shek gang," and descriptions of Jin Fu returning to the countryside to participate in land reform. These sections shifted the narrative from political "service literature" back to the more detached observation of the fate of ordinary people in the Xiao Ai (Conceptual Draft), thereby somewhat restoring the tragic logic of the conceptual draft. The focus of the novel was refocused on individual suffering. The deleted chapters not only weakened the timeline of social transformation but also returned the characters from being class symbols back to bearers of fate. Xiao Ai's final accusation, "I got this illness because of them, all these years, and now my life is still in their hands," was redefined as a personal entanglement with the old master rather than a symbol of opposition to the social system, thus restoring the original tragic narrative about human dilemmas [9].

4. Between Literature and Politics: The Writer's Strategy and Political Shaping

Beyond the differences in literary aspects, from an ideological standpoint, the adjustment of literary activities often occurs simultaneously with shifts in the political realm. The evolution of the three versions reflects the writer's temporary ideological fluctuations within specific political contexts, as well as her attempt to respond to the demands of the era. [10]

The difference between Xiao Ai (Conceptual Draft) and Xiao Ai (1951 Version) reflects the author's strategic compromise under political pressure. After the establishment of the People's Republic of China, the relationship between literature and politics became exceptionally close, with mainstream discourse demanding that literary creation "align with the political currents."[10] During the period of the occupied areas, Eileen Chang was criticized for "declaring not to discuss politics" and for "writing about romantic relationships and daily household matters," which led critics to label her as a "writer who collaborates with the enemy and the puppet regime in different ways."[11] This

placed significant pressure on Eileen Chang’s creative work in 1951. In terms of her personal circumstances, Chang had a clear understanding of her situation and was well aware that "even if you don't engage in politics, politics will come after you." Moreover, after the liberation, she found herself in a state of "quasi-exile" mentally. In order to secure comfort and survival, she was forced to briefly align with the mainstream of the era through "reluctant compliance" and "reluctant cooperation." Ke Ling once criticized her for displaying a "keen political instinct" in Eighteen Springs and Xiao Ai, using this to "seek fame and fortune" or "avoid disaster."[12] However, from the perspective of her creative mindset, this was actually a survival strategy in an extremely unfree environment. The more significant turning point came from her attendance at the First Writers’ Congress in Shanghai. This congress, held at a sensitive time following the outbreak of the Korean War, featured a political report by then-Shanghai Mayor Chen Yi, emphasizing that literature and art should serve the new social and political missions. It marked the official establishment of the Shanghai Writers’ Association. [13] Eileen Chang attended the congress under the pen name "Liang Jing," which she had used when serializing Eighteen Springs. She sat alongside literary representatives such as Tang Tao, Shi Tuo, Guo Shaoyu, and Xu Jie. Dressed in a cheongsam, she sat in the back row, standing out from the surrounding crowd dressed in Zhongshan suits. Despite this, her presence at such a highly politicized event itself reflected the new regime’s policy of "valuing talent" and "uniting all those who can be united." It was in this atmosphere of political embrace and acceptance that Chang briefly wavered from her previous stance of detachment. She began to consider whether it was possible to create with "new ideas" and, in Xiao Ai, created the progressive, politically conscious youth, Feng Jinhua, and portrayed Xiao Ai’s redemption through "union welfare," culminating in a hopeful ending.

This shift in creative tendency was already evident in Eighteen Springs. Starting its serialization in March 1950, the conclusion of Eighteen Springs clearly deviated from her previous bleak style, with the protagonist choosing to go to Northeast China to participate in construction work under the "education and call" of revolutionary forces. This "quasi-reunion" or "bright ending" emphasized the decisive role of political power in shaping the protagonist's fate. In the novel, Shu Hui's ideal of "truly doing something for the people" further exemplify this shift. The analysis above shows that Eighteen Springs and the serialized Xiao Ai in Friendship News marked a significant political phase in Eileen Chang's writing during the 1950s. Her works became new models of "reversal literature" and "service literature" of the time. This assessment was not only reflected in responses from contemporaries like Sang Hu and Ke Ling, but was also confirmed by later scholars such as Chen Zishan and Wu Xiaoli, who believed that during this period, Eileen Chang briefly entered into "politicized writing." Sang Hu’s comments are particularly noteworthy. He remarked, "Reading Eighteen Springs by Liang Jing, one feels that he is changing... In terms of thoughts and emotions, he seems calmer and more composed than before, which is a welcome improvement." He also expressed, "I sincerely recommend Eighteen Springs to Friendship News readers and congratulate Liang Jing on the new start of his creative life"[14]. Regarding the serialized Eighteen Springs and Xiao Ai in Friendship News, Eileen Chang had effectively dressed a traditional love triangle story with the trappings of "reversal literature" and "worker-peasant-soldier literature," which likely represented the "welcome progress" she made in her "thoughts and emotions." The so-called "new start in creative life" was, in fact, her transition from writing about daily life and romantic relationships to "writing for political service."

