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Rewriting Cultural Hybridity:

Postcolonial Mirror Images in Somerset Maugham and Eileen Chang

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Abstract

Eileen Chang (1920-1995) is one of the most read authors in the history of Chinese literature. There is a fair amount of scholarship on her work, and a few scholars have started exploring the representation of colonial matters in her Shanghai and Hong Kong short stories from the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945). However, in English academia, there are no longer studies looking specifically at Chang’s representation of wartime cultural tensions in comparison to the colonial writings of the popular British writer W. Somerset Maugham (1874-1965). Considering the postcolonial and transnational contexts of both Chang’s and Maugham’s educational and personal backgrounds, Chang’s preference for Maugham’s far East tales, as well as the lack of interest in Maugham’s colonial narratives in both Chinese and English scholarship, this research will question the notion that to write authentically or sincerely about postcolonial issues of a certain country, one has to be a native of that country. It will also explore that, if bearing the early awareness of Orientalism, to what extent Maugham was deliberately being ironic in writing about the cultural parody by juxtaposing with Chang’s colonial narratives set in the (semi-)colonial Shanghai and Hong Kong.

Lay Summary

Somerset Maugham’s colonial writings have been often criticized for representing an Orientalist way of viewing the East – the Orient being demonized and worshiped simultaneously. From the pre-modern foreign landscape to the natives, especially women, the exotic elements are largely marginalized in Maugham’s colonial narratives. Although his stories imply a lack of consciousness in writing something more than “the exotic”; nevertheless, Maugham reveals his anti-imperialist stance in criticizing the colonial masculinity and sexual exploitation of the native females. Eileen Chang’s short stories state no intention of constructing a comprehensive picture of the war, individual awakening, or resistance against imperialism or colonialism. Chang’s works show her insistence on composing how individuals continue living their daily mundane lives and immediate realities despite the intrusion of disruption and anxiety caused by war. Both writers’ works present the ambivalence of colonial identity that is caught between the modern and tradition in the colonial land.
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Introduction

This study will explore the “mirror images” of the Occidental/colonists and the Oriental/natives portrayed in Eileen Chang’s (Zhang Ailing 张爱玲, 1920-1995) and Somerset Maugham’s (1874-1965) works, and examine both writers’ interpretations and rewritings of cultural hybridity. The research aims to answer the question of how their works represent the exotic East and the problematic conventional colonial narrative that has been perpetuated within the discourse of Orientalism. Over the last century, few writers have had as much influence and popularity as Eileen Chang among literary critics and lay readers, especially in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Mainland China.\(^1\) A great number of critical studies and analytical readings have been conducted on her works over the past few decades, looking at various aspects such as feminism, narrative techniques, self-translation, psychoanalysis, and more.\(^2\) In recent years, with increasing interest in post-colonialism and Orientalism in modern Chinese literature, some critics have started to explore the representation of colonial matters in Chang’s Shanghai and Hong Kong short stories considering her transnational background.\(^3\) However, in English academia, few have touched upon Chang’s writings about colonial encounters between East and West,

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\(^1\) These will be discussed in the literature review. Chang rose to fame with the publication of her first short story “Aloeswood Incense: The First Brazier” (Chenxiang xie diyi lu xiang 沉香屑: 第一炉香) in 1942 in Shanghai. With the trend of “Zhang Studies”, Chang retains a great influence in diverse Chinese-speaking communities.

\(^2\) I will provide a detailed account of the recent research in the literature review.

\(^3\) Chang was born to a Europeanized mother and an aristocratic, opium-ridden father. She entered St. Mary’s Hall and started writing in both English and Chinese. She was accepted by the University of London with full scholarship, but later attended the University of Hong Kong to study English Literature instead because of the ongoing Second Sino-Japanese War.
and most of the discussions hardly reach beyond situating Chang as a Sinocentric “nativist” writer. In addition, despite the growing number of comparative projects on Chang and other Western writers, there are no significant studies in English specifically examining Chang’s representation of the cultural tensions in the liminal areas during the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945) that compare her work with the colonial writings of the popular British writer W. Somerset Maugham.

Born to a decaying aristocratic family in 1920 Shanghai, Eileen Chang was exposed to Western education and culture and started writing at a very young age. She was accepted by the University of London in 1938 but attended the University of Hong Kong instead because of the Second Sino-Japanese War. She returned to Shanghai in 1942 due to the breakout of the Pacific War. Chang began her writing career in Japanese-occupied Shanghai especially in 1942-44, during which she published most of her best-known stories such as “Aloeswood Incense: The First Brazier” (Chenxiang xie diyi lu xiang 沉香屑：第一炉香), “Red Rose and White Rose” (Hongmeigui yu baimeigui 红玫瑰与白玫瑰) and “Jasmine Tea” (Moli xiangpian 茉莉香片). With the publication of these short stories, she

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4 With exceptions such as Kim Louie and Edward Gunn, etc. and I will discuss them in more detail in the literature review.

5 Comparative projects on Chang and Western writers include authors such as Virginia Woolf, J. G. Ballard, George Eliot, Marguerite Duras, George Bernard Shaw, Vladimir Nabokov, and D. H. Lawrence, etc., but these studies do not look specifically at the post-colonial or transnational issues. I will further illustrate this part in the literature review. The only few pieces of writings in English on Chang and Maugham include the last chapter of Hsia-Chuang Deppman’s PhD dissertation Domestic Space in Virginia Woolf and Ailing Zhang “Domesticating East-West Colonial Encounters: Ailing Zhang and Somerset Maugham” in 1999, which was elaborated into a journal article “Rewriting Colonial Encounters: Ailing Zhang and Somerset Maugham” in 2001.
became “the most prominent author and public intellectual in the besieged city.”⁶ After the war ended in 1945, Chang’s reputation faded significantly due to “her connections with the collaborationist forces in the occupied territory.”⁷ The situation worsened with the Communist Party takeover after 1949, making it increasingly difficult for Chang to continue her writing career in Shanghai. In 1952 she moved to Hong Kong and later to the U. S. Because of her marriage to Hu Lancheng 胡兰成, who was branded as an “arch-traitor”, her works were banned and not highly regarded in Mainland China and Taiwan. However, Chang’s works were back in public sight in the 1960s. This second wave of this “Chang Fever” (张热) began with C. T Hsia’s influential criticism on Chang’s short stories in 1961. C. T. Hsia remarked powerfully in A History of Modern Chinese Fiction that Chang is “the best and most important writer in Chinese.”⁸ He regarded Chang’s achievement in short stories to be on the same level as Katherine Mansfield, Katherine Anne Porter, Eudora Welty, and Carson McCullers. Hsia’s high praise called wide attention to Chang from both literary critics and lay readers, especially in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and the United States. It was not until China’s Opening-up and Reform in 1978 that Chang was again frequently mentioned in essays or monographs on Chinese modern literature published in Mainland China. After nearly three decades of silence, the trend of “Chang Fever” again reached new heights. Some of Chang’s writings were discussed and analyzed

⁷ Ibid.
at universities. Her novels were also adapted multiple times for the screen in the 1980s and 90s.

Somerset Maugham was a world-famous writer whose works have been translated into countless languages, and his novel, *Of Human Bondage* (1915), was also one of the most widely read books of the twentieth century. His works have been staged, filmed, and dramatized over and over again since the last century. Born in Paris, Somerset Maugham spent his early childhood in France. However, Maugham was orphaned at the age of ten in June 1884 and “was sent to live with his paternal uncle in England,” where he had to “adapt to a new language, family, home, country and school.” After spending one year at Heidelberg, Maugham entered St. Thomas’s, a medical school in London, and qualified as a doctor in 1897 after five years of study. “Read widely and written furiously in medical school”, Maugham decided to abandon medicine and was encouraged to become a professional writer, especially with the publication and subsequent small success of his first novel *Liza of Lambeth* (1897). Since then, “constant travel and prolonged residence

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9 As Liu Chuan’e 刘川鄂 notes, “T. A. Hsia, Li Ang, Leo Ou-fan Lee, C. T. Hsia, Zhang Jian all discussed Eileen Chang’s works in their class. Li Ang explained the exhausting love relationship between Fan Liuyuan and Bai Liusu to her students; Leo Ou-fan Lee designed one course on Eileen Chang’s fiction at the University of California, Los Angeles; Zhang Jian supervised six of his postgraduate students’ essay on Eileen Chang’s fiction, and later published an essay collection named *The World of Zhang Ailing’s Fiction* Translation is my own. See Liu Chuan’e 刘川鄂, *Zhang Ailing zhuan 张爱玲传 [Biography of Eileen Chang]*. (Beijing: Beijing shiyue wenyi chubanshe, 2000) 2.


13 Ibid., 40.

14 Ibid., 45.
abroad [became] a dominant pattern in his life.”

Hardly suffering from writer’s block, Maugham travelled to Spain, Italy, and Scotland, achieving triumph in plays and theatre and enjoying financial security. After the publication of *The Moon and Sixpence* (1919), which is considered as Maugham’s “first commercially successful novel,” he travelled to China, Malaya, and Borneo “in search of fictional material” since 1919. In October 1926, Maugham bought Villa Mauresque in Cap Ferrat, France, which “remained [his] permanent home from 1926 until his death in 1965, though he continued to travel in search of new locales and new material.” However, although Maugham enjoyed worldwide reputation and commercial success, his fiction and short stories were hardly included in the modern literature canon at universities in the UK or North America because his “rapidly written work” were often criticized as being “facile and superficial.”

The reasons why I choose these two authors as the focus of this study are twofold: firstly, the postcolonial and transnational contexts of Chang’s and Maugham’s educational and personal experiences make them particularly relevant to the topics that I am interested in. As a Western-educated Chinese woman, Chang had first-hand experience during the Second Sino-Japanese War in Shanghai and later the Pacific War (1941-1945) in Hong Kong. She wrote actively in Japanese-occupied Shanghai in the 1940s, and her short stories also often deal with the cultural tensions that arose in British-colonized Hong Kong during

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16 Ibid., 149 & 155.
17 Ibid., 190.
18 Ibid., 47.
the war. Besides, Maugham traveled to the Far East and South Seas during the 1920s, and he is the first modern English author who wrote about China. Maugham arrived in China with Gerald Haxton, his secretary and lover, in the autumn of 1919, a few months after the May Fourth Movement (wusi yundong 五四运动) spread across China. They traveled in China for four months in 1919-1920. Arrived at Hong Kong via sailboat from Saigon, Maugham visited Shanghai, Tianjin, Beijing, and returned to Shanghai and took a sampan along the Yangtze River to Chongqing. Then he went back to Shanghai and later Hong Kong. The fruits of his journey in China include the travel book On a Chinese Screen (1922), the play East of Suez (1922), and the China-based novel The Painted Veil (1925). These works contain a great number of oriental elements, picked up from his own experience and observations in Southeast Asia. Therefore, Chang’s exploration of the Chinese and Eurasian communities in Shanghai and Hong Kong makes her work an “immediate comparison” to the colonial context in which Maugham’s stories are set in.

The ongoing debates over whether Chang’s and Maugham’s works should be classified as conventional colonial narratives are often brought up in the context of postcolonial

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19 Chang published her first essay “The Dream of a Genius” (Tiancai meng 天才梦) on West Wind (Xifeng 西风) in 1939 when she studied in the University of Hong Kong. She returned to Shanghai in 1942 because of the breakout of the Pacific War, and started writing film criticism and English articles for The London Times and The Twentieth Century. She wrote actively especially in 1943-44, during which most of her best-known works were written and she became an instant celebrity in Shanghai.

20 “[Maugham] went there before I. A. Richards and Peter Quennell visited the country in 1929 and 1931, before William Empson taught there in the late 1930s, before Auden and Isherwood, Osbert Sitwell and Harold Acton wrote about it. He traveled for four months in 1919-20, between the revolution of 1911 that overthrew the Manchu dynasty and the Shanghai revolution of 1927 that Malraux described in his novel Man’s Fate.” In Jeffrey Meyers, Somerset Maugham: A Life (New York: Vintage Books, 2005), 162.

In stereotypical colonial narratives, the Oriental subject has often been identified through exotic and erotic re-imagination as grotesque and mysterious exoticizations. For instance, the gruesome supervillain Dr. Fu Manchu from a series of novels created by Sax Rohmer in 1913 was still “by far the dominant and best-remembered fictional personification of the merciless, inscrutable, vengeful and cunning Chinese – of ‘Chineseness’ – all over the world”. Many critics think that their works, Maugham’s short stories in particular, inaccurately maintain the kinds of stereotypical images that the discourse of Orientalism has perpetuated. As a result, it is worthwhile to juxtapose the works of both authors to re-examine their approaches in portraying the Orient and the Occident.

Secondly, Chang mentioned in her biographies and short stories that she was an avid reader of Maugham. For example, her brother Zhang Zijing  mentions that “Dream of the Red Chamber and the works written by Somerset Maugham are what she loves to read most.” There are also frequent references to Maugham and his South Seas writings in Chang’s short story “Floating Flowers” (Fuhua langrui 浮花浪蕊). Maugham’s extensive

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22 These ongoing debates will be discussed in detail in the literature review.
24 To list a few, for example, Adeline Koh, Ge Guili 葛桂录, Pang Ronghua 庞荣华, and some other scholars all share the similar argument that Maugham depicts China from a racially Eurocentric point of view. This will be further discussed in the literature review.
25 Zhang Zijing 张子静, “Wo de zizi Zhang Ailing” 我的姊姊张爱玲 [My sister Eileen Chang], eds. Zi Tong 子通 and Yi Qing 亦清, Zhang Ailing pingshuo liushinian 张爱玲评说六十年 [Criticism on Eileen Chang over Sixty Years], ed. (Beijing: Zhongguo huaqiao chubanshe 中国华侨出版社, 2001), 4. Translation is author’s own.
influence over Chang has been noted by Chinese scholars. It can be found in Chang’s first few short stories that she adopted subject matters and writing techniques from Maugham’s early South Sea narratives. For instance, Zhou Shoujuan 周瘦鹃, chief editor of the journal *Violet* (紫罗兰), wrote in the preface of Zhang's first two published short stories that “the style of Zhang’s story is reminiscent of the British writer Somerset Maugham’s stories.” Edward M. Gunn later comments on Chang’s short story “Aloeswood Incense: The Second Brazier (沉香屑: 第二炉香)” that the reader “is reminded of Maugham’s tales of the British expatriate community in the Far East. The story is framed in a gossipy session between the author and a British classmate, much as many of Maugham’s stories are introduced.” In Chang’s “Aloeswood Incense: The First Brazier (沉香屑: 第一炉香)”, Gunn further noted that Chang has employed cynicism that is familiar to Maugham readers, while “its harshness was hardly surpassed by Maugham.” Nevertheless, in both stories, “Chang’s interest in and employment of imagery surpasses Maugham’s. […] Moreover, the degree of cynicism present, while less harshly expressed, is still more comparable to that of a writer like Maugham rather than an old tale in the Chinese tradition.” Furthermore, Leo Ou-fan Lee also points out straightforwardly that Chang’s writing technique is also reminiscent of that of Maugham:

27 Translation is author’s own. Shou-chuan Chuo 周瘦鹃, “Xie zai ziluolan qianmian” 写在紫罗兰前面 [Preface to Violet], in Shui Ching’s 水晶 张爱玲的 小说艺术 [The Art of Eileen Chang’s Novels] (Taipei: Earth Publisher, 2000), 124.
29 Ibid., 201.
30 Ibid.
A technical “extra” in Chang’s stories – something that is not often found in other popular fiction – is an almost omniscient narrational voice that not only hovers over or enters into the characters effortlessly but also constantly comments on them with an intimate and bemused tone. The voice may sound slightly condescending, as if it came from a seasoned observer, but it also dwells on a trivial detail or appearance, sometimes when least expected. At such moments the narrative language takes sudden and unexpected flights into imaginary and metaphor. […] Such digressions may be no more than a display of wit such as is also found in Somerset Maugham, P. G. Wodehouse, Aldous Huxley, and other English writers whom Chang admired.31

However, regardless of their similarity in the colonial encounters between East and West in their works, there has been no significant comparative research on this topic so far. Thus, considering their shared interests in the colonial topics, a comparative reading of their works also creates ideal examples of portraits of the Occidental/colonists and the Oriental/natives from different standpoints.

Thirdly, while there has been a surge of publications in “Chang studies” over the recent decades, research on Maugham has not seen major development in either English or Chinese literary studies. For one thing, Maugham was a popular writer throughout the seven decades of his writing career, but he was never really popular among critics in the West. His novels and short stories were largely excluded from the modern fiction canon in both British and North American universities. Maugham produced a substantial body of colonial writings based on his experience in the Far East and South Sea, yet his writings were frequently considered pedestrian, pretentious, and superficial by critics.32 His exploration of humanity and representations of characters often lack texture and depth, especially when compared with those more canonized predecessors in colonial writing,

such as Rudyard Kipling, Joseph Conrad, and even E. M. Forster, whose *A Passage to India* (1924) was published one year before Maugham’s *The Painted Veil*. For another, Maugham’s fictional works, *Of Human Bondage* (1915), *The Moon and Sixpence* (1919), and *The Razor’s Edge* (1944) in particular, have been highly recommended and praised among Chinese readers. In comparison to these three, his books on Chinese matters are relatively less known in China. Academic research on Maugham’s works are also predominantly focused on these three works of fiction, and the few who look at Maugham’s colonial stories often regard him as an imperialist and Eurocentric writer. Therefore, I intend to present a new reading of Somerset Maugham’s colonial narratives to postcolonial and transnational studies in both Chinese and English scholarship by conducting this research. I will examine Maugham’s fictional writings particularly about China, which is based on his own trip through China, in juxtaposition with the “raw materials” from his travel notes/journals, which is not done by earlier research. My research aims to contribute to the knowledge of postcolonial literature on Eileen Chang and especially on earlier research of Somerset Maugham.

