

# *The Mapping of Shanghai's Concession Space in the Spatial Writing of Eileen Chang's Novels*

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**Abstract:** Taking the space of Shanghai's Concession as the research field, this study explores the symbolic meaning of the concession space in Eileen Chang's novels and her critique of colonial modernity. Through literary analysis and close reading of texts, the thesis focuses on public space, domestic space and spiritual space in Eileen Chang's novels, revealing how her spatial writing maps out the process of Sino-Western cultural conflict, the penetration of colonial power, and the alienation of the individual's spirit. The study finds that through the juxtaposition of spatial symbols and metaphors, Eileen Chang deconstructs the myth of modernity in the Concession. Her spatial narratives not only present the cultural hybridity of the Concession in Shanghai, but also profoundly reveal the structural oppression of colonial modernity on human nature and the social structure, and provide a de-romanticized critique of Chinese urban literature. It provides a critical perspective of "de-romanticization" for Chinese urban literature.

**Keywords:** Eileen Chang, Shanghai, Concession, Spatial Writing, colonial modernity

## 1. Introduction

As a special space where Chinese and Western cultures collide, the Shanghai Concession (1843-1943) not only epitomizes the process of modern urbanization, but also is a typical field that embodies colonial modernity. In view of this cultural background, the research finds out the "cultural hybridization theory" proposed by Homi K. Bhabha is a key to answering the question of why the culture of the Concession had a far-reaching influence on literary creation. The theory emphasizes that the hybrid form produced by the contact of different cultures is not a simple fusion, but a dynamic process filled of tension and conflict. In the colonial context, Shanghai citizens formed new cultural identities through interaction with the colonizers' culture, and such a hybrid state of cultural identity had a great impact on literature and even regional culture.

Li Yongdong points out that the culture of the rented world is mainly the product of external factors forcibly embedded in the Concession, in other words, the culture of the rented world is a man-made product dependent on the rented space [1]. It means that the concession culture is an artificial product attached to the tenant space.

Relying on the results of previous research, this article shifts the focus to different spaces in the Shanghai Concession. By centering on Eileen Chang's works, it focuses on three major types of spaces: public space, family space, and spiritual space, and analyzes the deep logic of colonial modernity, and reveals how she deconstructs the "myth of modernity" within the Concession through a narrative that intertwines reality and fiction.

## 2. Types of space under the rentier culture

Shanghai is a modern metropolis full of heterogeneity, not only a mix of Chinese and foreign, East and West, but also a convergence of tradition and modernity, the interior and the coast, and the vernacular and the urban. This amalgamation creates a complex, unique spatial form [2]. In a field like the foreign settlement, everything in its space carries a certain cultural color to a greater or lesser extent. Spaces in the foreign settlement are not simply functional, but they often convey certain deep-seated cultural and social values through their specific form, layout, or use. It can regard all kinds of scenes and buildings as symbols. The formation and development of the foreign settlement are a special historical and cultural phenomenon. In other words, the exchange and collision of such cultures are symbols. Under the influence of the concession culture, the construction of space not only reflects the western colonial culture, but also reflects the process of transition from feudal traditional society to modernization.

The collision and interweaving of the two cultures have a great influence on Eileen Chang's writing about space in her novels. The study categorizes spaces in the Shanghai Concession into three types: public space, namely family space and spiritual space. On this basis, this paper will systematically explain the different spatial symbols.

### 2.1. Public space: material symbols of colonial modernity

The most typical spaces in the Concession are those with the features of modern Western civilization. Unlike traditional Shanghai buildings and urban planning, which was influenced by Chinese culture and featured elements of the water town of Jiangnan, with its common roofs with rounded corners, the use of timber and masonry, and the use of courtyards and alleyways. Other Western-style buildings in the Concession are influenced by the colonial period and incorporate European, American, and various modern architectural styles. It is worth noting that the urban planning in the Concession Area was much neater and more systematic, influenced by Western urban planning concepts, with wide streets, regular patterns, and a design that emphasized public spaces and commercial uses. In the Concession Area, especially the British Concession, the street exemplified a fusion of Eastern and Western cultures.