The 1987 reissue can be seen as Eileen Chang's reassertion of her aesthetic stance in a complex era and cultural context. In Taiwan, from the period of martial law until the lifting of martial law on July 15, 1987, the publishing industry faced clear institutional and factual restrictions. [15] According to regulations such as the Taiwan Provincial Martial Law Period Newspaper and Magazine Control Regulations, the Taiwan Garrison Command and the Government Information Office had the authority to confiscate and ban printed materials, with reasons often including "disrupting public opinion," "affecting civilian morale," or "affecting the morale of armed personnel." In this context, as a primarily literary-focused publisher, Crown Publishing Company had to avoid political discourse related to "pro-Communist" views or sensitive cross-strait issues in order to publish smoothly in the

Taiwanese market. This meant that the revisions of Xiao Ai were not only aimed at avoiding potential political and censorship risks but also represented a deliberate "de-leftist" stance, aimed at preventing political misinterpretations of the author, the publisher, or the text, thus reaffirming the author's position as an "independent writer." In other words, this reissue not only signifies Eileen Chang's adjustment in creative stance but also reflects her practical considerations of the publishing environment at the time. In a context where political subjects were subject to strict censorship, the revisions of the text became an inevitable outcome of adapting to institutional constraints.

On an aesthetic conscious level, the revision of Xiao Ai reflects Eileen Chang's profound reflection on her own creative philosophy. She explicitly stated that she "greatly dislikes Xiao Ai and even more dislikes appearing under Xiao Ai's name alone"[16]. "In a situation where there was no other choice, I had to 'get married by imperial command'"[3], This was, in fact, a rejection of the control that politicized narratives exerted on her personal creativity. Eileen Chang always believed that she "could only write about things she was familiar with," rather than "works that served as monuments to the times." As early as 1944, in What to Write, she confessed, "I cannot write proletarian stories"[17], further emphasizing that she was always focused on individual fate and the complexity of human nature in her creative stance. Had the initial conception of Xiao Ai been followed, the novel might have become a realistic model of a proletarian woman striving to improve her life. However, in Chang's hands, Xiao Ai's fate did not achieve the meaning of class liberation. She approached the story from a female perspective, narrating from the margins of the lower social strata, focusing on individual suffering and emotions, rather than collective redemption and revolution. For this reason, Xiao Ai (1987 Version) removed the original bright ending, refocusing the work on the individual's existential predicament.[18]

5. "Superficial Compliance" and "Internal Resistance": Internal Contradictions within the Political Framework

However, the author believes that Eileen Chang's compliance was not a genuine internal endorsement but rather a strategic, surface-level compromise. Although she responded to the common theme of "suffering and liberation" prevalent in that era, she subtly maintained her consistent detached tone in the details. What she truly focused on was not politics, but the desires and survival dilemmas of ordinary people. This internal contradiction led to a text that presented a form of incomplete detachment, seemingly making a "reluctant concession" to the narrative of the times [2], but emotionally deviating from the ideological demands, ultimately resulting in a nearly heterogeneous literary form.

From the perspective of character creation, Eileen Chang simultaneously depicted Xiao Ai, the maid, as an exploited figure under the old system, fulfilling the requirements of class narrative. On the other hand, when the "oppressed" Xiao Ai, within the political context, encounters political ideologies like "New Democracy," her attitude is one of "indifference."