The primary texts I will use in this research are Eileen Chang’s “Aloeswood Incense: The First Brazier (*Chenxiang xie: diyi lu xiang* 沉香屑: 第一炉香)” (1943), *Love in a Fallen City* (*Qingcheng zhi lian* 倾城之恋) (1943), “Streamed Osmanthus Flower Ah Xiao’s Unhappy Autumn (*Guihua zheng Ah Xiao beiqiu* 桂花蒸 阿小悲秋)” (1944), “Sealed Off (*Feng suo* 封锁)” (1943), and some of her essays collected in *Written on Water* (1944), together

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33 *Of Human Bondage* (1915), *The Moon and Sixpence* (1919), and *The Razor’s Edge* (1944) are called “Maugham Trilogy” among his Chinese readers.
with Somerset Maugham’s *On a Chinese Screen* (1922), *The Painted Veil* (1925), “The Letter” (1926), “The Outstation” (1926), “The Force of Circumstance” (1926), and “Masterson” (1963). There are a few reasons that I choose these works: First, I intend to conduct a comparative project on two authors and their shared interests on the colonial encounters in the liminal space in the Oriental world, instead of a research on one single author during a specific period of time. Therefore, these texts included are most relevant to this research topic. Second, the genre of texts is limited to short stories, with two exception of novellas (Maugham’s *The Painted Veil* and Chang’s *Love in a Fallen City*). The characteristics of both authors’ writing structures and techniques are most highlighted in their short stories and novellas, for instance, the framed narrative in Chang’s short stories and the unreliable narrator in Maugham’s travel writings and novels. In addition, the form and length of short stories can bring out the impact of the dramatic arrangement of the plot and encounters among characters. Therefore, Maugham’s Chinese-based play *East of Suez* (1922) is excluded from the discussion. Yet, considering the limitation of resource and time during the COVID-19 period, I decided to focus primarily on textual analysis rather than bringing substantial contextual background into this research. I believe this also provide room for further research; for instance, the historical and geopolitical context of the time during which both authors wrote could also be considered.

**Research Question and Structure**

In this study, I bring in the theory and concept of colonial travel writing, semi-colonialism, and colonial mimicry as a lever to explore the colonial encounters between the East and
West and the constructed image of Britishness and whiteness in its South-East Asia colony, semi-colonial Shanghai and British colonized Hong Kong in particular. Most of these will be discussed in later chapters where relevant. One starting point of this study is a journal article entitled “Rewriting Colonial Encounters: Eileen Chang and Somerset Maugham” written by Hsiu-Chuang Deppman in 2002, which argues that Maugham and Chang have opposing perspectives – “one Eurocentric and one Sinocentric”, claiming that “Chang’s writing reveals that the Maughamian fetishization of differences ultimately leads to a certain commodification of ‘authenticity,’ which exacerbates the fallacy of an imperialist desire to reinvent the notion of a pure, national culture”. In other words, although Chang’s early writings model Maugham’s techniques and subject matters, she views the colonist and the colonized from a native Chinese perspective, which challenges “Maugham’s privileging of the center / Empire” literary preference as Chang’s narration could be more authentic and objective. However, I will start this study by question that to what extent that these two authors write beyond showing the complexity and contradictions of colonialism at a personal level, and also explore that, if bearing the early awareness of Orientalism, to what extent Maugham was deliberately being ironic by writing about the cultural parody.

Therefore, the first chapter will be looking at Maugham’s Chinese-based novel The Painted Veil and his travel book On a Chinese Screen, which will address the “arrival scene” that frequently depicted in Maugham’s colonial stories when the European characters

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35 Ibid.
encounter the exotic in the Oriental world. I will examine Maugham’s use of demonized fantasy of characters in representing the unknown and “monstrous beauty” of the East. It will also take a close look at how dreams play an essential role in Maugham’s colonial stories as an elusive form of fantasy in bridging the connection to the domestic homeland of the European characters. Following this, the chapter will demonstrate how Maugham writes about his characters’ romantic exaggeration of normalcy.

The second chapter will focus on the representations of cultural hybridity in the semi-colonial metropoles Hong Kong and Shanghai. I will start the second chapter with a close reading of Chang’s Hong Kong stories “Aloeswood Incense: The First Brazier” and Love in A Fallen City, in juxtaposition with Maugham’s short stories “The Beast of Burden” and “The Road” in On A Chinese Screen. By reading Chang’s essay “Writing of One’s Own,” in which she explains her writing “by ways of equivocal contrast,” I will bring in a discussion on “what is to write” when writing about the unknown exotic in both writer’s works and have a detailed textual analysis of Chang’s writing technique of the alternation the “foreign eyes perspective.” It will also include Chang’s subtle depiction of the female subjectivity under both colonial and male gaze in the colony, as opposed to Maugham’s inevitable oblivion of such perspective. Specifically, this part will be guided by the question that how the natives and the Western-educated Chinese intellectuals living in the liminal areas struggle with their cultural identities and accommodate themselves to the conflux of Western and Chinese cultures under the “dual gaze” that come from both the colonists and the male natives.

The third chapter of this study will primarily concentrate on two of Chang’s short
stories – “Steamed Osmanthus Flower: Ah Xiao’s Unhappy Autumn” and “Sealed Off”, as well as Maugham’s three pieces of short writings entitled “Rain,” “The Plain,” and “The Philosopher.” By focusing on the idea of the “modern” (modeng 摩登), this chapter will demonstrate how Chang constructs her short stories against the background of “modern domesticity” during the wartime period in the early 1940s Shanghai, and how the female protagonists pursue love and seek to find fulfillment in romantic relationships. As for Maugham’s combination of the pre-modern Chinese landscape and modern Western ideologies and cultural memory, it will also illustrate how the pursuit of modern life becomes the driving force in the semi-colonial land, further restructuring the interpersonal relationship both sexually and politically.

The last chapter, again, will use Chang’s “Steamed Osmanthus Flower Ah Xiao’s Unhappy Autumn” but offer an alternative approach in reading this story. This Shanghai story will be examined in parallel with four of Maugham’s short stories, “The Outstation,” “The Letter,” “Masterson,” and “The Force of Circumstance.” Chang’s short story is narrated from the perspective of a Shanghai “Amah” (servant) and depicts her Western master, Mr. Garter, while Maugham’s colonial tales often feature a British colonist official in an overseas colony in far East, and explore the complex romantic relationship with the native women. I aim to investigate how the commodification of exoticism and the constructed Britishness and whiteness are represented in these texts, and to what extent the power dynamic between master/colonist and servant/native dualism is deconstructed within the discourse of Orientalism. Furthermore, I am interested in the representation of ambivalence, as termed in Homi Bhabha’s explanation of colonial mimicry, and how
such ambivalence is materialized and subverted in both writers’ works.

**Literature Review**

1. **Research on Eileen Chang**

Research on Eileen Chang experienced three phases in general: the first phase begins with Chang’s first publication in the journal *Violet* in 1942 Shanghai till she left for the United States; the second period is from the establishment of the People’s Republic of China in 1949 to the early 80s, during which studies on Chang’s works were mainly conducted overseas; the last phrase is from the 1980s to present.

Chang became an instant hit in Shanghai with the publication of her first two short stories “Aloeswood Incense: The First Brazier” and “Aloeswood Incense: The Second Brazier” in 1943. In the following year, with the subsequent publications of short stories and essays, Chang published two collections of works named *Legend* (*Chuanqi* 传奇) and *Written on Water* (*Liuyan* 流⾔) in 1944. However, although Chang’s works were extremely popular amongst readers and in literary circles, there were not many critical articles on her writings during the 40s. Fu Lei’s 傅雷 “On Eileen Chang’s Fiction” (*Lun Zhang Ailing de xiaoshuo* 论张爱玲的小说) is the most influential articles from that time, and Chang later wrote *Writings of One’s Own* (*Ziji de wenzhang* 自己的文章) in response to Fu Lei’s criticism. Fu Lei primarily comments on three of Chang’s works in *Legend*, namely “The Golden

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36 It should be noted at first that enormous numbers of research have been done on Eileen Chang with the application of various theories. Therefore, major monographs and biographies will be considered though, journals and essays predominantly conducted from a postcolonial perspective will be discussed in the following section. In terms of the scholarship on Maugham, I would mainly look at publications written in English, reasons of which will be further illustrated.
Cangue” (Jinsuo ji 金鎖記), Love in a Fallen City, and “Chained Links” (Lianhuan tao 连环套). Fu Lei praises Chang’s narrative techniques and talents in writing but also points out the emptiness and the lack of logic in her storytelling and characters.37

Following the establishment of the People’s Republic of China in 1949, research on Eileen Chang saw nearly three decades of silence, which lasted until the early 1980s in Mainland China. After the war against Japan, Chang faced a dilemma as she was acquainted with some of those who were branded as national traitors (pantu 叛徒). Zhang was severely accused by the public of being one of them largely because of her personal relationship with Hu Lancheng 胡兰成, who once worked for Wang Jingwei’s 汪精卫 puppet regime during the Japanese occupation and had fled after the victory of the war. Therefore, Chang did not publish any writings or defend herself at all for two entire years.38 There were no published articles on Chang, and her name was hardly mentioned in monographs in the history of Chinese modern literature during that period. However, in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and overseas Chinese language communities, Chang’s works received wide attention from critics such as Shui Jing 水晶, Tang Wenbiao 唐文標, Stephen Soong 林以亮, and C. T. Hsia 夏志清. Some major biographies and monographs were published during the 1960s-70s outside Mainland China.39 These authors are avid readers and close friends of Eileen

37 See Fu Lei, 傅雷 “Lun Zhang Ailing de xiaoshuo” 论张爱玲的小说 [On Eileen Chang’s Novels]. Wanxiang 万象. 1944. vol. 3, no. 11.
38 Another reason is that few publishers wanted to get themselves into trouble at that time. Some asked Chang to write for them by using a new penname but Chang refused to do so. Her marriage with Hu Lancheng also broke up. With all added up, Chang stopped writing from August 1945 to April 1947.
39 For instance, Shui Jing spent three decades working on the monograph The Art of Eileen Chang’s Fiction (Zhang Ailing de xiaoshuo yishu 张爱玲的小说艺术), which was published in 1973. This book points out that Chang’s writing techniques and spirit are relatively westernized. Tang Wenbiao 唐文標 wrote Eileen Chang Studies (Zhang Ailing Yanjiu 张爱玲研究) in 1983 and The Complete Studies on Eileen Chang (Zhang Ailing
Chang, and these books are valuable first-hand materials for subsequent research.

In 1980, Edward Gunn, a student of C. T. Hsia, produced a monograph on literary activities in Peking and Japanese-occupied Shanghai from 1937 to 1945, providing an impressive account of modern Chinese literature over this political and cultural period. In the chapter “Antiromanticism,” Gunn devoted one section entirely to Eileen Chang and gave a detailed literary analysis of Chang’s short stories such as “Aloeswood Incense: The Second Brazier,” “Red Rose and White Rose,” and “Sealed Off.”\(^40\) Based on his textual analysis, Gunn identified the pattern of Chang’s writings and categorized them into two groups: “those in which an impersonal force in the environment acts out an individual’s fantasies, and those in which an active protagonist attempts directly to impose his or her will.”\(^41\) Such patterns diverged Chang’s writings from the majority of works of her time such as “the romantic May Forth literature of ‘New Youth’ and the tradition-bound Saturday School of ‘Mandarin Duck and Butterfly literature”: “[Chang’s] concern is neither to gather a comforting vision of an old society nor to extol visions of a new one.”\(^42\) Instead, Gunn concluded that the setting in Chang’s stories are not homogeneously antiquated or modern, but her characters’ interior world always lies in a place that “neither outstripped

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\(^40\) Gunn referred to the stories as “Aloeswood Ashes – The Second Brazier,” “Red Rose and White Rose,” and “Blockade” respectively. There are various versions of translation of Chang’s stories’ title. For the sake of consistency, I will use Karen S. Kingsbury’s (New York: New York Review Books, 2007) translation of these stories in the thesis.


\(^42\) Ibid., 230-231.
the old society, [nor] will be liberated in the new.” Gunn’s analysis provides invaluable insights when I later read Chang’s short story “Sealed Off” within the literary field during the wartime in Shanghai.

From the 1960s to the early 80s, there was hardly any literary criticism mentioning Chang in Mainland China until scholars such as Ke ling, Jia Pingwa, and Shu Ting recognized the importance of Chang’s writings in contemporary Chinese literature history after the Opening-up and Reform in 1978. There were several biographies on Chang published in the 90s. These works have established a sound foundation for future research on Eileen Chang since.

In terms of journal articles and dissertations after the 1990s, early research concentrated on symbolism, metaphors, and narrative structures, which mainly follow Shui Jing’s analysis of stories such as Love in a Fallen City or “Red Rose White Rose.” With the gradual development of studies in feminism and other Western literary theories, research on Eileen Chang was conducted largely from a feminist or gender studies perspective. In

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45 For example, publications include: Wang Yixin’s 王一心 Talented Women Eileen Chang (jingshi caini Zhang Ailing 惊世才女张爱玲) (1992), Yu Qing’s 余青 The Talented Woman Eileen Chang (Tiancai qinzi Zhang Ailing 天才奇女张爱玲) (1992), Liu Chuan’e 刘川鄂 A Talented Woman in Chaotic Times – Eileen Chang (Luanshi caini Zhang Ailing 乱世才女张爱玲) (1993), and Yu Bin’s 余彬 Biography on Eileen Chang (Zhang Ailing zhuan 张爱玲传) (1995). The first two biographies tend to give an overall view of Chang’s life story with a touch of literary rendering. Liu Chuan’e’s biography offers a textual analysis of Chang’s work from the perspective of Chang as a Western-educated Chinese female writer. Yu Bin presents Chang’s life and writing philosophy in more detail.
addition, there was also a transition of research approaches from textual analysis to cultural studies, and Chang’s writings were discussed in a larger cultural context. It is worth pointing out that only a few studies examined Chang’s short stories using postcolonial theories in the last fifteen years. For example, Gong Wenhua’s dissertation “Postcolonial Critique of Eileen Chang’s Fictions” (Houzhimin piping shifa zhongde Zhang Ailing 后殖民批评视阈中的张爱玲) in 2007 points out that Shanghai and Hong Kong are under the colonial gaze and are regarded as the cultural “Other” in terms of their roles of being the liminal space. However, Gong argues that Chang’s mockery of colonists and the insistence on native culture imply the shared wish to fight against the invader, which is largely in contrast with Chang’s apolitical stance.46 In Sun Bochao’s dissertation in 2016, “A Study of the Characters in Eileen Chang’s Fictions from a Colonial perspective” (Zhimin zhuyi shiye zhongde Zhang Ailing xiaoshuo renwu xingxiang yanjiu 殖民主义视野中的张爱玲小说人物形象研究), he compares the characters in Chang’s and Toni Morrison’s fiction, and demonstrates “the formation reasons and art values of personality traits of the characters in Eileen Chang’s works.”47 In addition, Liu Yongli 刘永丽, Wang Ruihua 王瑞华, Wang Youxin 王攸欣 and Liu Tongdan 刘彤丹 have written essays on short stories such as “Streamed Osmanthus Flower Ah Xiao’s Unhappy Autumn”. However, these essays are all rather short and hardly go beyond textual analysis on a very surface level.48

48 Liu Yongli 刘永丽, “Xifang ‘xian dai’ shenhua de pomic – Zhang Ailing xiaoshuo zhongde ‘jiezhimin’ shuxie” 西方“现代”神话的破灭——张爱玲小说中的“解殖民”书写 [The Disillusion of Western
Some studies in translation and self-translation also take a postcolonial approach in reading Chang’s stories; yet, the majority are master’s dissertations, and their arguments are quite similar to each other in arguing that Chang’s self-translation of her own writings cater to the Western readers with an Orientalist point of view.49

There have been several journal articles and monographs written in English mentioning Chang’s post-colonial writings in recent years. In her 1998 essay “Two Discourses on Colonialism: Huang Guliu and Eileen Chang on Hong Kong of the Forties,” Leung Ping-kwan suggests that Eileen Chang had made specific comments on the colonial situation of Kong Hong, where she placed her characters and their romances. Unlike Huang Guliu, the narrator in Chang’s stories usually sets up a framed narrative structure that “leads into and sometimes heightens the strange and exotic events narrated, creating a distance from which the audience can reflect on the unfamiliar”.50 Tsai Hsiu-Chuang’s doctoral dissertation *Domestic Space in Virginia Woolf and Ailing Zhang* in 1999 argues that

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49 See, for instance, Chen Huiqin’s *Self-Orientalization in Eileen Chang’s Self-translated Works* in 2011, Zhou Shuyuan’s *A Study of Eileen Chang’s Compliance with Orientalism in Her Self-translated Works* in 2014, Zhao Haijuan’s *Study of Amplification and Omission in Eileen Chang’s Chinese-English Self-Translation: A Postcolonial Perspective* in 2011 are very similar argument to each other. Moreover, Yang Xiao’s *A Postcolonial Approach to the Hybridity in Eileen Chang’s Self-Translation of Jin Suo Ji* in 2015 has a lot in common with Yang Yi’s *Analysis of Self-Translation in The Golden Cangue from the Post-Colonial Perspective* in 2014.