In Eileen Chang's novels, the most typical public space scenes are the tram and the high-class hotel. These two scenes are the most modern and colonial elements in the Concession. Within the study of the Concession culture, scholars frequently highlight these iconic scenes as central to understanding its symbolic and historical layers.

#### 2.1.1. Trams

In the Shanghai Concession, trams, as an important means of transportation, occupying significant space and time in people's daily lives. The tram tracks in the public concession were widely distributed, extending from the core business district and main roads to the Bund, while winding through the French Concession. The tram tracks cut shiny scars into the asphalt, resembling colonizers' iron wheels trampling the city's skin.

The tracks of the tram connect the lives of various regions and classes. The linear extension of the tracks is a metaphor for the irreversible trajectory of destiny; the daily repetition of the tram's path corresponds to the fate of the characters being held hostage by the times, and the tram's mechanical operation symbolizes the order of the modern city. Additionally, the tram also divides Shanghai's civic classes: the tram, as a modern amenity, exacerbates class divisions - the rich ride in cars, the poor squeeze into trams. In *Cinnamon Steam* A Little Sorrowful Autumn, A Little says as soon as she arrived that she was run over by the life-breaking tram. On the third-class tram, she was pressed tightly that she can't stand up.

Tram tracks are like a silver dagger cutting through the texture of Shanghai's traditional streets and alleys, imposing Western industrial civilization on the urban bloodline of an Eastern city. The railroad tracks are not only a means of transportation, but also a network for imperialism to measure, cut, and reorganize the Oriental city. In such a network, Eileen Chang not only constructs the spatial coordinates of colonial modernity through horizontally extended tram tracks, but also pays special attention to vertical skyscrapers, which constitute the dual coordinates of colonial power. Horizontally extended railroad tracks symbolize the expansion and extension of capitalism, while vertically soaring buildings highlight the technological hegemony of the West; this intertwined and three-dimensional spatial network actually constitutes an invisible framework for the daily lives of the citizens of the Concession. Through the metaphor of steel tracks and electric currents, Eileen Chang's tram narrative portrays the tram system as the Shanghai Concession's "cultural blood vessel". More than once in *Half a Life* she writes of the picture of Manjing's tram ride, such as the scene where the steel bridge with its electric lamps lit snowy bright, the huge black shadow of the bridge, a big black bar across the grayish-yellow water. And what appears to be a bridge that is inaccessible to the tram is actually part of the imagery that makes up the tracks. The tracks of the tram stretched out in the twilight like two glowing snakes. Such a track is like an anaconda that entangles and suffocates humanity, but its inability to leave human activity, without which the empty railroad track would only look like a "steel skeleton" from which the soul has been drained.

If the tracks are seen as colonial power's electrocardiogram, the carriages and the vibrations of electricity as the vibrations of the city of Shanghai under the colonial culture, and the bells of the trams as the echoes of the traumas of colonial history, then researchers can understand why these mobile spaces can become a key to detecting the culture of Shanghai's rented world, and through this key, it can touch the complex dimensions of Shanghai's concession culture.

### 2.1.2. High-end restaurants and hotels

It has been verified that the hotels or high-class restaurants in Eileen Chang's works are inextricably related to the hotels in the Shanghai Concession at that time, some even modeled after certain hotels. For example, the Kaiser Café in *Lust, Caution* corresponds to the Kaiser Western Restaurant, established in 1928 on Nanjing West Road and is famous for its sea-style pastry such as chestnut cake, Napoleon.