"Feng Jinhua often talked to them at home about New Democracy and the history of social development. Xiao Ai... thought theory was just an ornament for men... indifferent to it."[19]

Here, although Eileen Chang has Feng Jinhua express political declarations about "New Democracy" and "socialism," she has Xiao Ai simplify the dissemination of political ideas into "an ornament for men," with Xiao Ai's indifference to grand theories effectively diffusing the originally strong political narrative. Chang did not allow Xiao Ai to be swept up in political fervor; rather, with a female perspective of calm observation, she reduced collective political discourse to a mere accessory of daily life. Behind this approach is Chang's continued adherence to a creative concept centered on individual fate and everyday life, detached from grand political narratives.

In terms of character motivation, Chang superficially presents the "awakening" of the proletariat but implants bourgeois sentiments within the characters. While Xiao Ai often expresses gratitude for the stability and happiness of her current life, her inner desires still revolve around "personal wealth."

"If I become successful, I'll go run my own business; who knows, maybe I'll get rich... Life is short, a grass growing for an autumn, I also want to live a relaxed life for a few days."[20]

The word "wealth" appears multiple times in Xiao Ai (1951 Version). In the novel, this simple yearning for material stability and personal happiness replaces the grand ideals of class liberation and serves as the core motivation for the characters' actions throughout the book. Whether it's Xiao Ai's desire to escape the oppressive environment of the Xie family before liberation and become self-reliant, or her pursuit of wealth after liberation, these details continue Chang's focus on the "ordinary life" of people.[21]

Additionally, in the Xiao Ai (1951 Version), there are occasional direct expressions of doubt regarding "idealized" patriotic narratives:

"Feng Jinhua is foolish, always talking about patriotism, patriotism—what good does this country do for poor people like us? A lifetime of suffering and hunger, if you follow the rules, you'll never have a way out."[20]

This passage reveals Eileen Chang's negative attitude toward the idealized "patriotic narrative." By questioning "what benefits does this country bring to poor people like us," she contrasts political promises with the reality of a lifetime of "suffering and hunger" endured by the poor. This expresses a profound skepticism toward political promises and weakens the "suffering—social redemption" theme that Xiao Ai (1951 Version) attempts to construct, shifting the narrative focus from collective interests back to the harsh realities of individual survival. This is in line with Xiao Ai's secular desire to "run a business on her own," showing Chang's consistent focus on "private narrative" in her novels.

More importantly, Chang's tragic understanding of individual fate runs throughout the text. Although Xiao Ai (1951 Version) ends on a seemingly bright note, the novel subtly reveals a pessimistic judgment of human nature and political power:

"People are forgetful creatures. After a few good days, they forget the nightmare-like experiences of the past."[19]

This expression not only questions the thoroughness of political redemption but also suggests that human nature is stronger than ideology. Meanwhile, Xiao Ai's struggle to survive in humiliation and her desire to "make money" are precisely the female independence Chang affirmed. As she once said: "Using other people's money... is not as free and easy as using money earned by yourself."[22] This yearning for self-sufficiency and the ability to change one's fate with one's own hands stems from individual desire, not political belief.

From the author's later revisions, the internal contradictions of Xiao Ai become even more apparent. The 1987 version's revisions of the original text actually serve to demonstrate that the 1951 version was not her true creative intention. In her interview with Shui Jing, she admitted that Red Dust was "commissioned to be written" and expressed "discontent" with it. [23] Whether in her rejection of the work or her later retreat from the political center, it is clear that she maintained her detachment from political stances.

6. Conclusion

This article compares Eileen Chang's Xiao Ai (Conceptual Draft), Xiao Ai (1951 Version), and Xiao Ai (1987 Version), exploring the limitations imposed on literary production by the political environment in the early 1950s, and revealing the writer's creative strategy under ideological pressure. Although Xiao Ai (1951 Version) reflects what scholars call a "reluctant concession" and "a remarkable turning point"[24], this compliance is not a complete endorsement. Chang, in fact, concealed her personal literary stance by dissolving grand narratives, focusing on ordinary lives, and retaining a pessimistic undertone. Through these means, she carried out a thorough "de-politicization" of the text in Xiao Ai (1987 Version), demonstrating her adherence to an individualistic creative philosophy. Therefore, this article not only provides a new explanatory framework for the evolving versions of Xiao Ai, but also offers a comprehensive analysis of Chang's political awareness, individualism, and aesthetic pursuit in her literary creation.[25] Furthermore, it offers profound

insights for Chinese literary history research, especially in examining the creative shifts of writers in 20th-century China under political pressure.

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