“not only their thematic and stylistic attention to domestic space does not constitute grounds for dismissal, but also that they actually use constructions of it to present what they see as profound modern ‘problems’ the unresolved tensions, for example, between tradition and modernity, men and women, realism and modernism”. It is worth pointing out that the last chapter of her dissertation looks at Eileen Chang’s and Somerset Maugham’s colonial writings, which was later elaborated into an article in 2000.\(^51\) This is also one of the major recurring literatures of my research for its emphasis on the commodification of the exotic elements in domestic space in analyzing Chang’s stories such as “Streamed Osmanthus Flower Ah Xiao’s Unhappy Autumn.”\(^52\) In 2005, Amy D. Dooling wrote one chapter “Outwitting Patriarchy: Comic Narrative Strategies in the Works of Yang Jiang, Su Qing, and Zhang Ailing” in her book. She examines Chang’s Love in a Fallen City concerning female desire and argues that “comedy was adopted by feminist writers to offer relief from the relentlessly serious fare and, at the same time, to attract the ridiculous discrepancies between the dominant discourse and current realities”.\(^53\) There is one journal article published in 2009 looking specifically on Chang’s depiction of wartime colonial cosmopolis. Belinda Kong proposes that “Shanghai nativism” is a theoretical position put forth by some writers, “whether Chinese or Western, who are born into the

\(^{51}\) Tsai, Hsiu-Chuang, Domestic Space in Virginia Woolf and Ailing Zhang. 1999: 2. This is one of the few and earliest studies that look at Zhang’s and Maugham’s writings together. The author later changed her family name to Deppman. I will cite her name as Deppman hereafter in this study.

\(^{52}\) I will give a detailed introduction of the Deppman’s article and explain how I use her work as the departure point of my own research in later section “Comparative Studies on Eileen Chang and Somerset Maugham.”

\(^{53}\) Amy D Dooling, Women’s Literary Feminism in Twentieth-Century China. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 141.
city’s condition of semi-colonial cosmopolitanism and whose primary identification is with neither empire nor nation, worldliness nor Chineseness, but Shanghai itself as the biopolitical tension between those forces.”54 This article inspired me in reading Chang’s Shanghai stories within the context of semi-colonialism, which I will introduce in detail in later section of theories.

Despite the interest in her authorship, it was not until 2012 that an English volume predominantly on Eileen Chang was published. Edited by Kam Louie, Eileen Chang: Romancing Languages, Cultures and Genres contains eleven essays on “Chang Studies”. The authors deploy a variety of methods, concepts, and theories in discussing Chang’s writings. These authors also introduce useful concepts in explaining the heterogeneity and incoherence of Chang’s post-1950 works, such as “self-translation”, “schizophrenia”, and “involution”. In addition, essays by Gina Marchetti and Hsiu-Chuang Deppman also explore the adaptation of Chang’s novel, such as the stage adaptation of Love in a Fallen City and Ang Lee’s adaptation of Lust, Caution. Yet, this book does not include any studies from a post-colonial perspective.55

2. Research on Somerset Maugham

Somerset Maugham was a world famous writer whose works have been translated into countless languages, and his novel, Of Human Bondage, was also one of the most widely

55 See Kam Louie, Eileen Chang: Romancing Languages, Cultures and Genres. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2012.
read books of the twentieth century. His works have been staged, filmed, and dramatized over and over again since last century. However, Maugham’s fiction and short stories were never included in the modern literature canon at universities in the UK or North America.

As Philip Holden comments,

Maugham’s writings, having never been part of the canon, do not present ready targets for contemporary critical interventions which attempt to decenter, deconstruct, or rewrite literary history. No real case can be made, it seems, for including Maugham in a newly expanded canon constructed around an acknowledgment of difference.

However, in Mainland China, Maugham’s fictions such as *The Moon and Sixpence* (1919) are greatly popular in schools and universities. Yet, in this section, studies on Maugham’s South Seas and Far East writings and whether and how they are criticized as stereotypical Orientalist colonial writings will be mainly discussed.

Although Maugham travelled to China in the early 1920s, his works were first introduced to Chinese readers in *Short Story Monthly* (*Xiaoshuo yuebao 小说月报*) in 1929.

*The Collection of Contemporary British Short Stories* (*Yingguo jingdai duanpian xiaoshuoji 英国近代短篇小说集*) was published in the same year, which included Maugham’s short story “Taipan”.

By 1949, around ten of Maugham’s short stories and plays had been translated into Chinese. However, there were no other translation of Maugham’s writings from 1949

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58 Maugham’s works, especially the “Maugham trilogy” (*Of Human Bondage*, *The Moon and Sixpence*, and *The Razor’s Edge*) are also regarded as the most recommended books on China’s influential online literary community Douban. There have also been a large number of studies on these three books.
60 Zhu Xiang 朱湘, *Yingguo jingdai duanpian xiaoshuoji 英国近代短篇小说集* [The Collection of Contemporary British Short Stories], *Beijing shuju 北新书局* 1929.
to 1978. After the Opening-up and Reform in 1978, a large amount of Western literature was introduced and translated for Chinese readers. Therefore, there have been increasing numbers of research and studies on Maugham’s works conducted in Chinese since the 1980s.61

The first book of criticism on Maugham, *W. Somerset Maugham, Novelist, Essayist, Dramatist*, was published in the United States in 1926 by his literary agent Charles Hanson Towne.62 Since then, scholars in many other European countries started to look at Maugham’s work as well.63 One of the most recent biography, *The Secret Lives of Somerset Maugham: a Biography* written by Selina Hasting, was published in 2009 and received well acclaim for “[coalescing] into compelling, nonjudgmental portraits of Maugham’s brother, wife, and daughter and of the many men with whom he notoriously consorted”, which connecting his literary output with personal experience with graphic clarity and

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63 For example, French critic Paul Dottin wrote *Somerset Maugham et Ses Romans* in 1928, which started the critical inquiry into Maugham’s work in France. German scholar Helmut Papajewski wrote *Die Welt-, Lebens- und Kunstanschauung William Somerset Maughams* in 1952, which is a complete critical study of Maugham’s philosophy, ethics, and aesthetics. Since the 1950s, there have been an increasing number of essays and doctoral dissertations on Maugham in various European universities.63 In later years, numerous biographies and critical monographs were published. Richard Cordell’s *Somerset Maugham: A Biographical and Critical Study* (1961) examines the autobiographical elements in Maugham’s novels such as *Cakes and Ale* (1030) and provides a critical survey of his short stories and fiction. Books such as Robert Lorin Calder’s *W. Somerset Maugham and the Quest for Freedom* (1972), Frederic Raphael’s *W. Somerset Maugham and his World* (1976), Anthony Curtis’s *Somerset Maugham* (1977), and Stanley Archer’s *W. Somerset Maugham: a Study of the Short Fiction* (1993) were all published in subsequent years.
In 1954, *Maugham Enigma: An Anthology* was published. Several earliest critical analysis on Maugham's exotic stories are collected in this book. For instance, Louise Maunsell Field's “Maugham's Chinese Sketches” written in 1923 claims that “the impression of hardness, narrowness, self-satisfied lack of understanding among the whites […] becomes more and more pronounced with almost each page one turns; yet Mr. Maugham holds no belied for the Chinese”. Leslie Marchand's “The Exoticism of Somerset Maugham” (1933) is also one of the earliest criticisms on Maugham's exotic writings. Marchand points out that “the detachment of [Maugham’s] point of view made him a ruthless observer at times but gave him an advantage that a writer of the isolated places must almost of necessity have if he is to keep his critical perspective. It was that detachment which enabled him to see so clearly beneath the surface that alone is visible to the tourist”. It is also worth mentioning two important biographical works, namely *The Two Worlds of Somerset Maugham* (1965) by Wilmon Menard and *Maugham* (1980) by Ted Morgan. Menard is among the first who traced the true location and stories behind Maugham’s exotic stories and fiction in South Pacific. Yet, though much praised as an illuminating study of Maugham, this book is also criticized for misappropriating primary source materials, where

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words and phrases are changed from their original text and presented as spoken by Maugham himself during the interviews with Menard. In *Maugham*, Morgan also examines Maugham’s career and provides abundant background and sources of Maugham’s exotic stories.

There are also a few studies in Chinese concentrating on Maugham’s exotic writings produced during his travelling in China. Recent Chinese scholarship tends to agree that writers brought up within a Eurocentric and imperialist environment would inevitably be prejudiced subconsciously in their writing. Scholars such as Ge Guilu 葛桂录, Pang Ronghua 庞荣华, Sun Lingyun 孙泠赟, Xie Xiaoying 谢晓莹, Zhang Helong 张和龙 all share the similar claim that Maugham depicts China and other Oriental countries from a racially privileged point of view. For instance, Ge Guilu argues that Maugham’s colonial writings show the author’s cultural superiority, and that Maugham views the East with inevitable prejudice and arrogance. Moreover, these studies all adopted Edward Said’s theory of Orientalist theory in their analysis. However, in the context of my own research, these

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prior studies have not been particularly beneficial or influential. Their reliance on Said's Orientalist framework results in a somewhat repetitive and narrow analytical scope. Consequently, they fall short in providing new perspectives or methodologies that could enrich the understanding of Maugham’s writings in my research. Thus, while acknowledging their contributions to the discourse on colonial literature, these studies did not significantly advance the objectives of my research.

In terms of more recent research on Maugham’s Eastern stories, Philip Holden’s *Orienting Masculinity, Orienting Nation: W. Somerset Maugham’s Exotic Fiction* (1996) is one of the fundamental studies, which is based on his doctoral dissertation *Colonizing Masculinity: The Creation of a Male British Subjectivity in the Oriental Fiction of W. Somerset Maugham* in 1994. This study aims to “use homosexuality as a lever to explore the connection between British constructions of masculinity and imaginative geography in the early twentieth century”. Holden discusses Maugham’s oriental fictions in the light of postcolonial studies and queer theory, and argues that Maugham’s novels and short stories “exhibit a consummate recycling of colonialist tropes”, and “produces a fantasy of seemingly stable British male subjectivity based upon emotional and somatic continence, rationality, and secularity”. Holden’s research also helps establish the foundation of my own research in examining Maugham’s colonial stories. Holden focuses on the representation of British masculinity in exotic location in Maugham’s exotic fiction while I paid more attention on

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70 Ibid., 292.
71 Ibid., ii.
Maugham’s portrait of the marginalized, secondary characters, and put them in juxtaposition with the working class, women in particular, in Chang’s writing. Holden examined in detail the contextual background such as how Maugham’s homosexuality influences his depiction of gender, sexuality and political dynamics of the British Empire during late 19th and early 20th centuries. I did not involve Maugham’s personal sexual orientation into my textual analysis of his works as I consider it would be a deviation from my own research topic at current stage.

Apart from that, some recent doctoral dissertations and journal articles also present a critical analysis of Maugham’s exotic writings such as *On a Chinese Screen* and *The Painted Veil* in terms of Orientalism and post-colonialism. Lin Xingbo’s study *Images of China in Twentieth Century Colonial Discourse* in 1995 examines the representations of the Other in opposition to the colonial Self through the readings of the texts produced in Britain, France, America, etc. The first chapter looks at Somerset Maugham’s texts, and presents a critical analysis of “British narratives of travel and exploration in China to investigate the rhetorical nature of the historical construction of China as the Other.” Mamta Chaudhary’s *W. Somerset Maugham and the East: A Postcolonial Reading of the Implications of History, Culture and Text in the Work of a ‘Popular’ Writer* (1995) looks at Maugham’s representations of ‘white’ men in the colonies, the ‘natives’, and the environment and landscape where the stories are set, and “demonstrates the extent to which his writing

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draws on Orientalist constructions of the East.”73 In Adeline Koh’s *Inventing Malayanness: Race, Education and Englishness in Colonial Malaya* (2005), the third chapter “The Great ‘Yellow Peril’: Reading Somerset Maugham” begins with the question of “how the figure of the exotic, mysterious and inscrutable Chinese plays a central ideological role within the topography of British colonialism”, and argues that the “Sino-Malay” tension was constructed particularly in order to validate the British presence within Malaya.74 Published in 2011, Xavier Lachazette demonstrates in his article “Images and the Colonial Experience in W. Somerset Maugham’s *The Casuarina Tree* (1926)” that some of Maugham’s idiosyncrasies, his source of inspiration, and the art of the short story he developed over the years, which all “tended to work against his uniformly convey a satisfactory literary image of colonial experience in Malaya.” Moreover, some Oriental secondary characters in Maugham’s short stories “never go beyond the stereotypical image of the sly, corrupt, poker-faced Chinese on the look-out for easy money.”75 Isaac Yue’s article “W. Somerset Maugham and the Politicisation of the Chinese Landscape” in 2013 also focuses on Maugham’s novel *The Painted Veil* and the short story “The Philosopher” in *On a Chinese Screen*. Starting with a discussion on the polarised attitude to imperialism reflected in Maugham’s works and the preoccupied ambiguity in modern Maugham scholarship, Yue argues that the depictions of the Chinese landscape are never isolated. Maugham’s interest

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in the East “lies in its tradition and heritage (both manmade), and it is through such a style of landscape description that he is able to express his negative sentiments concerning colonialism and imperialism”.\(^{76}\)

3. **Comparative Studies on Eileen Chang and Somerset Maugham**

As mentioned in earlier section, Edward Gunn introduced and provided detailed literary analysis of Eileen Chang’s several short stories in his book *Unwelcome Muse: Chinese Literature in Shanghai and Peking 1937 to 1945*. Although Gunn identified the similarities between Chang’s and Maugham’s short stories, such as the use of framed stories within a gossipy session and their exploration of the native and Eurasian communities in Shanghai and Hong Kong, and further praised that Chang’s employment of imagery and cynicism surpasses Maugham’s, Gunn offered an introductory comparison between the two authors instead of providing any textual details of Maugham’s writings, which is also reasonable considering the chapter did not aim to conduct the comparative reading of the two.

The earliest study putting Eileen Chang and Somerset Maugham together in Chinese I have found is Wu Xiaoning’s 吴晓宁 “Eileen Chang and Somerset Maugham” (*Zhang Ailing yu Maomu* 张爱玲与毛姆), a short three-page article published in 1989, which demonstrates the similarities between these two writers in terms of their tragic childhood as well as the social background during which they produced their works.\(^{77}\) She also notes

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\(^{77}\) Wu Xiaoning 吴晓宁, “Zhang Ailing yu Maomu” 张爱玲与毛姆 [Eileen Chang and Maugham]. *Yancheng shizhuan xuebao* 盐城师范学报 1989, no. 4: 41-44.
these two writers’ opposing preferences in the choice of words and characters’ attitudes towards a mundane life. However, Wu focuses more on the two writers’ childhood experiences and hardly says anything specific in their texts. In 1999, Hsiu-Chuang Deppman argues in her chapter “Domesticating East-West Colonial Encounters: Eileen Chang and Somerset Maugham” that “the use of domestic space reveals a reverse perspective of examining the dynamic between colonists and natives” by examining the technique of using domestic space in reflecting a colonial reality in Chang’s and Maugham’s short stories.78 This chapter was later elaborated into a journal article entitled “Rewriting Colonial Encounters: Eileen Chang and Somerset Maugham” in 2001.79 It is also the only English study that I have found so far that focuses specifically on these two authors. However, it is important to note that Deppman’s two pieces both begin with the assumption that Chang and Maugham write from opposing perspectives – “one Eurocentric and one Sinocentric”, which is exactly the point I would like to question as a point of departure for my project. While Deppman argues that Maugham writes from a Eurocentric perspectives while Chang is a Sinocentric and nativist writer, I argue against Deppman in my conclusion that I do not consider they wrote from either Eurocentric or Sinocentric perspective, and neither of them were really nativist in representing either colonists or natives in their fictional writings, which can be found clear evidence when bringing their non-fictional writings into the discussion of their use of irony and criticism against colonialism.

In the last twenty years, there has been a couple of Chinese studies featuring comparative reading of Eileen Chang’s and Somerset Maugham’s writings, examining their representation of marriage, family, and human nature, as well as their narrative structure and use of anti-climax. However, as mentioned earlier, these journal articles are rather similar to each other with or even without references to earlier research. For instance, Yan Qiuixia’s “Analysis on Why Maugham Influences Eileen Chang’s Writings” (Shixi Maomu yingxiang Zhang Ailing de yuanyin 试析毛姆影响张爱玲的原因) in 2006, Li Yanran’s “Analysis of Maugham’s influence on Eileen Chang’s writings” (Shixi Maomu dui Zhang Ailing chuango de yingxiang 试析毛姆对张爱玲创作的影响) in 2015, and Jin Yanxi’s “Analysis on Human Nature Reflected in Maugham’s and Eileen Chang’s Fictions” (Maomu yu Zhang Ailing renxingguan bijiao yanjiu 毛姆与张爱玲人性观比较研究) in 2016 have the identical argument as Han Rui’s doctoral dissertation published in 2002.80 Furthermore, the majority of these papers are rather short and unilateral, rarely providing any critical analysis of the original texts or logically constructed arguments.