Most of the high-class hotels and restaurants in the Shanghai Concession were designed by foreign architects or architectural firms, and their construction was guided by European, multinational architectural firms, and developers with colonial backgrounds. For example, the Shanghai International Hotel was designed by Laszlo. Hudec completed in 1934, 83.8 meters high, was the tallest building in the Far East. Therefore, the buildings in the Concession have a distinctly Western flavor, reflecting the collision of Chinese and Western cultures and the characteristics of Western civilization. Similarly, in *The Red Rose* and *The White Rose*, the Western mood of roads contrasts with the disintegration of traditional morality. Completed in mid-1944, *The Red Rose* and *The White Rose* depicts Zhenbao's 1934 encounter with Jiaorui, whose apartment and surroundings follow the I.S.S. apartment as it appeared in the pre-1940s. As one of the most cosmopolitan streets in Shanghai, Ferguson Road, with its European-style architecture and foreign commercial culture, represents the process of colonization and modernization. Its open streets and bustling stores give an impression of prosperity and modernity.

The construction of hotels in the Shanghai Concession was essentially a complex symbiosis of colonial modernity, capitalist expansion and local cultural adaptation, and its spatial form and consumption practices constructed a paradoxical experience of multiple civilizations superimposed on one another. These buildings are not only material entities, but also places where power, desire, and cultural identity meet. In these spaces, traditional Chinese culture and Western modernity

intertwine and influence each other, and such a field creates a unique spark in Eileen Chang's writing. In Eileen Chang's writing, hotels and restaurants are often frequented by the upper class, in which people socialize, trade and exchange power. At the same time, unlike what is imagined today, such hotels were not merely an encroachment on the space and traditional culture of the Shanghai Concession, but rather the soil that drove the rise of modern civilization and thought in Shanghai. Over time, these hotels became gathering places for the upper class and the rising bourgeoisie.

## **2.2. Domestic space: an Aug-of-war between tradition and modernity**

Eileen Chang's novels often reveal the tug-of-war between tradition and modernity through delicate strokes in the depiction of family and personal relationships, which is not only reflected in the emotional conflicts of the characters, but also in the construction of the family space, the changes in the environment, and the psychological state of the characters. Eileen Chang's domestic space is not only an extension of physical space, but also a symbol of cultural concepts and social changes.

Apartments in Eileen Chang's novels are not only physical spaces, but also carry the psychology, social relations and characteristics of the characters. Most of her apartments are located in the Shanghai Concession, which symbolizes the modern city life at that time and reflects the modernity and development of the city. The closed nature of the apartments becomes a contradictory space of privacy and avoidance, which not only isolates the hustle and bustle of the outside world, but also exposes the inner loneliness and depression of the characters, reflecting the sense of alienation between people. Through meticulous and detailed descriptions, Chang's descriptions shows the real atmosphere of urban life, reflecting the mobility of social classes and complex interpersonal relationships.

### **2.2.1. Closure and decay of traditional spaces**

In *The Book of Golden Locks*, with the descriptions of the closed courtyard, the dark and obscure old-fashioned furniture, and opium couches could be found everywhere, Eileen portrays the restriction and bondage of the traditional family on the individual through the closedness and oppression of the family space. The closed space symbolizes the presence of authority and constraints in the traditional family, while the dark furniture and opium couches imply the oppression of human nature and freedom by traditional concepts. These elements present the dull and dead atmosphere of traditional society, which can not adapt to the rapidly changing modern society.

In her portrayal in *Jasmine Fragrance Piece*, Eileen Chang hints at the decline of the traditional way of life by describing the withering and desolation of the flowers and trees in the family mansion. When they first moved here from Shanghai, the yard had been full of flowers and trees. In no more than two or three years of work, the withered ones had withered, the dead ones had died, and those that were cut down had been cut down, and the sun's rays were full of desolation. These flowers and trees symbolize the prosperity and vitality of the past, and their death and cutting down over time reflects the decline of traditional families and values. To the family mansion, the phrase "sunlit and desolate" reinforces the emptiness and dilapidation of the space, symbolizing the powerlessness of modernization in the traditional domestic space.

### **2.2.2. Modernization rigidity and distance**

In *Scraps of Incense - The First Incense*, Mrs. Liang's garden is described as a rectangular lawn, short white stone lettered railings, neatly trimmed evergreens, showy English roses, arranged with meticulous care and not a trace of disarray. This ostensibly showcases modern gardening design and neatly organized spaces, conveying a sense of regularity, refinement, and control that seems to

embody modern ideas. However, this overly strict and deliberate arrangement also suggests a rigid and uninspiring space, reflecting the sense of apathy and oppression that can inherent with modern society's pursuit of order and rationality.

In another novel by Eileen Chang, *The Red Rose and the White Rose*, the spatial form of the apartment exemplifies the process of the penetration of modernity. The apartment's Art Deco interior is stark and austere. "The grey ochre streamlined house, like an unimaginably large train, was rumbling towards him, blocking out the sun and the moon". The spatial design of the apartment echoes the sense of detachment of the urbanites, reflecting the indifference and distance of the character emotions in the context of modernization. The apartment, a closed but relatively independent space of the outside world, symbolizes the alienation of human relationships and the rise of individualism in modern urban life. In this spatial environment, the characters are often unable to establish a deep emotional connection with others despite their presence. This indifferent spatial layout not only highlights the loneliness of modern urban life, but also hints at how modernity has made individuals increasingly isolated and unsupported in their pursuit of self-realization.

This strategy of writing about domestic space as a cultural symptom has enabled Eileen Chang's novels to transcend the mere literary field and become a key cultural text for reading the transformation of modernity in twentieth-century Chinese society. The dialectical tension embedded in her spatial poetics, the collapse of traditional architecture and the false promise of modernity, still provides a cautionary perspective on the contemporary process of urbanization.

### 2.2.3. Symbolism of space

Through her subtle portrayal of domestic space, Eileen Chang sublimates the construction of the physical environment into a metaphorical system of cultural conflict. In the deep mansion of *The Book of Golden Locks*, the dim light cast in through the carved windowpanes is like the shackles of feudal ethics, constructing a suffocating space of traditional rituals. These halls are not only closed spaces in the physical sense, but also the figurative existence of power and discipline.

Mrs. Liang's colonial garden in *Scraps of Incense - The First Incense*, with its neatly trimmed English roses and geometric lawn, ostensibly highlights the aesthetics of modern civilization's order, but in fact exposes the violent nature of cultural colonization: every plant is forced into the aesthetic framework of Western horticulture, just as Weilong is forced to transform her identity into that of a lady of Shanghai style, and meanwhile she also finds herself part of the orientalized imagery that characterized the colony. The deeper logic of this symbolic spatial writing points to what Homi K. Bhabha calls "the third space theory". In the gap between tradition and modernity, existing cultural symbols are reconstructed, giving rise to a hybrid form of feudalism and tradition. When the moon of the feudal family and the neon of the colonial space confront each other under the same night, it reflects not only the transformation of a city's traditional imagery, but also the spiritual pain of the whole nation in the transition to modernity.

### 2.3. Spiritual space: alienation and escape in colonial contexts

Through the writing of spiritual space, Eileen Chang internalized the cultural conflict of the colonial era into the tearing and alienation of the characters' psychology, forming the progressive structure of the triple spiritual dilemma of "Hell-Utopia-Threshold", which profoundly reveals the paradox of survival under the double squeezing of tradition and modernity, and the local and colonialism. It profoundly reveals the paradox of the individual's existence under the double pressure of tradition and modernity, localization and colonization. Chang takes the spiritual space as an entry point to show the complexity of human nature in the colonial context. From the suffocation of hell to the



illusion of utopia to the suspension of threshold, these three spaces together form a “closed-loop spiritual cage”, announcing the inevitable failure of seeking spiritual liberation within the framework of colonial modernity. These three spaces together constitute a closed-ring spiritual cage, announcing the inevitable failure of seeking spiritual liberation within the framework of colonial modernity. This sobriety of despair is precisely the sharpest warning by Eileen Chang against the myth of modernity of Chinese intellectuals in the 20th century.