The most recent publication on Eileen Chang and her experience and writings in Hong Kong is Hong Kong Connections: Eileen Chang and Worldmaking (Yuanqi Xianggang: Zhang Ailing de yixiang de shijie 缘起香港：张爱玲的異鄉和世界), published in 2022. This monograph, produced by Nicole Huang (Huang Xincun 黃心村), Professor in Comparative Literature

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at the University of Hong Kong, offers invaluable sources in visualizing Chang’s
experience as a student at the University of Hong Kong during 1939-1941, further
illustrating the inseparable connection between Chang’s life in Hong Kong and her literary
creation in following years after returning to Shanghai. Huang devoted one chapter to
Chang’s contextual encounter with the hitherto unknown author Stella Benson. Although
Huang did not write about Maugham’s influence on Chang’s exotic stories, the preface to
this book, written by Leo Ou-fan Lee, brings up the name of this English author quite
frequently. Lee shared his recollection in first reading Chang’s “Aloeswood Incense: The
First Brazier,” noticing its similarity to Maugham’s short stories “Rain” as they are both set
in the tropical colonies of the British Empire. Further to his recognition of the chapter
on Stella Benson, Lee inquired: “Since Huang Xincun has discovered Benson, this
relatively ‘obscure’ female writer, the next step would seemingly be to study Maugham. […]
Are there any scholars who specifically study the intertextual relationship between the
novels of Eileen Chang and W. Somerset Maugham? Therefore, considering the lack of
studies in both English and Chinese on this topic, my hope for the project is to contribute
to both Chang Studies and criticism of Maugham’s exotic stories in English scholarship.
The major contribution of my research lies in its originality as the first comparative
research focusing specifically on this two authors, Eileen Chang and Somerset Maugham,
from a postcolonial perspective. The theoretical framework I used in textual analysis in

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81 Translation is my own. The original sentence: “黃心村既然找到了本森這位「冷門」女作家，下一步似乎就應該研究毛姆了。[…] 是否有學者專門研究張愛玲和毛姆小說的互文關係？” See Leo Ou-fan Lee, preface to Hong Kong Connections: Eileen Chang and Worldmaking (Yuang Xianggang: Zhang Ailing de yiyou xinghe shijie 緹起香港:張愛玲的異鄉和世界) by Nicole Huang 黃心村 (Hong Kong: The Chinese University of Hong Kong Press), 14-15.
following chapters fundamentally builds upon Edward Said’s Orientalism. I will also combine Homi Bhabha’s Colonial mimicry and Luce Irigaray’s borrowing of this term into the feminist studies as the Mimicry of Femininity, as well as Shu-mei Shih’s definition of semi-colonialism and theory of travel writing into my discussion of Chang’s and Maugham’s exotic stories, which also distinguish my research from current literature on both authors, and hopefully could shed light on the intertextual connection between these two influential authors.

**Theoretical Approach**

The theoretical framework I applied in this research, first and foremost, is Edward Said’s Orientalism. This is the foundation of my research question and following literary analysis. Second, Shu-mei Shih’s definition of Semi-colonialism also helps in clarifying the geopolitical condition of Shanghai since the 1920s. In addition, other essential theories I used in textual analysis are Homi Bhabha’s conception of Colonial Mimicry and Luce Irigaray’s borrowing of this term from post-colonial studies to feminist study, which she called “Mimicry of Femininity.” These two theories on mimicry are applied to demonstrate my interpretation of the double-layered gaze in Eileen Chang’s and Somerset Maugham’s colonial writings.

Since Edward Said’s pioneering work on Orientalism, an entirely new dimension of critical discourse has opened up. Edward Said claims that Orientalism is “a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient” and a discourse within which “European culture gained in strength and identity by setting itself off against the
Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground itself.”82 The East is defined as the opposite of the West as the “Other”. The role that the East plays in Western ideology has long been embodied with evocative phrases such as “yellow peril,” “Asiatic hordes,” and “Oriental despotism.”83 In stereotypical colonial narratives, Oriental subjects have often been identified through exotic and erotic re-imagination as grotesque and mysterious.

My use of the term “Oriental” follows Philip Holden’s geographical and ethnographical contextualization in reading Somerset Maugham’s colonial narratives. Said’s terminology of Orientalism, following Foucault’s theorization of discourse, takes “the British, French, and American experience of the Orient” as a unit, which leads directly to “the Anglo-French-American experience of the Arabs and Islam” and excludes the other large part of the Orient.84 In applying Said’s discourse of Orientalism to Maugham’s exotic stories, Holden identifies four separate Orients – “the South Pacific, Malay (including much of the then Dutch East Indies), China and India.”85 In my research, therefore, “the Oriental” will mainly refer to China and partly to the South Pacific when discussing specific texts as this would allow me to focus more closely on its counterparts in Chang’s stories as well.

It should also be noted that contemporary Maugham scholarship, especially in China, has long been entrenched in the conventional Saidian Orientalism. Maugham is often

criticized as an imperialist Eurocentric writer for his exotic stories that are representative of early colonial narrative and stereotypical notions of Orientalism, which seems inevitable as he was brought up in an imperialist Eurocentric environment. However, the premise of the death of the author is abandoned within such discussions, and the discourse of Orientalism assumes the effect of the writer’s cultural and racial background on his or her writings. As pointed out by Ali Behdad, Edward Said’s Orientalism has repeatedly positioned all European writers as racist imperialists, which is an oversimplification that also supports exploitation.  

I do not suggest that Maugham is entirely an anti-imperialist author in this study. Yet, as mentioned above, I am interested in investigating how both authors surpass and to some extent subvert the Orientalist way of looking at the Orient in their writings. I would like to question the notion that, in order to write authentically or sincerely about postcolonial issues of a certain country, one has to be a native of that country, and also explore to what extent Maugham, if bearing an early awareness of Orientalism, was deliberately being ironic in his writing about cultural divides.

Christopher Isherwood famously likens himself to a camera on the first page of Goodbye to Berlin: “I am a camera with its shutter open, quite passive, recording, not thinking. Recording the man shaving at the window opposite and the woman in the kimono washing her hair. Some day, all this will have to be developed, carefully printed, fixed”.  

Enlightened by his words and starting with Said’s conceptualization of Orientalism, I would bring in Dennis Porter’s idea of the (dis)orientation of oneself in travel writings as

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he states

From the beginning, writers of travel have more or less unconsciously made it their purpose to take a fix on and thereby fix the world in which they found themselves; they are engaged in a form of cultural cartography that is impelled by an anxiety to map the globe, center it on a certain point, produce explanatory narratives, and assign fixed identities to regions and the races that inhabit them. Such representations are always concerned with the question of place and of placing, of situating oneself once and for all vis-à-vis an Other or others. 88

The situating and placing of oneself, as well as the writer’s relation to the place and others, is one of the important aspects in Maugham’s stories set in China. Isherwood’s claim of being objective in observing like a camera and Maugham’s choice of words in titles such as “painted veil” and “Chinese screen” indicates the disorientation between what is recorded and what is retold – as is “projected” onto the screen. The question of disorientation can be asked in reading Eileen Chang’s Shanghai stories as well. Chang is regarded to be more “objective” as a native Chinese author. Yet, does the “authenticity” or “objectivity” of her writings on the working class (such as the servant Ah Xiao in “Steamed Osmanthus Flower: Ah Xiao’s Unhappy Autumn”) should be questioned as well since Chang belongs to the upper-class elite? I would like to explore, bearing the “inevitability” of cultural and national background, how these authors represent and retell the stories set in colonial lands.

While examining Eileen Chang’s stories set in Shanghai and Hong Kong, I would also consider Shu-mei Shih’s explanation of semi-colonialism in analyzing Chang’s depiction of cultural hybridity and parasitism in colonial Hong Kong and semi-colonial Shanghai.

Hong Kong was ceded to Britain since the First Opium War (1839-1842), and officially

returned to China in 1997. The cultural identity of Hong Kong and its people were ambiguous as Hong Kong stood for a liminal space between the East and the West. However, different from Hong Kong, Shanghai (Mainland China to be precise) was never officially colonized by any Western power. Shu-mei Shih defines this state as semi-colonialism featuring four aspects. First, semi-colonialism implies an insufficiently formalized structure, which lacks systematic institutional infrastructure and did not assume “outright domination and formal sovereignty”. Second, semi-colonialism is closer to neocolonialism as it mainly “operated through economic and cultural imperialisms and not territorial occupation”. Third, “semi” does not imply “half” under the circumstances of China. Fragmented multiple foreign powers “potentially occupied different places within the Chinese cultural imaginary”. Fourth, the augmented exploitation and controls from multiple foreign powers “made impossible a tight-fitting, unified colonial management and containment of native spheres of activity”. Semi-colonialism is different from formal colonialism as experienced by countries such as Indonesia or India. Semi-colonialism ensures the perceived autonomy (such as language) of representation and a certain degree of openness to Western and Japanese culture. Shanghai, as a semi-colonial metropolis in Chang’s stories, presents a transnational space and a complication beyond the nation-state. This multi-cultural state of Huayang zachu 华洋杂处 (a miscellaneous situation where

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80 Ibid.
81 Ibid.
82 Ibid.
83 Ibid.
Chinese and foreigners live together) distinguishes Shanghai and Hong Kong from any other cities during wartime.

Therefore, I wish to clarify that the term “postcolonial” in this thesis refers to a way of thinking and perception rather than a specific historical period following colonialism. By incorporating the definition of semi-colonialism and situating the condition of Shanghai in Chang’s short stories from the 1920s, especially in the 1940s, as semi-colonialism, it becomes possible for me to analyze Chang’s stories from a postcolonial perspective. This approach focuses on the colonial effects, particularly on the cultural and individual dimensions of national ideology. Additionally, phrases such as “colonial context” and “colonial experience” may carry different meanings for Chang and Maugham, as they wrote these stories twenty years apart and within different cultural, social, and political backgrounds. Therefore, my reference to these phrases directly points to the textual settings of their stories, including both semi-colonial Shanghai and the British Empire’s overseas colonies.

Homi Bhabha’s notion of colonial mimicry is useful in reading the domestication of the unfamiliar and commodification of exoticism as represented in Chang’s “Steamed Osmanthus Flower: Ah Xiao’s Unhappy Autumn” and Maugham’s “The Outstation”. Homi Bhabha explains that

Colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite. Which is to say, that the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an ambivalence; in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference. […] The success of colonial appropriation depends on a proliferation of inappropriate objects that ensure its
strategic failure, so that mimicry is at once resemblance and menace.\textsuperscript{94}

An instance of imperial hegemony can be seen in the characters in both authors’ texts.

Bhabha’s notion of colonial mimicry explains the tension within the texts where the native Chinese in Hong Kong cater to the British taste in their daily lives, and the colonists in Malay or Shanghai insist on the routine of their Western life at home.

Chapter 1: Re-Imagining the Exotic:

Demonized Fantasy and Romantic Exaggeration

Starting from Marco Polo, the nature of Western construction of China is often protean and ambiguous in the literature. China has provided contemporary European writers with abundant and complex images of alterity in their travel writings. W. Somerset Maugham travelled to the Far East and South Seas during the 1920s. The depiction of China in Maugham’s Chinese-based novel *The Painted Veil* (1922) represents the Western re-imagination of the “monstrous beauty” of the East. In this chapter, using David Spurr’s concept of insubstantialization as a lever, I would like to conduct a detailed textual analysis of Maugham’s fictional colonial writing and several travel journals. Instead of understanding insubstantialization as a writer’s rhetorical writing technique, I intend to investigate why the substantial world often generates horror fantasy that is so detached from reality when the Western character encounters the exotic in the Oriental world. Here, I argue that the Western characters’ biased re-imagination of the exotic jumbles their impression of reality, therefore rendering it as a haunting, paradoxical fantasy of “monstrous beauty”. Meanwhile, I will explore how dreams play an important role in colonial writing as tangible but elusive forms of fantasy, which bridge a fragile connection to what is domestic for Western intruders. Last, this chapter will also demonstrate how normalcy is romantically exaggerated and entertained as exotic in the colonial land, which is constructed by appropriated cultural productions that purport to represent either the East or the West.
With Kitty Fane as both the protagonist and focalizer, Maugham’s novel *The Painted Veil* narrates the stories of her life mainly in Hong Kong and an inland Chinese town called Mei-tan-fu. To escape from her snobbish mother, Kitty impulsively marries Walter Fane as an alternative, a government bacteriologist, and moves from London to Hong Kong with him. Bored with her unattractive and clumsy husband, Kitty begins an affair with the Assistant Colonial Secretary, Charlie Townsend. Walter, deeply in love with Kitty, discovers the affair and deliberately volunteered to take a medical position in Mei-tan-fu, a poor and remote town at the center of a cholera epidemic. Walter offers Kitty two options: accompany him to Mei-tan-fu or face public exposure of the affair unless Charlie would divorce his wife and promise to marry her within one week after the decrees. Kitty sent for Charlie right after, believing without a doubt that he would divorce his wife for her sake. However, Charlie instantly refuses this option as his wife is the daughter of the Colonial Governor in Hong Kong. Disheartened, Kitty has no choice but to move to Mei-tan-fu with Walter. During her stay in this remote inland town, Kitty witnesses the life and death of the local Chinese and sees Walter’s dedication to those in need. Maugham depicted the gradual transformation of this female character through her various encounters with the French nuns at the convert, the Deputy Commissioner of Customs of Mei-tan-fu and his Manchu mistress, local military officials, and ultimately, her husband Walter.

This novel ends with the description of the Kitty Fane’s hallucinations in the poor inland town Mei-tan-fu in China:

Perhaps it was nothing but a dream from which she would suddenly awake with a sign of relief. It seemed to have taken place a long time ago and in a far-off place. It was singular
how shadowy the persons of that play seemed against the sunny background of real life. And now it seemed to Kitty like a story that she was reading; it was a little startling that it seemed to concern her so little. She found already that she could not recall with distinctness Waddington’s face which had been so familiar to her.95

There is a clear sense of detachment and disorientation when she looks back at the past months she spent at Mei-tan-fu. The whole experience seems nothing more than pieces of fragmented, dreamlike recollections.

David Spurr terms the rhetorical gesture of rendering an insubstantial world out of a journey into a non-Western place as “insubstantialization”.96 Similar to the extract above from Maugham’s The Painted Veil, Spurr deploys the example of Gérard de Nerval’s Voyage to the Orient (1851) in illustrating this rhetorical technique in Western writing. Nerval writes at the end of his journey that “I return to the land of storm and cold, and already the Orient seems but one of those morning dreams that are quickly dissipated by the worries of the day.”97 As Spurr notes, in journalistic travel writing, a Western writer’s “subjective disintegration is projected onto the outer scene, so that the scene itself becomes the locus of confusion and disintegration.”98 Yet, it should be pointed out that Spurr’s studies focus primarily on nonfiction, such as “literary and popular journalism, […] exploration narratives, travel writing, and the memoirs of colonial official.” 99 Hence, insubstantialization is identified as one of the rhetorical modes in colonial writing in this sense.

97 Quoted in Spurr, 696.
98 Spurr, The Rhetoric of Empire, 155.
99 Ibid, 2.
I would also like to introduce David Porter’s metaphor of “monstrous beauty” when he writes about the aesthetics of chinoiserie, specifically the silk slippers of women’s lotus-blossom feet in ancient China. As Porter notes,

[The silk slippers] are, by far, the most colorful and visually engaging objects in what is often otherwise a rather drab collection. They appeal to the touch as well, offering in their smooth surfaces and sensuous softness an alluring contrast to the cold metallic clamor of the copper coins in the neighboring bin. And inevitably, they conjure up a dim memory of a curiously cathexed eroticism, dating from those dark pre-evolutionary days when the delights offered by her lotus-blossom feet topped every blazon of a beauty’s charms.  

Porter suggests that the practice of physical monstrosity is cultural monstrosity and barbarism; meanwhile, it is also precisely the monstrosity that accounts for why these antique items sell so well to the Western audience.  The exotic is, as Rousseau and Porter explain, “whatever lies beyond the horizon of our mental maps of the familiar, conjuring up fascination and terror alike, acquires the attributes of difference, and thereby, of course, serves to reinforce the comforting perception of our own good order and sweet reasonableness.” The exotic commodities are cherished because of the remoteness of that unknown foreign culture they represent. I borrow the term “monstrous beauty” in this chapter to refer to the similar paradoxical nature of Western attitudes towards the East that can be found in Maugham’s colonial writings: demonizing the unknown aspect of the foreign land and, at the same time, exaggerating the local normalcy as something potentially entertaining and regarding it as the grand symbol of the East.

101 Ibid., 2.
1.1. Demonized Horror Fantasy

In Maugham’s *The Painted Veil*, Kitty’s first impression of China indeed exemplifies Porter’s notion of “monstrous beauty”. When Kitty Fane arrived in Mei-tan-fu, her first night “was tortured with strange dreams”:\(^{103}\)

She seemed to be carried in her chair and she felt the swaying motion as the bearers marched with their long, uneven stride. She entered cities, vast and dim, where the multitude thronged about her with curious eyes. The streets were narrow and tortuous and in the open shops, with their strange wares, all traffic stopped as she went by and those who bought and those who sold, paused. Then she came to the memorial arch and its fantastic outline seemed on a sudden to gain a monstrous life; its capricious contours were like the waving arms of a Hindu god, and, as she passed under it, she heard the echo of mocking laughter. […] And then there was a hoarse, abrupt cry […], hurrying silently, coolies passed in their ragged blue and they bore a coffin.\(^{104}\)

In this dream, elements evoking Oriental references are jumbled together. The Hindu God of India, the streets and shops with strange wares indicating a Nepalese or Arab market, and the coolies bearing the coffin that suggest Chinese or Vietnamese cultures combine into one mysterious and frightening image. According to the story and the time that it is set in, Kitty had never been to any Asian place other than Hong Kong, which was exceedingly British at that time since it was ceded to Britain following the Opium War in the 1840s. Yet, Kitty’s instinctive impression, which she may not even realize, is unconsciously revealed in this dream. Words such as “dim,” “tortuous,” “monstrous,” and “capricious” create a darkly dead but supernaturally alive atmosphere. Kitty appears to be the only living soul who is able to explore, but simultaneously afraid to, while being gazed upon by the still and stiff multitude.