### **2.3.1. Hell imagery: golden shackles and human alienation**

In *The Book of Golden Locks*, Cao Qiqiao’s spiritual space is visualized as a golden hell. The deep house of the Jiang residence is not only a physical carrier of the traditional patriarchal system, but also a metaphorical field for the colonial economic invasion - the “golden yoke” that Cao Qiqiao exchanges herself for through her marriage is in fact a product of the collusion between feudalism and capitalist materialism. Her use of gold as a weapon to take revenge on the world around her (e.g., making Chang An wrap her feet, destroying her son Chang Bai’s marriage, and forcing her daughter-in-law Zhi Shou to die.) is essentially a backlash against human nature by the alienated commodity personality. Using the imagery of the “moon thirty years ago”, Eileen Chang frames this eternal spiritual hell in terms of the distortion of traditional ethics by colonial modernity. Gold is both a symbol of Western-style material civilization and a continuation of the feudal family power structure.

Cao Qiqiao’s golden hell is a dual manifestation of the oppression and temptation of colonial modernity. As a member of the family, Qiqiao was trapped by the temptation of money, power and sensual. The glittering gold is not only material wealth, but also symbolizes a challenge to traditional morality and social order. In the pursuit of material wealth, Cao Qiqiao loses her spiritual freedom and independence, and her heart is filled with anxiety about her desires and deviation from traditional ethics, which is rooted in the cultural erosion and value reconstruction brought about by colonial modernity.

### **2.3.2. Utopian disillusionment: the trap of desire in colonized landscapes**

*The Mid-Levels Villa* by Ge Weilong (*Scraps of Incense - The First Incense*) is a typical pseudo-utopian space in the colonial context. The European-style buildings in Hong Kong’s Mid-Levels ostensibly represent modern civilization and freedom, but in fact, they conceal the colonial power’s discipline of the Oriental body. The villa is filled with colonial trophies such as carved iron fences, Persian carpets and tall white stone columns with a Southern American flavor, suggesting the hidden violence of cultural colonization. When she finally puts on the gold bracelet voluntarily, it is also the time when the utopia in Weilong’s mind is disillusioned. The disillusionment of utopia reveals a cruel truth. The liberation promised by colonial modernity is just another form of slavery, which makes it impossible for those who are caught up in the utopian imagination to escape. Deeper still, pseudo-utopia is in fact a kind of illusory idealism, a blind worship of Western modernization and a loss of self-identity. Weilong attempts to seek the realization of her self-worth through contact and integration with Western culture, but she is ultimately trapped in a quagmire of self-deception and alienation. Under the oppression of the colonial culture, her utopian dream is merely an empty ideal, which can neither construct true cultural identity nor bring spiritual satisfaction. The collision between the cultural framework constructed by the colonizers and the ideals of modernity creates a huge gap, which creates an insurmountable fissure between the individual’s ideal and the reality, and also embodies the sufferings and dilemmas that colonial modernity brings to the identity of the people of the Concession.

### 2.3.3. Threshold space: the cultural suspension of trams and leased territories

In *Blockade* and *Cinnamon Steam A Little Sorrowful Autumn*, Eileen Chang portrays transitional spaces such as trams and alley entrances as threshold zones of colonial culture. And the interior of the tram is also a space worth noting. Inside the tram, where strangers briefly coexist, the tram car becomes the perfect place to observe modern human relationships. In *Blockade*, the tram is suspended, temporarily creating a “vacuum chamber” free from the rules of society. Wu Cuiyuan and Lv Zongzhen briefly transgress the boundaries of propriety here, performing a modern encounter, but after the tram restarts, order is restored and everything returns to the repressed normality before the blockade. The spatial narrative in *Blockade* is structured in two ways as orange-petals and circles. The orange-petal structure dilutes and divides the time of the storytelling, thus emphasizing the space in which the story takes place. In addition, the circle structure not only makes the narrative form develop into a perfect whole, but also has a strong sense of transportation, which can put the reader in the story situation [3].