Spurr’s explanation of travel writings emphasizes “a certain phenomenology of

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104 Ibid., 79-80.
consciousness deployed in relation to the non-Western world, rather than on the aesthetic qualities assigned to that world.” By emphasizing the mystical aspects of Mei-tan-fu and using abstract descriptions rather than anything concrete, the town, as the center of an epidemic, seems to belong to a bygone era and has little relevance to its modern Western readers. This, in turn, makes it seem exotic to the readers. However, it is also precisely the consciousness of being irrelevant that generates Kitty’s fear as the heroine of this story. Moreover, there is also a power dynamic between the observer and the observed. Despite Kitty’s horror at this nightmare, her being the seemingly only living soul in this dream can also be seen as a subconscious claim of power, as she is able to control the movement and feeling within it. The town is portrayed as lacking substance, and its people are viewed as in need of order, structure, and reality until this heroine, who is capable of bringing such attributes, intrudes.

It is also worth mentioning that the memorial arch and the coffin are the elements Kitty picked up from her memory of the journey to Mei-tan-fu – both indicating death. In Kitty’s recollections, these two elements are described as such:

She knew by now it was a memorial in compliment of a fortunate scholar or a virtuous widow, she had passed many of them since they left the river; but this one, silhouetted against the westering sun, was more fantastic and beautiful than any she had seen. Yet, she knew not why, it made her uneasy; it had a significance which she felt but could not put into words: Was it a menace that she vaguely discerned or was it derision? Four peasants passed, quick and silent, bearing a new coffin, unpainted, and its fresh wood gleamed white in the approaching darkness. Kitty felt her heart beat in terror against her ribs.

107 Ibid., 75.
There was an epidemic in this city and people were “dying like flies.”¹⁰⁸ The meaning of life is somehow lost in Mei-tan-fu as the bodies need to be buried as soon as possible once the person passed away to avoid contagion. There is no time left to paint the coffin, let alone to mourn for the dead. The coffin is being buried while the memorial arch is built up to be seen, remembered, and worshiped as some sort of symbol for morality and chastity. During her stay in Mei-tan-fu, Kitty strived to denote and interpret the cultural symbols that the memorial archway signified. As Graham Huggan explains,

exotic is not, as if often supposed, an inherent quality to be found ‘in’ certain people, distinctive objects, or specific places; exoticism describes, rather, a particular mode of aesthetic perception – one which renders people, objects and places strange even as it claims to surrender to its immanent mystery.¹⁰⁹

It is notable that Kitty was not aware of the meaning of the arch when she first arrived in Mei-tan-fu, and she even described it as “fantastic and beautiful”; yet in her dream later that day, the memorial arch was demonized as if it gained a monstrous life. The unconscious perception of certain foreign elements suggests Kitty’s inherent fear and prejudice towards the unknown East in general. The simultaneity of contrasting feelings indicates Kitty’s subconsciousness of guilty as she later come to realize that the memorial arch seems to be a mockery of her own unfaithfulness in the marriage. Additionally, such paradoxical perceptions also echo with Porter’s metaphor of “monstrous beauty.” By depicting Kitty’s emotional reflections of making meanings out of the foreign and the unknown, Maugham makes sure that his readers are experiencing a similar process of making the unknown relatable and accessible, along with Kitty through the story. Through

¹⁰⁸ Maugham, The Painted Veil, 76.
Kitty’s encounters with the Oriental world, both fascination and terror are sold as “the exotic” to the Western audience.

After Walter’s death, when Kitty was finally able to leave Mei-tan-fu, the scenery she saw on the same road as she first arrived in the city left her with a completely different impression:

They passed up and down little hills laid out with trim rice-fields and farm-houses nestling cozily in a grove of bamboos; they passed through ragged villages and populous cities walled like the cities in a missal. The sun of the early autumn was pleasant, and if at daybreak, when the shimmering dawn lent the neat fields the enchantment of a fairy tale, it was cold, the warmth later was very grateful. Kitty was filled by it with a sense of beatitude which she made no effort to resist.\footnote{Maugham, \textit{The Painted Veil}, 246.}

Although this is not a sudden shift of attitudes in terms of the ways Kitty perceives the scenery, it implies an ultimate relief. This relief may be because of her gradual exploration of ancient Chinese philosophy, or through her understanding of foreign ideologies and cultures, enlightened through communication with other characters. However, there is always an indication throughout the narration that this ultimate relief and optimism have resulted from Walter’s death and her eventual escape away from Mei-tan-fu. To a large extent, what makes all these changes is that she was finally free – free from the marriage with Walter that made her feel furious, guilty, and sympathetic, and away from the center of the epidemic haunted by death.

Another example of the haunted dream can be found in “Taipan” (1922) from Maugham’s travel journey collection \textit{On a Chinese Screen}. Unlike \textit{The Painted Veil}, Maugham presented \textit{On a Chinese Screen} as non-fictional. Maugham wrote in the preface of the Heinemann Collected Edition of this book that
This is not a book at all, but the material for a book. [...] I did not keep a diary, for this is a thing I have never been able to do since I was ten, but I made notes of the people and places that excited my interest. I vaguely thought they would be useful for stories or a novel. They mounted up and it occurred to me that I might make them into a connected narrative of my journey. 111

This collection of travel narratives consists of 58 short sketches picked up from Maugham’s journey in China, and they are put together in a non-linear narrative sequence. As Philip Holden notes, “the text indulges in a cutting up of China into representative metonyms (antiques, decaying buildings, representative types of colonizers and colonized), presenting itself as having affinities with the sketchbook or photo album, and thus self-consciously allying itself with tourist memorabilia”. 112 Stories such as “The Philosopher” and “A Student of the Drama” are written from Maugham’s own perspective, which records the actual meetings when he visited Gu Hongming 辜鸿铭 and Song Chunfang 宋春舫 respectively in China. However, though presented as non-fictional, On a Chinese Screen also contains several stories that feature anonymous narrators, sometimes even with omniscient voices. The narrator, if not necessarily Maugham himself, is often both a flaneur and an observer of events. Therefore, agreeing with Holden’s comments, I would read On a Chinese Screen as a sourcebook of short sketches or snapshots, in which the original images of many characters in Maugham’s later exotic narrative can be found.

“Taipan” is one of the short stories that is narrated from an omniscient point of view. This story revolves around a British businessman, referred to as the Taipan, who lives and works in a colonial outpost in China. He is a wealthy, influential figure who commands respect and authority in the foreign community. One day, the Taipan experiences a sudden

112 Philip Holden, Orienting Masculinity, Orienting Nation, 121.
fear of death, which is triggered when he encounters a Chinese fortune-teller who predicts his imminent death. Despite trying to dismiss the prediction, the Taipan becomes increasingly paranoid and anxious. His fear gradually intensifies as he started seeing omens and signs almost everywhere, interpreting ordinary events as confirmations of his impending death. The story ends with the Taipan’s sudden and unexpected death, fulfilling the fortune-teller’s prophecy.

Corresponding to Kitty in *The Painted Veil*, the taipan came across coolies digging a grave when he strolled into a cemetery:

He was astonished, for he had not heard that anyone in the community was dead. ‘Who the devil’s that for?’ he said aloud. The colliers did not even look at him; they went on with their work, standing in the grave, deep down, and they shoveled up heavy clods of earth. […] He knew that Mrs. Broome’s child was ailing and it might have died, but he would certainly have heard of it, and besides that wasn’t a child’s grave, it was a man’s, and a big man’s too. It was uncanny.\(^{113}\)

There is nothing particularly astonishing about digging graves for the dead, yet there are reasons for the taipan’s astonishment. Firstly, he was in charge of the community: “no one knew better than he that he was an important person. He was number one in not the least important branch of the most important English firm in China”.\(^{114}\) Yet, he was not aware of any news about somebody dying in the community he was in charge of. This is a sign of things slightly going out of his control. Secondly, when he inquired about the dead person’s identity, he did not receive an immediate reply as expected because of the language barrier: “though he had been so long in China he knew no Chinese, in his day it was not thought necessary to learn the damned language”.\(^{115}\) Having been in China for more than

\(^{113}\) Maugham, *On a Chinese Screen*, 126.

\(^{114}\) Ibid., 122.

\(^{115}\) Ibid., 126.
thirty years and speaking no Chinese at all, the taipan asked the coolies in English, and when the coolies answered in Chinese, he “cursed them for ignorant fools”.\footnote{Maugham, *On a Chinese Screen*, 126.} Considering what is said at the beginning of the story, that “he was the most prominent man in the community and what he said went”, this failure of communication, and to be specific, the failure of giving the commands and requesting answers, indicate the taipan’s failed authority. Later that day, when the taipan realized that the new grave was in fact nowhere to be found in the cemetery and that he was the only one who had seen it, he started to feel panicked and “vaguely annoyed.”\footnote{Ibid., 127.} Being tipsy that night, the taipan had a dream:

He had dreamed of that open grave and the coolies digging leisurely. He was sure he had seen them. It was absurd to say it was a hallucination when he had seen them with his own eyes. Then he heard the rattle of the night watchman going his rounds. It broke upon the stillness of the night so harshly that it made him jump out of his skin. And then terror seized him. He felt a horror of the winding multitudinous streets of the Chinese city, and there was something ghastly and terrible in the convoluted roofs of the temples with their devils grimacing and tortured.\footnote{Ibid., 129-130. Grammatical error of “an hallucination” is kept as the original text.}

What he saw during the day projected into this nightmare. Terror seized him because the unknown and uncontrollable aspect became so evident that he could no longer ignore it. In addition, the failure of communication and declining power over the Chinese community are somehow related to death – the panic of being murdered by the locals. In the taipan’s horror fantasy, the new grave was dug for him, in his exact size, and he was terribly afraid of being buried in this land.

It is interesting that, in Maugham’s colonial narratives, European colonial officials or clerks who have been living in the East for decades often yearn for returning to spend
their last years at home and dream bridges of a fragile connection to their domestic origin. However, rather than a real bond to the native homeland, such nostalgic sentiments seem to be driven by their resentment towards the Oriental world.

In “Taipan”, the character expressed such thoughts after having a nightmare about the nameless grave:

He wanted to go home. If he had to die he wanted to die in England. He could not bear to be buried among all these yellow men, with their slanting eyes and their grinning faces. He wanted to be buried at home, not in that grave he had seen that day.\textsuperscript{119}

Ironically, his English origin and family were merely a past from which he had absconded. At the very beginning of this text, the readers already have a clear impression of the family background of this character:

He had indeed gone far. That was why he did not care to go home now; he had not been to England for ten years. [...] He knew no one at home. His sisters had married in their own station, their husbands were clerks and their sons were clerks; there was nothing between him and them; they bore him. [...] But when the time came for him to retire he had no intention of going back to England, he had seen too many men doing that and he knew how often it was a failure; he meant to take a house near the race-course in Shanghai: what with bridge and his ponies and golf he expected to get through the rest of his life very comfortably.\textsuperscript{120}

The essential reasons that account for his intention to stay in China after retirement are, first, he no longer fits into the social hierarchy that he initially came from; second, he is well aware of the fact that he could still live a rather posh life if staying at the British colonized foreign place, for his nationality and skin tone. The contradictory attitudes often occur with the threat of losing authority and the horror of being alienated, as implied in his dreams.

Maugham’s male protagonists often experience such dilemmas that, on the one hand,
they depart from their homeland and cultures for so long that they cannot return; on the other hand, they highlight the inseparable link to their cultural origin. In another short story entitled “Masterson” (1963) collected in Maugham’s Far East stories, the first-person narrator encounters a colonial official named Masterson in a small town in central Burma who was originally from Cheltenham, England. He lives with a Burmese mistress for three years and has three children with her. When the Burmese girl asks to marry him legally, in an English way, Masterson refuses and thinks it is just her whim. As a result, the mistress goes back to her family and takes all the kids away with her, and Masterson tells this story to the narrator with regret. When asked about the reason for not marrying her, Masterson replied:

> If I marry her I’d have to stay in Burma for the rest of my life. Sooner or later I shall retire and then I want to go back to my old home and live there. I don’t want to be buried out here. I want to be buried in an English churchyard. I’m happy enough here, but I don’t want to live here always. I couldn’t. I want England. Sometimes I get sick of this hot sunshine and these garish colours. I want grey skies and a soft rain falling and the smell of the country. [...] I dare say it all sounds very humdrum and provincial and dull to you, but that’s the sort of life my people have always lived and that’s the sort of life I want to live myself. It’s a dream if you like, but it’s all I have, it means everything in the world to me, and I can’t give it up.

> [...] Sometimes I ask myself if it’s worth while to sacrifice my happiness for a dream. It is only a dream, isn’t it? 212

In the original text, Masterson used fourteen continuous “want” in his reply in explaining the strong wish of going back to England after retirement. The reason for juxtaposing “Taipan” and “Masterson” is to highlight that, although characters express a strong sentimental wish to return to their native homeland, it is noticeable that the domestic life and family are, in fact, absent in their current life. No details of any domestic life but only

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vague, childish words can be found in their recollections. Solitude in the Oriental world, disconnection to the native land, and the imagined horror fantasy seem to account for the characters’ nostalgia.

Mary Louise Pratt discusses how travel and exploration writing from 1750 to 1980 “produced” the other (Other) part of the world to European readers. She mentions the importance and usage of arrival scenes in travel writing: “arrival scenes are a convention of almost every variety of travel writing and serve as particularly potent sites for framing relations of contact and setting the terms of its representation.”

In these texts, the arrival scenes are frequently shadowed with the biased and stereotypical impressions of the Orient, which to some extent account for the white characters’ vehement attachment to their native homeland. Their journey into the unknown East is like a dangerous adventure; thus, simultaneously, they wish to be the survivor at the end of their story.

1.2. Romantic Exaggeration of the Normalcy

The notion of “romantic exaggeration” that I wish to invoke here refers to a particular way of perceiving the East, one that generates a self-righteous standard of what “the exotic” is in colonial contexts. According to Edward Said, the Orient is often depicted as a primitive world shrouded in mystery, yet simultaneously celebrated for its fascinating traditions, scenery, and ancient philosophy. In Maugham’s exotic stories, the journey to the East is portrayed as a potential adventure into a wildlife zoo, where Western characters

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often view the Oriental world as a place to be explored, tamed, and cultivated. These characters are frequently amazed by common objects or occasions, which they regard as quintessential symbols of the East or embodiments of beauty.

In both *The Painted Veil* and another two short stories by Maugham entitled “Dawn” (1922) and “The Road” (1922), collected in *On A Chinese Screen*, the sunrise scene is described as solemnly sacred. In the novel, the heroine Kitty often stares at the river and bastion at the opposite bank through her room’s window. The view outside the window never really changed over time during her stay, but through Kitty – the focaliser’s point of view, the scenery was changing all the time. The following example is on the first morning when Kitty arrived at Mei-tan-fu. Echoing what has been discussed in the earlier section, the heroine instantly felt the terror that is inspired by the lifeless scenery as well as her potential prejudice:

The dawn had just broken and from the river rose a white mist shrouding the junks that lay moored close to one another like peas in a pod. There were hundreds of them, and they were silent, mysterious in that ghostly light, and you had a feeling that their crews lay under an enchantment, for it seemed that it was not sleep, but something strange and terrible, that held them so still and mute.

The morning drew on and the sun touched the mist so that it shone whitely like the ghost of snow on a dying star. Though on the river it was light so that you could discern palely the lines of the crowded junks and the thick forest of their masts, in front it was a shining wall the eye could not pierce. But suddenly from that white cloud a tall, grim and massive bastion emerged. It seemed not merely to be made visible by the all-discovering sun but rather to rise out of nothing at the touch of a magic wand. It towered, the stronghold of a cruel and barbaric race, over the river.  

In Kitty’s narration, this “othered” city serves as a site that generates horror and mystery, a world enchanted with ghostly magic, an object that is being gazed at but cannot be penetrated. The numerous, crowded junks also aggravate the overwhelming tension to

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such vision, as if some enormous giant is hidden under the pretended silence and would break the peace at any second. Kitty felt threatened by all the exotic, unknown surroundings. However, the character herself, not the bastion, is in fact the intruder. In subsequent paragraphs, the repetitions of her ignorance of the language and the discomfort when being surrounded by Chinese children also indicate that Kitty saw herself as an outsider. Therefore, what she felt towards such scenery at the very beginning was constant rejection and horror fantasy.

However, it is worth mentioning that, following the above-extracted paragraph, Kitty’s perception of the sunrise scene shows an abrupt reversal when the sun came out later that day:

> But the magician who built worked swiftly and now a fragment of coloured wall crowned the bastion; in a moment, out of the mist, looming vastly and touched here and there by a yellow ray of sun, there was seen a cluster of green and yellow roofs. Huge they seemed and you could make out no pattern; the order, if order there was, escaped you; wayward and extravagant, but of an unimaginable richness. This was no fortress, nor a temple, but the magic palace of some emperor of the gods where no man might enter. It was too airy, fantastic and unsubstantial to be the work of human hands; it was the fabric of a dream. The tears ran down Kitty’s face and she gazed, her hands clasped to her breast and her mouth, for she was breathless, open a little. [...] Here was Beauty. She took it as the believer takes in his mouth the wafer which is God.\(^{125}\)

There is an unnatural incoherence in Kitty’s perception – from strong negation to complete appreciation. Kitty’s contrasting comments remind the reader of some cultural stereotype that people from the West can always “see Chinese women as [...] exotic sex sirens or sinister dragon ladies, images which have been perpetuated by works like *The World of Suzie Wong* and *Taipan*”.\(^{126}\) Like an alluring siren, the bastion and temple were once shadowed

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with frightening air; and all of a sudden, the godly light shines upon the bank and Kitty seemed to be the one who was enchanted. The very manner of perceiving nature and landscape indicates an act of appropriation and idealization. By projecting Western religious ideology onto the exotic Oriental world, the foreign landscape is turned into some Western cultural production, bearing more familiarities and fewer threats to the heroine. As Spurr notes, “idealization always takes place in relation to Western culture itself. […] It makes use of the savage in order to expand the territory of the Western imagination, transforming the Orient into yet one more term of Western culture’s dialogue with itself.” 127 Therefore, far from appreciating the landscape and scenery for its own existence, this transformation of perception is more like a gesture of romantic exaggeration so that to claim a sense of reassurance and superiority.

Likewise, the short story “Dawn” also celebrates a similar sunrise scene. This story has no central plot or character development. The narrator describes an early morning scene in a Chinese town. He observes the town waking up, with people going about their daily routines as the sun rises. The narrative witnesses the quiet beauty and simplicity of the dawn, capturing the serene atmosphere and the subtle details of life during that moment. When the night is about to end, and the sun starts to show up with shadowy light, the narrator relates the scenery of dawn to the paintings of old masters of China. Apart from worshiping the scenery as sacred and holy, the narrator also generates a nostalgic image out of the imagination of the real landscape:

This is the moment of most magical beauty, when the hills and the valleys, the trees and the water, have a mystery which is not of earth. […] The bamboos grow right down the

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127 Spurr, The Rhetoric of Empire, 128.
causeway, their thin leaves shivering in the shadow of a breeze, and they grow with a high-bred grace so that they look like groups of ladies in the Great Ming dynasty resting languidly by the wayside. [...] But the road turns and, my God, the bamboos, the Chinese bamboos, transformed by some magic of the mist, look just like the hops of Kentish field. Do you remember the sweet-smiling hop-fields and the fat green meadows, the railway line that runs along the sea and the long shining beach and the desolate greyness of the English Channel? The seagull flies over the wintry coldness and the melancholy of its cry is almost unbearable.\textsuperscript{128}

The narrator creates a romantic, typical image of an English country scene, a civilized representation where nature co-exists somehow harmoniously with industry. Spurr claims that “utopian vision imposes an entire series of European institutions on the natural landscape. [...] It is a question of simple substitution and supplement rather than true transformation”\textsuperscript{129} The Chinese bamboo is no longer the object that is being written about; instead, they are a blank, meaningless background upon which the ideal European civilization can be projected. As a matter of fact, beauty could only be found and appreciated when the landscape and scenery are reminiscent of the homeland. This way of seeing the East, as Spurr sees it, eases the disoriented Western minds when first encountering the unknown Oriental world. In addition, the exaggeration and dramatic tone seem like an unintentional ridicule of a common sunrise scene, through which a tangible connection between the real scenery and the domestic homeland is established.

Furthermore, the exact moment as Kitty gazes at the bastion across the river can be found in its original sample in Maugham’s earlier story “The Road”, in which the narrator recounts a journey along a Chinese road. He describes the various travelers he encounters, including peasants, merchants, and laborers, each with their own stories and struggles. This

\textsuperscript{129} Spurr, \textit{The Rhetoric of Empire}, 30.
replication of settings could possibly explain the abrupt transformation of Kitty’s attitudes toward the scenery in the novel:

For looming through the mist you may see the fantastic roofs of a temple loftily raised on a huge stone bastion, around which, a natural moat, flows a quite green river, and when the sun lights it you seem to see the dream of a Chinese palace, a palace as rich and splendid as those which haunted the fancy of the Arabian story-teller; or, crossing a ferry at dawn, you may see, a little above you, silhouetted against the sunrise, a sampan in which a Ferryman is carrying a crowd of passengers; you recognise on a sudden Charon, and you know that his passengers are the melancholy dead.¹³⁰

The Western religious ideology and cultural references, again, are appropriated into the scenery. The exotic elements are appreciated and understood under the circumstances when they can be related to an Arabian story or the Greek god. As Maugham stated himself, the writing of The Painted Veil began with its story, while the characters and settings are later inserted into the storyline.¹³¹ This paragraph makes it more evident that Maugham practically transplants the exotic cultural background that he personally experienced during the trip into his fictional writings. It also to some extent reveals Maugham’s inability in representing “the exotic” without direct adaptation of his first-hand materials, thus making Kitty’s realization an abrupt transformation in the story.

Other than writing about the landscape, Maugham’s exotic stories also contain portraits of the local people. Although Maugham’s colonial narratives frequently mock white male officials in the East, his short stories have also been criticized for reproducing the conventional, often rather negative images of the locals. For instance, Kathy-Ann Tan comments that

Maugham’s short stories are representative of early colonial narratives about the region, and contain, for the most part, stereotypical notions of the local folk (e.g., the Chinese

¹³¹ Maugham, The Painted Veil, ix.
population as a shrewd and cunning race, although lacking in courage, and the native Malay population as indolent people spending all their time drinking or gambling). The Painted Veil can be seen as an example of such commentary, in which white people are under the focus while almost all the locals are left at the margin of the storyline, nameless with homogenous, unrecognizable poker faces.

As mentioned earlier, there seems to be a conflict between the plot and what the narration actually implies in terms of Kitty’s changing attitudes towards the surroundings, including people, ideologies, and environment. The Painted Veil is narrated from Kitty’s point of view, which means that it is through Kitty’s eyes that the story unfolds. However, the narrator is not Kitty. The use of third person pronouns shows that the narrative agent is not the character herself but one who is taking Kitty’s perspective throughout. The narrative voice is not omniscient. In fact, the narrative agent is limited to Kitty’s point of view. Since the narrative voice is not Kitty’s, it maintains a certain degree of objectivity. In other words, the narrator retells the story that happens surrounding this character without giving personal comments. However, it is also precisely such “frankness” in the narrative voice that reveals a growing sense of irony because the narrative voice is also opinioned, or even biased in some way. Throughout this story, almost every plot involves Kitty’s presence at the scene. This narrator probably can be seen as semi-omniscient to the extent that it can penetrate and very straightforwardly reveal what is in Kitty’s mind. The narration contains large amounts of Kitty’s inner thoughts and feelings towards events and people around her. Therefore, the narrator’s failure in remaining detached could be also read as

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Maugham’s intention in taking over the narrative voice as the maintained objectivity is somehow deconstructed by the revealing commentary.

As the plots unfolds, the reader acquires more insights into this character – Kitty Fane. In terms of establishing this character, the narrative voice not only shows what others comment on Kitty, but also reveals Kitty’s personal thoughts and feelings, and many of these indicate her racist and prejudiced perspectives. For example, at the beginning of this novel, the readers already know that Kitty is vain as she married Walter simply because she wanted to marry before her younger sister does. Walter also bluntly pointed out in a conversation with Kitty that she is silly, frivolous, vulgar, and empty-handed. The narrator loyally records and reveals her flaws. However, the narrative voice also creates a context of irony in which the readers are invited to re-consider the conflicts in the narration, as readers have the same semi-omniscient stance in realizing a potential gap between what Kitty says or does and what she actually thinks.

For instance, when Kitty visits the French nuns at the convent in Mei-tan-fu for the very first time, she meets some Chinese orphans:

She shuddered a little, for in their uniform dress, sallow-skinned, stunted, with their flat noses, they looked hardly human. They were repulsive. […] They were very red and they made funny restless movements with their arms and legs; their quaint little Chinese faces were screwed up into strange grimaces. They looked hardly human; queer animals of an unknown species, and yet there was something singularly moving in the sight.133

The newborns are described as “hardly human” from Kitty’s perspective. Contrasting from what the readers would commonly expect – that the newborns are seen as little angels – these Chinese orphans are demonized as little monsters with “quaint little Chinese faces”

of “unknown species.” Further, in the following chapter when Kitty decided to help take care of the children in the convent, it seemed to be a great challenge for Kitty as she had to make effort in overcoming the disgust when surrounded by the kids:

For the first few days she had to make something of an effort to overcome the faint distance she felt for these little girls, in their ugly uniforms, with their stiff black hair, their round yellow faces, and their staring, sloe-black eyes. [...] But there was one child that she could not grow used to. It was a little girl of six, an idiot with a huge hydrocephalic head that swayed top-heavily on a small, squat body, large vacant eyes and a drooling mouth; the creature spoke hoarsely a few mumbled words; it was revolting and horrible; and for some reason it conceived an idiot attachment for Kitty so that it followed her about as she changed her place from one part of the large room to another. It clung to her skirt and rubbed its face against her knees. It sought to fondle her hands. She shivered with disgust. She knew it yearned for caresses and she could not bring herself to touch it.  

It is noticeable that the words used to describe the children are rather negative and establish a very stereotypical and prejudiced image of Chinese looks. Kitty saw the children in the convent as if they were rendered homogenous. The very child whom Kitty both so disliked and was afraid of somehow resembles the Oriental world that Kitty first encountered. To Kitty, this orphan girl is not even seen as naturally human. The repetitive use of “it” indicates that Kitty considered this child no different from a little ugly animal. More strikingly, when Sister St. Joseph told Kitty how many times they had tried to bring this little kid back to life, Kitty changed her attitude towards this girl all of a sudden: “next day when the idiot child came to her and touched her hand Kitty nerved herself to place it in a caress on the great bare skull. She forced her lips into a smile.”  

There are clearly conflicts between how Kitty acts and what she, in fact, thinks about the kid.

In addition, as the narrator frankly reveals Kitty’s thoughts, the readers are able to

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135 Ibid., 164.
find out that Kitty was actually thinking about the Mother Superior at that very time:

But she remembered the soft look which had transfigured so beautifully the countenance of the Mother Superior when on Kitty’s first visit to the convent she had stood surrounded by those ugly little things, and she would not allow herself to surrender to her instinct.\textsuperscript{136}

The thought of “but the Mother Superior stood among them like Charity itself” seemed to somehow encourage and motivate Kitty to imitate the Mother Superior’s behaviors.\textsuperscript{137}

Therefore, when Kitty found herself comforting these “little ugly things” with her touch and soft words, “she felt that they liked her and, flattered and proud, she liked them in return.”\textsuperscript{138} From the focalizer’s and probably those French nuns’ perspectives, the image of a great, brave, and caring Western female saver is established. Yet, as for the readers, this absurd twist of Kitty’s feelings is rather unnatural and unlikely. To a large extent, the narrator betrays this character as the narrator unveils Kitty’s pretended mask she presents to others.

However, this novel has one exceptional chapter that is entirely devoted to depicting one Chinese woman who distinguishes herself from all other locals. Waddington, the Deputy Commissioner of the Customs of Mei-tan-fu, lived with a Manchu princess for a long time and Kitty requested to pay a visit to her. Upon meeting the Manchu woman, Kitty was immediately amazed and felt attracted to her.

She wore a jacket of pale green silk with tight sleeves that came over her wrists and on her black hair, elaborately dressed, was the head-dress of the Manchu women. Her face was coated with powder and her cheeks from the eyes to the mouth heavily rouged; her plucked eyebrows were a thin dark line and her mouth was scarlet. From this mask her black, slightly slanting, large eyes burned like lakes of liquid jet. She seemed more like an idol than a woman.\textsuperscript{139}

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext[150]{Maugham, \textit{The Painted Veil}, 163.}
\footnotetext[151]{Ibid., 138.}
\footnotetext[152]{Ibid., 163.}
\footnotetext[153]{Ibid., 145.}
\end{footnotes}
Although much is written in describing the appearance of this character, what the readers may feel is probably the same as Kitty’s comment: “She seemed more like an idol than a woman.” The Manchu woman is gorgeous but nameless and inarticulate. Her image is rather flat and weirdly static: for one thing, the Manchu woman did not have any noticeable movements or gestures. She seemed to be situated on the seat like a doll. For another, she belonged to the ethnic minority Manchu (滿族) instead of China’s largest ethnic group Han (漢族). Manchu people ruled Later Jin (后金, 1616-1636) and Qing Dynasty (清朝, 1644-1912), the last imperial dynasty. From Kitty’s perspective, the Manchu woman looked like an image that dated back centuries ago embodying secrets that Kitty was unable to comprehend. The ethnic background adds even more romantic, exotic touches to this woman. This could explain why Kitty immediately assumed that the Manchu woman was a real Imperial Princess when she heard of this person for the very first time. Although Waddington clarified when being asked about her origin: “No, that is a romantic exaggeration of the nuns. She belongs to one of the great families of the Manchu, but they have, of course, been ruined by the revolution.” Kitty still believed, or at least firmly hoped that the Manchu woman was a real Imperial Princess when she finally met her in person.

Following the above extract, the story moves on from the depiction of the Manchu woman to Kitty’s inner thoughts:

She was impressive as she sat, without embarrassment, in her beautiful clothes; and from the painted face the eyes looked out wary, self-possessed and unfathomable. She was unreal, like a picture, and yet had an elegance which made Kitty feel all thumbs. Kitty had

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141 Ibid., 130.
never paid anything but passing and somewhat contemptuous attention to China in which fate had thrown her. It was not done in her set. Now she seems on a sudden to have an inkling of something remote and mysterious. Here was the East, immemorial, dark and inscrutable. The beliefs and the ideals of the West seemed crude beside ideals and beliefs of which in this exquisite creature she seemed to catch a fugitive glimpse. Here was a different life, lived on a different plane. Kitty felt strangely that the sight of this idol, with her painted face and slanting, wary eyes, made the efforts and the pains of the everyday would she knew slightly abused. The coloured mask seemed to hide the secret of an abundant profound and significant experience: those long, delicate hands with their tapering fingers held the keys of riddles undivined.142

Kitty’s favorable attitudes toward the Manchu woman and her subsequent epiphany about what the East represents are not at all surprising. Firstly, as illustrated above, the Manchu woman’s appearance and background distinguish her from the general public. The Chinese people Kitty had encountered so far on her trip to Mei-tan-fu were beggars, coolies, orphans, and the numb residents who were impoverished and constantly tortured by sickness and death. Secondly, the Manchu woman is the mistress of the Deputy Commissioner of the Customs, affording her a life of comfort and security. Despite the city being engulfed by the shadow of cholera, her life remained insulated from the outside world, peaceful and detached. The place where the white officials, including both Kitty and Waddington, resided was on one side of the river, while on the other side of the river, “so short a way from them, the great city lay in terror; and death, sudden and ruthless, hurried through its tortuous streets.”143 The struggle and hardship endured by the people for basic sustenance had no bearing on the Manchu woman. She appeared to have been living through all the centuries without being touched by the trials of earthly life.

Furthermore, for Kitty, the Manchu woman is also the substantialized image of

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143 Ibid., 78.
the “immemorial, dark and inscrutable” history and tradition. “Wary, self-possessed and unfathomable” as the Manchu woman looked, the important characteristic was that she seemed harmless to Kitty. Like the Taipan discussed earlier, who was afraid of being murdered by Chinese grave diggers, Kitty as well often felt frightened or threatened by the locals. She described the passers-by on the streets as “ghosts”, and even the newly born and orphans in the conversion were “repulsive and horrible”: “they looked hardly human; queer animals of an unknown species.” However, the Manchu woman was approved of by Kitty. It is through this white woman’s approval that the local woman is presentable but no more than as a situated harmless idol. The glamorous, exquisite image that the Manchu woman represents echoes Kitty’s own imagination of what the exotic East should look like.

As Tzvetan Todorov writes,

> the best candidates for the role of exotic ideal are the peoples and cultures that are most remote from us and least known to us. […] Knowledge is incompatible with exoticism, but lack of knowledge is in turn irreconcilable with praise of others; yet praise without knowledge is precisely what exoticism expires to be.

This constitutive paradox can be frequently found in Maugham’s colonial narratives when the Western characters encounter the unknown Oriental world. The commercial success of the exotic or “Chinoiserie” commodities in the West shows the culturally anchored phenomenon of exoticism.

Maugham’s choice of using the perspective of a Western female to depict the Manchu woman highlights the exotic and mysterious qualities attributed to her by Western characters. This portrayal reinforces the cultural difference and stereotypes of otherness.

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However, Kitty’s perspective in revealing the appearance of the Manchu princess also allows Maugham to develop Kitty’s characteristics, as this encounter marks a significant moment in her transformation, lifting “the painted veil which those who live call Life.”\(^\text{146}\) Furthermore, it provides a coherent transition to Waddington’s illumination of Taoism to Kitty, which centers on the renunciation of one’s desire and indicates a transgression of social convention. For most readers, Maugham’s colonial stories, as Graham Green described in a letter to Maugham himself, “primarily means adultery in China, murder in Malaya, suicide in the South Seas.”\(^\text{147}\) Yet, Waddington’s admission of his relationship with a native mistress move beyond the conventional plot of “adultery in China,” showcasing Maugham’s intention to highlight Kitty’s change in learning the virtues of acceptance and appreciation. The relationship between the Manchu woman and Waddington would be seen as a scandal in a typical colonial context, and one of the reasons white women are introduced in colonial narratives is to stymie such practice.\(^\text{148}\) However, during their encounter, Kitty learns to engage with the foreign other with a much more humane attitude, accepting Waddington’s way of life and appreciating the Manchu woman’s difference. Nevertheless, although Maugham does not surpass the conventional stereotypes of the Orient, especially in his portrait of the Manchu woman’s appearance, the lens through which she is depicted still indicates Kitty’s growing sensibility in embracing difference.

Apart from the Manchu woman, Maugham also makes a comparison between two

\(^\text{146}\) Maugham, *The Painted Veil*, 93.


\(^\text{148}\) Such setting and plot are very common in Maugham’s colonial stories. I will illustrate this in more detail in Chapter 4.
white male characters in this novel - Charlie Townsend and Waddington, who are both
British officials working in China. Kitty is largely influenced by Waddington in viewing the
exotic East throughout the story, and her changing attitudes can be understood as a process
of demystifying the exotic East. These two male characters share the almost same cultural
and social origins and educational backgrounds. I would like to discuss these two characters
in detail from mainly three aspects: 1) their preservation of a more civilized, superior sense
of Whiteness through their repetitive daily rituals, either consciously or unconsciously; 2)
their contrasting attitudes towards foreign ideologies and cultures; and 3) Waddington's
comments on British officials such as Charlie Townsend.