Wu Cuiyuan’s threshold anxiety is a kind of spiritual dilemma in modernity, as she wanders between Chinese and Western cultures, unable to truly find her own position. “Life, like the Bible, is translated from Hebrew into Greek, from Greek into Latin, from Latin into English, and from English into Mandarin”. When Cuiyuan read it, the Mandarin was translated into Shanghainese in her head. That’s a bit of a divide. Her anxiety not only comes from the external colonial oppression, but also from the deeper level of confusion about her own identity and the fear of uncertainty about her future. Her heart is filled with the struggle of being at a loss, unable to fully integrate into the traditional social structure or find a place in the wave of modernization. Wu Cuiyuan’s spiritual dilemma demonstrates the profound impact of colonial modernity on the individual’s psyche - whether it is the adherence to tradition or the embrace of modernity, one cannot completely get rid of the inner conflict and pain.

This state of suspension is a metaphor for the dilemma of cultural identity in the Shanghai Concession. It is neither a purely traditional China nor a true Western territory, but rather a space with blurred boundaries by colonial power. The characters are like dust on the tram tracks, unable to take root in their homeland and difficult to integrate into the colonial system, and ultimately caught in an eternal drift.

### 2.3.4. The ultimate point of spiritual dilemma: the structural violence of colonial modernity

Through the writing of this triple spiritual space, Chang exposes the structural contradictions of colonial modernity and profoundly reveals a social reality of oppression and deprivation. In the name of progress, colonial modernity destroys traditional ethics and tries to erase the original cultural roots, while at the same time reshaping a new hierarchical system through economic hegemony and colonial order. This hierarchical order has not only changed people’s way of life, but has also profoundly affected the individual's spiritual world, resulting in profound psychological alienation.

The fates of these characters are intertwined to form a profound reflection on the structural contradictions of colonial modernity. In her works, the encounters of Cao Qiqiao, Ge Weilong, and Wu Cuiyuan are essentially a manifestation of the cognitive violence imposed by the colonial culture. The individual loses subjectivity in the gap between East and West, Old and New, and is unable to find his self in the dichotomy between the traditional and the modern, the Oriental and the Occidental. Individual is unable to find himself in the confrontation between tradition and modernity, East and West. Her writing goes far beyond a simple cultural criticism, and directly addresses the alienating nature of modernity itself. Through her delicate descriptions, Chang reveals the spiritual fragmentation brought about by the colonial logic. No matter whether an individual

chooses to adhere to traditional values or tries to embrace the glory of modernization, he or she cannot escape the fate of being destroyed by the colonial power system in the end. Under the oppression of colonial modernity, the individual's self-identity and cultural belonging become blurred, and ultimately fall victim to the power game.

### 3. Space writing techniques and their uniqueness

Therefore, time seems to be spatialized in Eileen Chang's novels involving cities. This spatialized urban phenomenon, or it can be seen as another path to pursue modernity, not pointing to temporal evolution but spatial excavation, in other words, through the depiction of urban factors such as apartments, clothing, and architecture, to show the appearance of the city during the transition between the old and the new [4]. Chang's approach to spatial writing is also heavily influenced by Shanghai culture, reflecting to some extent the shadow of modernity and Western culture.

#### 3.1. Large versus small spaces

The Shanghai Concessions were established by foreign powers in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, particularly the British and French Concessions, which occupied the core of the city. Shanghai was successively forced to set aside British, American and French expatriate residences under unequal treaties between China and foreign countries. Subsequently, the British and American Concessions were merged into the Public Concession, while France insisted on independent management rights, and the French Concession became a French-administered concession. The Chinese Settlements, the Public Concession and the French Concession coexisted in Shanghai. At the beginning of the establishment of the Concession, the separation of Chinese and foreigners was practiced, restricting the residence of Chinese in the Concession, but in 1853, a large number of Chinese flooded into the Concession due to the war, breaking the prohibition of the separation of Chinese and foreigners [5]. These boundaries nested and coexisted with traditional Chinese urban spaces, particularly the traditional neighborhoods of old Shanghai. On the Bund, buildings ranging from Western Gothic architecture to Baroque architecture to traditional Chinese courtyards and laneways are nested within the boundaries of the leased territory, creating a stark contrast.