Fairly early in the story, the location of Kitty and Walter's house in Hong Kong is
introduced as such:

Their house stood in the Happy Valley, on the side of the hill, for they could not afford
to live on the more eligible but expensive Peak. But her abstracted gaze scarcely noticed
the blue sea and the crowded shipping in the harbour. She could think only of her lover.149

This happens right after the adultery scene between Kitty and Charlie, and Kitty watched
Charlie leave the house. The Fane's house is located in the Happy Valley area in the east
part of Hong Kong. This area was originally swamp and was called Wong Nai Chung (黃
泥涌) in the mid-19th Century. A British military camp was set up in this area but was later
affected by malaria and a then-unknown fever. The fatal diseases led to an increasing death
rate in the valley as well as in Victoria City. As a result, this area became a place to bury the
dead and was thus renamed “Happy Valley” by the British troops.150 The British later

150 According to *Hong Kong Memory*, “more than one-and-a-half centuries ago, there was an area of swamp
even hardened British troops found uninhabitable. Known as Wong locals at the time, and euphemistically
renamed Happy Valley, it has horse racing in Hong Kong since 1864”.
developed Happy Valley into a racecourse. In this story, the Fanes could only afford a house in the Happy Valley area considering Walter was just a government bacteriologist.

As for “the more eligible but expensive” Peak area, Charlie Townsend, as a popular Assistant Colonial Secretary, owned his house there.

The Townsends’ house is mentioned twice in the story:

The room in which they were received was spacious. It was furnished as was every other drawing-room she had been in at Hong-Kong in a comfortable and homely style. [...] They were the last to come and as they entered Chinese servants in uniform were handing round cocktails and olives.151 [Kitty] was conscious of her delight in the sober luxury of the drawing-room. She sat in an armchair, there were lovely flowers here and there, on the walls were pleasing pictures; the room was shaded and cool, it was friendly and homelike. [...] Following the luxurious custom of the foreigners in China two boys in uniform came into the room with savouries and cocktails.152

These two descriptions appear at the beginning and end of the story respectively, and both paragraphs highlighted two essential elements – the house being “homelike” and Chinese servants with cocktails. To start with, it should be pointed out that the Peak (太平山 Taipingshan) area “was to be exclusively Chinese, and no Europeans, except for police officials, could live there.”153 As Carroll notes, “in 1844 the government proceeded with a plan for relocating Chinese residents of the Upper Bazaar to the hillside at Tai Ping Shan

See more at: https://www.hkmemory.hk/collections/hkjc/racecourse/index.html Also, as John Carroll notes, “When the British took control on 26 January 1841, the north shore of the island was for the most part unoccupied. There was a small settlement in Sai Ying Pun, next to present-day lower Pokfulam Road. To the east, in Wong Nai Chung, was the largest settlement on the north side of the island, perhaps the largest agricultural area on the island”. See John M. Carroll, “Chinese Collaboration in the Making of British Hong Kong” in Hong Kong’s History: State and Society under Colonial Rule, edited by Tak-Wing Ngo. New York: Routledge. 1999: 18.

151 Maugham, The Painted Veil, 38.
152 Ibid., 256-257.
to make room for the construction of a European-style town.”  

In this upmarket residential area only for foreigners at that time, the Townsends lived a luxurious life that had hardly any difference from their life back in London. The “homelike” decorations and objects create a nostalgic atmosphere, which generate a feeling of being back at “home” of their cultural origin.

Moreover, the Chinese boys who played the role of servants show the Orientalizing efforts through which the Townsend’s imagination of an authentic Britishness is completed. After all, Chinese servants are not exclusively owned by the rich who live up at the Peak. The Fanes, even Waddington, who lived in the undeveloped inland city did the same. Yet, it is noticeable that when the Fanes arrived at Mei-tan-fu, Waddington invited himself over to have dinner with the couple: “You won’t dress tonight, will you?” asked Waddington. “My boy died last week and the boy I have now is a fool, so I haven’t been dressing in the evening.” This implies that Waddington used to dress every night for dinner. Moreover, over their first dinner in Mei-tan-fu, Waddington started to talk about London: “he talked of the theatres. He knew everything that was being played at the moment and he told them what pieces he had seen when he was last home on leave.” The certain repetitive rituals of dining and dressing, as well as the frequent references to the latest social life in London, generate an illusion of pure Englishness even in the “barbaric” Oriental world.

Although both Waddington and Charlie Townsend engage in Orientalizing practices,

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155 Maugham, The Painted Veil, 106.
156 Ibid., 108.
it should be noted that the Townsends’ efforts in preserving a pure and authentic Englishness are much more striking. Compared with the Townsends, Waddington is open to foreign ideologies and cultures and willing to explore through first-hand communications. First, at the beginning of the story, when Kitty told Townsend that her husband had already found out about their affairs and threatened to bring an action into court. Townsend replied:

I’m very keen on my career. There’s no reason why I shouldn’t be a Governor one of these days, and it’s a damned soft job to be a Colonial Governor. Unless we can hush this up I don’t stand a dog’s chance. I may not have to leave the service, but there’ll always be a black mark against me. If I do have to leave the service then I must go into business in China where I know people. In either case my only chance is for Dorothy to stick to me. 157

As Charlie Townsend suggested, if he lost his job at the Colony, he was left with no choice but to be a businessman in China because he seemed to get along very well with the Chinese people. Ironically, throughout the story, almost every character (except his wife Dorothy and lover Kitty) in his daily life are secondary Chinese characters, who hardly go beyond the stereotypical images of being either cunning, corrupt Chinese, looking for some easy money in the colonial land, or obedient, silent poker-faced servants and laborers. For instance, Kitty and Charlie often meet in a curio dealer’s shop off Victoria Road, and the old man in the shop is described as “ingratiating”. The Chinese people whom Charlie claimed that he knew well were almost ignored and invisible throughout this story.

Second, unlike Charlie Townsend, Waddington not only always negotiated with the locals, but he was also knowledgeable, even might not accurately sometimes, about foreign ideologies, philosophy, and cultures. It can be seen when Waddington made the first

appearance that he dealt with the local people, the troops, the French nuns, and the
magistrates quite frequently on a daily basis. In the following chapters, Kitty was told by
one of the nuns, Sister St. Joseph, that Waddington was once stationed at Hankow and
had lived with a Manchu woman since. Therefore, it is not surprising that Waddington had
rather sarcastic comments about Charlie Townsend. It should be mentioned that when
Kitty brought up a conversation around Charlie Townsend, with whom Waddington once
worked and travelled for many years before, Waddington commented:

“That is [Charlie’s] stock in trade. He’s made a science of popularity. He has the gift of
making every one he meets feel that he is the one person in the world he wants to see.
He’s always ready to do a service that isn’t any trouble to himself, and even if he doesn’t
do what you want he manages to give you the impression that it’s only because it’s not
humanly possible. […] He’s as industrious as a Eurasian clerk. […] There are many foolish
people in the world and when a man in a rather high position puts on no frills, slaps them
on the back, and tells them he’ll do anything in the world for them, they are very likely to
think him clever. And then of course, there’s his wife. There’s an able woman if you like.
She has a good sound head and her advice is always worth taking. As long as Charlie
Townsend’s got her to depend on he’s pretty safe never to do a foolish thing, and that’s
the first thing necessary for a man to get on in Government service. They don’t want
clever men; clever men have ideas, and ideas cause trouble; they want men who have charm
and tact and who can be counted on never to make a blunder. Oh, yes, Charlie Townsend
will get to the top of the tree all right.”

Waddington bluntly pointed out the characteristics of Charlie, or in general, those colonial
officials who find their way up the official ropes in the colony. His words clearly explain
why Charlie is such a popular Colonial Secretary in Hong Kong, and sarcastically mock
people as such who undertake official jobs in the Oriental colony while having no ability
other than “charm and tact.” Both British and white, Waddington and Charlie took
opposing paths in the Oriental colony. For instance, the Townsends sent all their children

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159 Ibid., 116.
back to England, and Dorothy only went to occasions that are upper-class such as tea parties with other colonial officials’ wives. However, Waddington was quite at ease in the foreign community, surrounded by people of different colors and races. When asked about the plans for the rest of his life, Waddington replied that “when I retire I shall take a little Chinese house in Peking and spend the rest of my days there.” Although it is negotiable whether Waddington's assurance in living a carefree life in the East is generated from his racial and cultural superiority over the natives in the colony, this character is the core cause of Kitty’s later transformation of her Orientalist perspective in viewing the East.

Although not mentioned directly in the novel, it is not difficult to imagine that Charlie would comment on people like Waddington. Yet, like the Townsends, Kitty had been one of those who were brought up with the knowledge of being upper-class and very much enjoyed such social occasions. In this story, Waddington helped Kitty become familiar with the place since the Fanes moved to Mei-tan-fu, and from Kitty’s perspective, she described Waddington as such:

He had lived for many years in outports, often with no man of his own colour to talk to, and his personality had developed in eccentric freedom. He was full of fads and oddities. His frankness was refreshing. He seemed to look upon life in a spirit of banter, and his ridicule of the Colony at Hong Kong was acid; but he laughed also at the Chinese officials in Mei-tan-fu and at the cholera which decimated the city. He could not tell a tragic story or one of heroism without making it faintly absurd. He had many anecdotes of his adventures during twenty years in China, and you concluded from them that the earth was a very grotesque, bizarre and ludicrous place. Though he denied that he was a Chinese scholar (he swore that the Sinologues were as mad as march hares) he spoke the language with ease. He read little and what he knew he had learned from conversation. But he often told Kitty stories from the Chinese novels and from Chinese history and though he told them with that airy badinage which was natural to him it was good-humoured and even tender. It seemed to [Kitty] that, perhaps unconsciously, he had adopted the Chinese view that the Europeans were barbarians and

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160 Maugham, The Painted Veil, 179.
their life a folly: in China alone was it so led that a sensible man might discern in it a sort of reality. Here was food for reflection: Kitty had never heard the Chinese spoken of as anything but decadent, dirty and unspeakable. It was as though the corner of a curtain were lifted for a moment, and she caught a glimpse of a world rich with a colour and significance she had not dreamt of.161

Unlike the Townsends, or even Kitty, Waddington did not consider his race as the essence of his identity. As mentioned in the text, this is probably because Waddington had lived with people from diverse backgrounds and nationalities for many years. Kitty was surprised at the ways that Waddington views China and the people there. But ultimately, it was precisely this character who first offered Kitty a brand-new approach to seeing the Oriental world.

To sum up, the collection of Somerset Maugham’s travel sketches On a Chinese Screen provides abundant original materials that are later re-written in the novel The Painted Veil. Therefore, through the juxtaposition of Maugham’s fictional writings with the travel notes based on his personal experiences, it is evident that Maugham transplants his vision of the East into his works as something exotic for his English readers. This perspective helps explain the conflicts and abrupt transitions in the attitudes of his fictional characters. This point will be discussed in further detail in the next chapter.

Maugham’s Chinese-based novel The Painted Veil shows what David Porter terms as “monstrous beauty” through the depiction of the protagonist Kitty Fane’s experience in China during the 1920s. Initially, Kitty’s understanding and definition of the Oriental world are simplistic and ignorant, but she undergoes a gradual transformation in her attitudes.

161 Maugham, The Painted Veil, 119-120.
toward the Chinese people and culture as the story unfolds. This transformation can be seen as a process of demystifying the exotic East. However, the semi-omniscient third-person narrator complicates Kitty’s changing attitudes, making them somehow questionable. The narrative voice reveals Kitty’s evident Orientalist and racist perspective, potentially mocking such ways. This critique underscores how the exotic and foreign are often romanticized and misunderstood by Westerners. In contrast to Kitty’s evolving perspective, Maugham’s male protagonists typically seek to recreate cultural memories of their European homeland in their foreign colonies, highlighting a loss of connection to their domestic origins. Maugham’s stories also expose that the normalcy of daily life is often romantically exaggerated and portrayed as exotic in the colonial lands, a construct shaped by appropriated cultural productions that purport to represent either the East or the West. This dynamic reveals the different ways male and female Westerners perceive and engage with the Oriental world, with Kitty’s narrative offering a distinct, though still problematic, perspective compared to her male counterparts.
Chapter 2: The Localized Colonial Gaze and the Foreign Perspective

In one of Eileen Chang’s essays entitled “Peking Opera Through Foreign Eyes” (Yangren kan jingxi ji qita 洋人看京戏及其他, 1943), she suggests that “many young people love China and yet have only a vague notion of what this thing called China might be.”\(^{162}\) Instead of such unconditional love for China and Chinese culture, as Chang continues, “to see China through the eyes with which foreigners watch Peking opera” would maintain a comfortable and proper distance to the “exalted motherland” for it is only “through surprise and wonderment that we may be able to find real understanding and a steadfast, reliable love.”\(^{163}\) In a later paragraph, she explains that “the immediate reality,” because of being observed from too close a distance by the natives, could only be understood “through its connection with a more lucid, comprehensible reality.”\(^{164}\) In Chang’s Hong Kong stories, with a localized colonial gaze, she wrote substantially on the locals as well as

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\(^{163}\) Ibid.

\(^{164}\) Ibid., 111. The English translation of this sentence is different from Eileen Chang’s original text; therefore, changes are made in the translation to keep it true to its original expression. For references, the original sentence: “切身的現實，因為距離太近的緣故，必得與另一個較明澈的現實聯系起來方才看得清楚。” in Eileen Chang 张爱玲, “Yangren kan jingxi ji qita” 洋人看京戏及其他 [Peking Opera through Foreign Eyes and Others], *Liuyan 流言 [Written on Water]* (Taiwan: Crown, 2000), 113. John’s translation: “A cook holds up an emptied vegetable basket to shake off the few leaves of spinach still stuck to the bottom. The leaves, a translucent green in the checkered sunlight, remind him of climbing vines on a trellis. Now, the latter is no less or homely an object than the former, and yet the analogy is pleasing, as it calls up associations to things that mean more to us because our thoughts have dwelt on them and art has shaped those thoughts to advantage. The tiny chores in the kitchen, the immediate reality, uninteresting by itself, gains significance through its connection with a more lucid, comprehensible reality.”
the Western expatriates while maintaining an alienated distance from the characters.165

As a counterpart to Chang’s stories set in colonial Hong Kong and semi-colonial Shanghai, W. Somerset Maugham’s colonial stories also reflect the author’s strong awareness of preserving distance, even as he attempts to bridge the gap between himself, a keen observer of human nature, and the locals in the foreign, colonial lands. In both Chang’s and Maugham’s stories, the protagonists’ experiences are largely intertwined with their narrative origins and often problematic identification with the junction between nativism and nationalism. Maugham’s cultural and educational background, encompassing both English and French influences, along with the specific agenda of his trips to China and the South Seas, provide him with a unique perspective in collecting and observing the “raw materials” for his writings. There are obvious limitations in Maugham’s understanding of his foreign subjects, especially compared to Chang, whose cross-cultural background offers her a nuanced delicacy in representing the complex, hybrid colonial experiences in the twin colonial cities of Shanghai and Hong Kong.

In this chapter, through a parallel reading of W. Somerset Maugham’s *The Painted Veil* (1925) and *On a Chinese Screen* (1922), and two of Eileen Chang’s “Hong Kong romances” – “Aloeswood Incense: The First Brazier” (*Chenxiang xie: diyi lu xiang* 沉⾹屑: 第⼀炉⾹, 1943) and “Love in a Fallen City” (*Qingcheng zhi lian* 倾城之恋, 1943) – I would like to demonstrate that the “foreign eyes” perspective is a constant, alarmed undertone in both

165 “Localized” here means from the perspective of a Shanghainese. Chang wrote that “I have written a book of Hong Kong romances for Shanghainese readers […] The entire time I was writing these stories, I was thinking of Shanghainese people, because I wanted to try to observe Hong Kong through Shanghainese eyes”. See Eileen Chang, “Shanghainese, After All,” in *Written on Water*, trans. Andrew F. Jones (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 55.
writers’ representation of colonial experiences. Chang and Maugham share a commonality in their writing approach: both authors maintain a distance from the colonial subjects they depict, utilizing the technique of writing by way of equivocal contrast. Their works frequently present situations in which ambivalent or even contrasting characteristics coexist within a single character, directly showcasing the contradictions of these roles to the readers.

Despite these similarities, their approaches diverge significantly in certain aspects. Though clearly aware of the deviations between the observed and perceived essence of the foreign subjects, Maugham’s depictions of the locals inevitably dependent on his Westerner protagonists and the local landscape, and by extension, the original foreign identity and homeland, which Maugham could only confidently reflect upon. By contrast, rather than providing a nativist, anti-imperialist critique against colonialism, Chang’s “foreign eyes” perspective represents the colonial experience, suggesting a shift in power dynamics. Chang not only gives a voice to native women - something absent in Maugham’s work – but also mimics Maugham’s narrative perspective as a foreign observer, localizing such foreign perspective while further exposing the marginalization and oppression of colonial natives, especially women living under the dual-layered colonial gaze from the Western colonists as well as the motherland natives.

2.1. Writing the Exotic

As is written on the back cover of On a Chinese Screen:

Maugham spent the winter months of 1919 traveling fifteen hundred miles up the Yangtze river. Always more interested in people than places, he noted down finely crafted sketches
of those he met on countless scraps of paper. In the resulting collection we encounter Western missionaries, army officers and company managers who are culturally out of their depth in the immensity of the Chinses civilisation. Maugham keenly observes, and gently ridicules, their dogged and oblivious persistence with the life they know.\footnote{W. Somerset Maugham, \textit{On a Chinese Screen} (London: Vintage, 2000), back cover.}

Indeed, as a pioneering traveller of his time and the first English author who wrote about China, Maugham offers a unique perspective in representing China and Southeast Asia in the early 1920s. Unlike those characters in his own stories, Maugham is neither one of the British officials, nor a global trader or settler, nor born in British overseas territory; instead, he is a keen observer of the people who inhabit or travel in the foreign land that is very alien to himself as well. As mentioned in the last chapter, in \textit{On a Chinese Screen}, even though the voice of the first-person pronoun narrator sometimes remains suspicious, this collection of Maugham’s travel vignettes should not be read as fictional, but rather as well-documented materials for his later literary outputs, the novel \textit{The Painted Veil} for instance.