In Eileen Chang's novels, the conflicts and differences between different classes and social cultures are often demonstrated through large and small spaces. In Chang's novels, the international hotel and the alleyway of the city form a distinct class rupture. The International Hotel symbolizes modernization, capitalist luxury, and is a display of the lifestyle of the upper class. Its open, luxurious, colonial layout represents the internationalization of Shanghai's urban construction and is a symbol of Western culture and capital. In contrast, the alleyway is a traditional small space, with narrow, dark alleys full of urban marketplace ambiance, representing the underclass of Shanghai in the old days. The oppressive and confined nature of the alley space reflects the hardship and poverty of the ordinary citizens' life in the marketplace. In the juxtaposition of these two kinds of spaces, Chang profoundly reveals the class rupture between the upper class and the lower class, as well as the lifestyles and emotional dilemmas of people of different classes through comparison. In line with the novel's own desolate, depressing, ironic and anti-climactic narrative features, the space constructed by Eileen Chang is mostly depressing and closed, whether it is a claustrophobic public house, a stifling apartment, or a blocked tram or a narrow bathroom, the space under her writing is often filled with a sense of suffocation, and even forms a seemingly rich and glamorous, but a closed and horrible cage, wrapping the characters tightly the characters tightly [6].



### 3.2. Nested structures and oppression

In Eileen Chang's novels, space often presents a nested "nesting" structure, which shows the depressing feeling and plight of the characters. In *Jasmine Fragrance Piece*, the colonial prosperity of Hong Kong highlights the plight of the marginalized by wrapping the traditional dilapidated house in an external luxurious space. Chuanqing lives in a lifeless mansion, often huddled in an extremely small and dilapidated bedroom. The narrowness and sense of dilapidation of this space is symbolic of his sense of powerlessness and oppression at the margins of society. This space is surrounded by the colonial prosperity outside, the street outside is gorgeous and fashionable, while the space inside the bedroom is cold, barren and even dirty. This nested spatial layout highlights Chuanqing's isolation and helplessness, and also symbolizes the situation of those oppressed under the colonial system. The contrast between the luxury of the external world and the poverty of the internal world emphasizes the division and injustice of social class.

In *The Book of Golden Locks*, the nesting of large and small spaces also depicts the oppressive atmosphere of the family. The two tents in the Jiang Mansion show the oppression and constraints of the traditional family structure through the nested spatial layout, as Cao Qiqiao builds a feudal kingdom with the use of the smoking couch, staircase and tents in the sitting room of the rented house. The two tents represent the secrecy and repression within the feudal family, filled with entanglements, pain, and the desire for freedom. This spatial nesting constitutes the structure of the family under Cao Qiqiao's control, full of layers of confinement and bondage, suggesting the individual's predicament in traditional morality and family ethics. The nested nature of space in the Shanghai Concession profoundly shaped the creative expressions of the Haipai writers represented by Eileen Chang. The spatial pattern in the Concession, where Western-style buildings and traditional alleys are intertwined, and high-rise neon signs are juxtaposed with the smoke and fire of the marketplace, forms a unique field of cultural hybridization. This spatial nesting provides writers with creative nutrients. It not only provides rich imagery for Haipai literature, but also gives birth to the unique aesthetics of "urban modernity": in the midst of the disintegration of traditional ethics and the penetration of colonial modernity, they record the spiritual fission of a city with fragmented narratives and sensory language.

### 3.3. Space juxtaposition and dispersion

The juxtaposition of space and the separation of the subjects of rights inevitably result in the struggle for spatial power. The struggle for spatial power has not ceased since the establishment of the Concession in Shanghai [7].

Eileen Chang also often uses spatial juxtaposition and dispersion in her works to portray the emotional state of her characters and social changes. In *The Red Rose and the White Rose*, Yanli's inner conflict is reflected through the juxtaposition of space. Her living space consists of both a modern apartment and a traditional family environment, which seem to be independent in form but are intertwined in Yanli's emotions and choices. The modernized apartment in which she lives represents her pursuit of personal independence and freedom, while the domestic space in which she lives is a continuation of traditional morals and family responsibilities. Through the juxtaposition of these spaces, Chang shows the irreconcilable contradiction between modernity and tradition, and the individual's emotional struggle between these two spaces and two cultures.

The juxtaposition of space also plays an important role in *Love in a Fallen City*. Bai Liusu's escape is not only an escape from marriage, but also a rebellion against the traditional family bondage. In this process, Eileen reflects the change of Bai Liusu's psychological state through the ever-changing spatial environment. From the small and depressing family space to the wide and

open cityscape, the dispersion of space complements the liberation of the character's psyche, highlighting Bai Liusu's desire for freedom and independence.

The attic where she lived alone became a perfect footnote to the juxtaposition of space on the night that Chang'an was forced to withdraw from her marriage. The sloping ceiling oppresses the young girl's breathing, and she feels her bones dislocate as Qiqiao's sobs inside the house. When Qiqiao steps onto the creaking wooden stairs, the cracked dressing mirror at the corner of the staircase distorts and splices the two women's figures - the attic is both a watchtower of the feudal patriarchy and a showcase for the history of female insanity. Eileen Chang makes the space itself the perpetrator of violence, and also makes it transformed into instruments of discipline in the darkness of the night.

Through the reconstruction of space, Eileen Chang tears away the false veil of colonial modernity. Eileen Chang uses the folds and fissures of space to prove that there is no real neutral zone in the rapidly changing process of modernity, and that every physical coordinate is a battleground for the game of power. The juxtaposed space in her writing is not only the iron curtain that traps the characters, but also the mirror that reflects the sickness of the times; and the trajectory of spatial dispersion implies the compassionate irony of predestination--when individuals like Bai Liusu finally break through the geographic barriers, they often find that they have just fallen from a cage into another more sophisticated cell. The profoundness of this kind of spatial writing lies in the fact that it reveals the eternal existential dilemma of modern individuals. They are forever in the paradox of fleeing and returning, destroying and reconstructing, searching for an ideal country that does not exist.

#### 4. Conclusion

Eileen Chang's novels construct a critique of colonial modernity through spatial writing in the Shanghai Concession. Her spatial narrative breaks through binary oppositions and deconstructs the myth of modernity in the Concession through techniques such as nesting and juxtaposition. She tears apart the false veil of colonial culture and exposes its violent nature of distorting traditional ethics and reconstructing hierarchical order in the name of progress. Her spatial writing not only presents the complexity of cultural hybridization, but also points directly to the alienation of colonial modernity itself: in the process of fleeing and returning physically and spiritually, the individual becomes a victim of the colonial structure. This kind of writing injects a critical perspective into Chinese urban literature and warns of the "deep-seated entanglement" of power and culture in the process of modernity.

This paper analyzes the cultural mapping of the rental world in Eileen Chang's novels from a spatial perspective, but there are still limitations. The paper fails to fully reveal the dynamic interaction between space and power; when analyzing Eileen Chang's classic texts. It lacks a horizontal comparison between her later works and her contemporaries in the Haipai school, which weakens the extension and validity of her conclusions. At the same time, the research method is mainly based on textual close reading, which leads to a slightly weaker argument for the materiality of spatial writing. In the future, the study will introduce interdisciplinary theories to deepen the critique of spatial power mechanisms, and combine the empirical materials, such as historical maps and urban planning history materials, to construct a two-way dialogue between literary space and material space, and explain the colonial modernity embodied in literature.

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