Compared with his characters in \textit{On a Chinese Screen}, Maugham’s own stay in China is rather short – merely a four-month trip along the Yangtze River in 1919. However, through the glimpse of an alien place and with all the collected raw materials, Maugham’s attitude towards writing the “exotic” is revealed in one story named “The Rolling Stone” at the very beginning of \textit{On a Chinese Screen}.

The colonial perspectives of Eileen Chang and Somerset Maugham exhibit both similarities and differences in their approaches to depicting foreign lands and cultures. It should be noted that writing the “exotic,” as Maugham terms it, involves tales that are “set in some country that little known to the majority of readers, and [deals] with the reactions upon the white man of his sojourn in an alien land and the effect which contact with
peoples of another race has upon him.”167 In “The Rolling Stone,” Maugham depicted a man whose life experience and career is an extraordinary stories themselves: “the son of a veterinary surgeon, he had been a reporter in the London police courts and then had gone as steward on board a merchant ship to Buenos Aires.”168 He then worked his way across South America – from Chile to Marquesas and Tahiti – before finally arriving in China nine years earlier. Yet this just lifts the curtain of his four-year adventurous journey across the country until he spent every last penny of the eight hundred dollars he had saved over the past years. He was looking for a job once he settled in Peking, and he wrote for one of the English papers in China, which was the easiest way to earn money for someone like him. This man had seen and experienced so much “which he was perhaps the only Englishman to know.”169 Maugham admires this man’s rich experience; yet, when it comes to this man’s articles that he wrote on his journey, Maugham comments that

I will not say that they were unreadable, for they showed a careful and a sympathetic observation; but he had seen everything at haphazard, as it were, and they were but the material of art. They were […] the foundation of literature rather than literature itself. […] But I think his experiences were merely of the body and were never translated into experiences of the soul. […] That was certainly why with so much to write about he wrote tediously, for in writing the important thing is less richness of material then richness of personality.170

It is, thus, stimulating to note that Maugham was doing somehow the exact same job as this Englishman – writing about exotic tales about an alien land for readers who are mostly Westerners. Here, Maugham critiques the superficiality of the Englishman’s articles that “I

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167 See the introduction to the anthology of classic literary short stories entitled Tellers of Tales, in “Selected Prefaces and Introductions of W. Somerset Maugham,” (New York: Doubleday, 1939), 114-5.
170 Ibid.
could not discover that any of his adventures had intimately touched him. [...] Perhaps that is why at bottom you felt he was commonplace.”

Despite careful observation, the Englishman’s articles lack depth and fail to convey the emotional essence of the experiences. Maugham reveals his own comprehension and aesthetics in writing about the exotic: the depictions of the people and physical landscape are not merely objects that are being watched. These “raw materials” need to be rendered into something more than observational facts; to be specific, the writings should be able to express the feelings and generate the effects that the foreign land has upon the author, which the readers could truly empathize with.

It should also be pointed out that, compared with this Englishman, Maugham has little knowledge of Chinese, which he is clearly conscious about. This raises the question: if Maugham were capable of the language and able to travel without the constraints of a four-month set agenda, would he have attempted to incorporate more voices of the locals, thereby making the interplay between the “exotic” and himself more successfully translated into his stories? After all, by criticizing this Englishman’s articles and placing this story at the very beginning of the travel vignette collection, Maugham implies that his own exotic tales would not be like the Englishman’s at all. Indeed, Maugham does make an effort to reach out to more locals of diverse occupations while he travels in China – not only the government officials or prominent intellectuals such as Gu Hongming and Song Chunfang, but also working-class people like coolies, boatmen, or

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servants. However, the mentioned limitations inevitably determine that Maugham's exotic stories in *On a Chinese Screen* are either largely dialogue-laden narratives with a third-person perspective or straightforward physical descriptions with a second-person voice in the narration. The depiction of the locals remains shallow and homogenous, with almost no access to a more inner or self-reflective level of narration for these characters. In his colonial writings, Maugham's representation of the natives is heavily dependent on his white protagonists, and it is only through these white protagonists that the natives are rendered. Therefore, it is not a surprise that, in his subsequent novel *The Painted Veil*, Chinese characters are very much marginalized, and the locus is entirely on the white protagonists, about which Maugham is most skilled in writing.

In contrast, Chang writes one essay entitled “What Are We to Write?” offers insights into her approach to writing about the exotic. It is rather interesting to place it together with Maugham's comments on that Englishman's articles. Chang writes:

> If I were to take a hurried look around, I would be no better than a news reporter on assignment. Perhaps it’s true that first impressions are the most important. But while a foreigner might well take away extremely vivid impressions from a visit to a “swallow’s nest,” his perspective won’t necessarily reveal very much about the psychology of those who frequent it.

>“Observing the flowers from astride a horse” will only take you so far. But even if you were to live someplace for a few months, searching high and low for dollops of local colour, you might well fail to achieve your objective. True immersion in the atmosphere of life usually takes place spontaneously. It isn’t something that can be forced or willed into being. […] A real writer can only really write about what he himself thinks. He will write about what he can write.\(^{173}\)

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\(^{172}\) Song Chunfang’s son Song Qi (Stephen Soong) is close friend with Eileen Chang. When Chang passed away in her apartment in Los Angeles, 1995, her remains were left to Song Qi and his wife Kuang Wenmei. Song Chunfang’s grandson Song Yilang (Roland Soong) now owns the copyright of Chang’s novels.

\(^{173}\) Eileen Chang, “What Are We to Write?" in *Written on Water*, trans. Andrew F. Jones (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 131. The French Concession in Shanghai was the centre of those swallow’s nests. By 1927 there were at least 6000 of them in French Concession and more than 8000 by
It is no mere coincidence that Maugham wrote a story titled “The Opium Den” in On a Chinese Screen, that is, the “swallow’s nest” metaphor referenced by Chang. In depicts the opium den as “a cheerful spot, comfortable, home-like, and cosy,” Maugham failed to “reveal very much about the psychology of those who frequent it”, echoing Chang’s observation about the limited depth of Maugham’s depiction.174 While Chang adopts a “foreign perspective” reminiscent of Maugham’s colonial perspective in her depiction of the exotic, she emphasizes the importance of genuine immersion in the atmosphere of life and personal reflection in capturing the essence of a place and its people. She criticizes the superficial perspective of foreigners who create vivid impressions but lack an understanding of the psychological and cultural nuances of the locals. Both Chang and Maugham critique the superficial perspective of foreigners and emphasize the importance of engagement in writings about the foreign subjects. However, while Chang advocates for a deeper understanding and immersion in the unknown, Maugham’s writing often remains confined to an outsider viewpoint. After all, Maugham’s approach to writing about China aligns with his straightforward “foreign eyes” perspective, “[writing] about what he can write” rather than delving into deeper complexities.

2.2. Writing by Way of Equivocal Contrast

Growing up in a traditional feudal family and educated in Western missionary schools, Eileen Chang’s cross-cultural background and experience in Japanese-occupied Shanghai

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and British-colonized Hong Kong offer her abundant source material in writing about the (semi-)colonial situation of the times. Writing in both Chinese and English while reaching both highbrow and middlebrow readers, commercial success and critical acclaim made Chang immediately rise to fame in early 1940s Shanghai. Thus, unlike Maugham, Chang was certainly more at ease in representing the colonial minds in China within the mechanism of the power system. Chang adopted the stance of the colonial gaze and turned it into a foreign-eye perspective in her writings. She explains the reasons for such adoption:

China is all of these things – colorful, shocking, enigmatic, absurd. Many young people love China and yet have only a vague notion of what this thing called China might be. Unconditional love in admirable, but the danger is that sooner or later, the ideal will run up against reality, and the resultant rush of cold air will gradually extinguish one's ardor. [...] So why not make a careful study of it instead? Why not revisit its sights through the eyes of a foreigner watching Peking opera? For it is only through surprise and wonderment that we may be able to find real understanding and a steadfast, reliable love.\textsuperscript{175}

Chang deliberately maintains an alienated distance from the people and the traditional Chinese culture that she is most familiar with in her writings. This stance of observation, or gaze, is by no means an agreement with the colonialist or Orientalist voice; instead, from a relatively detached perspective like an outsider, it allows her to study the trivial things and common people that are everywhere in daily life, yet voiceless and nameless in other colonial stories, and bring them back to life with actual values and meanings.

Chang mentions several times that she likes writing “by way of equivocal contrast.”\textsuperscript{176}

In 1943, shortly after Chang published her first short stories, a critical essay was published in the journal \textit{Wanxiang} in which Fu Lei, a famed translator of French literature, “praised

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\textsuperscript{175} Chang, “Peking Opera Through Foreign Eyes,” 105. \\
\textsuperscript{176} Chang, “Writing of One’s Own,” \textit{Written on Water}, 17.
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her talent but attacked the content of her fiction”.177 Chang later wrote an essay entitled “Writing of One’s own” as a response to Fu Lei’s critique on her writings. Chang writes:

I do not place truthfulness and hypocrisy in direct and unequivocal contrast; instead, I utilize equivocal contrast as a means of writing the truth beneath the hypocrisy of modern people and the simplicity underneath the frivolity, and this is why I have all too easily been seen as overly indulgent and criticized for lingering over these beguiling surfaces. […] I only demand of myself that I should strive for an even greater degree of realism. Further, because I rely on a particular conception of equivocal contrast in my writing, I do not like to adopt the classicist manner in which good and evil, spirit and flesh, are always posed against each other in stark conflict, and thus the theme of my works may sometimes seem vague and unsatisfactory.178

In Chang’s short stories, heroism does not exist and there is no stark boundary between the decent and the vulgar. Characters may be affected by certain accidents and react with certain degrees of goodness or evil, yet it does not make that person ultimately a saint or horrible person. The reality of their daily presence, as Chang concludes, “remains prosaic, earthbound, and given their situation, it could be nothing more.”179 The ambivalent characteristics coexist in her characters, and they are always straightforwardly revealed to the readers.

Such ambiguity can also be frequently found in Maugham’s characters. To list a few examples: an Englishman who valued personal dignity so much that he refused to use a rickshaw but finally “obliged to use it frequently,” and gave the rikshaw boy a kick on the bottom when the boy missed a turn; or the one who is stationed in a little town for a tobacco company had not talked to or seen another white man for three months madly cursed but sobbed out when a passing-by white missionary refused to have any

177 Leo Ou-fan Lee, Shanghai Modern: The Flowering of a New Urban Culture in China, 1930-1945 (London: Harvard University Press, 1999), 280. It was published anonymously but later attributed to Fu Lei.
178 Chang, “Writing of One’s Own,” Written on Water, 19.
179 Ibid., 17.
conversation with him; or the cabinet minister who appreciates and is specialized in traditional Chinese art, criticizing the ruthless generation from Europe and America, yet himself being a very rascal, cruel, vindictive, and venal person in the real life.180

It should be highlighted here that, although both authors write by way of equivocal contrast, they have different purposes in doing so. Maugham’s stories attempt to expose the absurd and hypocritical masquerade that the white characters perform in order to consolidate their supposedly superior white identity in the foreign place, while Chang concentrates on more mundane aspects of daily life in the colony that are usually overlooked yet which the characters are unable to articulate by themselves in stereotypical colonial writings. Her writings show that the locals are often the involuntary product of the entire colonial culture. In other words, Maugham is much more straightforward than Chang in criticizing British colonialism in China, which also complements the anti-imperialist stance that he intends to express.

2.3. The Alteration of Foreign Eyes Perspective

As mentioned, in the travel vignette collection On a Chinese Screen, Maugham’s writing is either heavily based on the dialogues from a third-person perspective, or direct physical descriptions using a second-person voice so as to form the conversation with his audience. The former mainly records the occasions when Maugham meets other Westerners in China (with exceptions – Gu Hongming and Song Chunfang both speak English well), while the latter is his own observations of those who live there, mostly the indigenous people.

Weather portrayed directly or indirectly, the indigenous people are present in the large scenario for their own existential purposes in *On a Chinese Screen*, yet it is quite the opposite in Maugham’s Chinese-based novel *The Painted Veil*.

In the novel, most settings and characters resonate with those in *On a Chinese Screen*, which can be seen as the original “raw materials” for the author’s literary adaptation. For instance, the detailed depictions of the memorial arches in “The Road” and “The Sight of the Town” turn into the symbolic mockery of Kitty’s unfaithfulness to her husband in the novel; the image of the chapel in the Convert and Mother Superior, who came from the south of France and had stayed in China for decades, originates from “The Nun;” and there are many shared characteristics between Colonel Yü in the novel and Robert Webb, a consul in a small port in “The Normal Man.” Far from being coincidental, these similarities are the transplanted to the novel in order to make the entire story more authentically Chinese-based. As Maugham claims in the preface to the novel,

I think this is the only novel I have written in which I started from a story rather than from a character. It is difficult to explain the relation between character and plot. You cannot very well think of a character in the void; the moment you think of him, you think of him in some situation, doing something; so that the character and at least his principal action seem to be the result of a simultaneous act of the imagination. But in this case the characters were chosen to fit the story I gradually evolved; they were constructed from person I had long known in different circumstances.181

According to Maugham, he got the inspiration for this story from the lines of Dante, and the story had been in his mind for years until he finally put it into writing. He also admits that “I could not think of a setting in the world of to-day in which such events might plausibly happen. It was not until I made a long journey in China that I found this.”182 The

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182 Ibid.
plot has been prepared and awaits the characters being transplanted. Thus, it is not surprising that, firstly, so many settings and secondary characters echo those in *On a Chinese Screen*; and secondly, none of these native Chinese characters have any further development in the narration.

There are quite a few native Chinese characters in *The Painted Veil*, but most of them are rather marginalized such as the inconsequential mentions of the servants, shop owners, and dressing boys of the white protagonists in Hong Kong. Maugham only places two native Chinese characters along with other protagonists in the plot, namely the Manchu woman and Colonel Yü. Notwithstanding, both these two characters are not only nameless (only with the given title to address), but also inarticulate in the sense that they need to be voiced or rendered through other white protagonists. The Manchu woman is Waddington, the Deputy Commissioner's mistress. She is presented within the circle of white people and has no connection to the local community or her own family. In the scene when Kitty visits Waddington and the Manchu woman's house, the entire conversation happens between the two white characters, even though Kitty’s intention was to meet the Manchu woman. When Kitty asked, “What does she think about all day long?” Waddington immediately replied “nothing,” without translating for his mistress, as he had done in previous scene.¹⁸³ Then the conversation then abruptly shifts to Kitty’s appreciation of the Manchu woman’s beautiful hands. This abrupt switch of the topic, from the blankness of mind (according to the white male) to the appreciation of physical appearance (recognized by the white female) creates only a vague image of the Manchu woman. Although much

has been written previously about her appearance and gestures, readers, or perhaps even Maugham himself, cannot perceive more than her physical attributes. Therefore, Waddington's reply does not sound like a joke but rather implies Maugham's inability in rendering a native female character within the fabricated Chinese setting.

Colonel Yü was introduced by Waddington to Walter Fane immediately after the Fanes arrived at the inland town Mei-tan-fu. Although this character only plays a minor parts in the story, he worked constantly by the side of Walter, as Waddington explained to Kitty that “[Walter's] got Colonel Yü in his pocket and he's induced him to put the troops at his disposal.” He also managed to convince the French nuns to “put [their] infirmary at the disposal of sick soldiers.” He acted as an intermediate between the local military and the British government officials or missionaries. This character resembles Robert Webb in “The Normal Man” in On a Chinese Screen in that both characters mingle between different parties and are acute of the circumstances in which their assistance is often prompt and effective. Near the end of the story set in Mei-tan-fu, Walter was dying due to cholera while Kitty was sent to him immediately under the arrangement of Colonel Yü. This is the first time in the novel that the narrative focuses upon this character:

Distracted, Kitty gave him a glance. He was a tallish man, but stockily built, and he seemed ill at ease in his khaki uniform. He was looking at Walter and she saw that his eyes were wet with tears. It gave her a pang. Why should that man with his yellow, flat face have tears in his eyes? It exasperated her.

Once again, this character exists for merely for contrast effects against the protagonist and there is no space for any inner revelation or further development in characteristics. Kitty

\[184\] Maugham, The Painted Veil, 92.

\[185\] Ibid., 100.

\[186\] Ibid., 163.
kept wondering that “because she had not wept when Walter died she was ashamed. [...] Why, the eyes of the Chinese officer, Colonel Yü, had been wet with tears.”

Colonel Yü serves as a trigger for Kitty’s regretful emotions and as proof of Walter’s obsession and attentiveness in work. Maugham attempts to show the sentimentality in this native military officer; nevertheless, like the Manchu woman, this native man exists in the novel no more than as a complement to the portrayal of other white protagonists.

Unlike the locals depicted in *The Painted Veil*, when representing the native people and their life that Maugham personally encountered in *On a Chinese Screen*, the author provides his Western audience with stories that are much more reflective than in the novel. In addition, Maugham’s effort in reaching out to these various natives and trying to decode the symbolic meanings underneath the Oriental myth is evident. It can also be found in this collection that Maugham frequently expresses his critical thoughts in terms of the Western travellers and traditional colonial stories, as well as travel writing. The examples in point are two stories entitled “The Beast of Burden” and “The Road” respectively. Both stories also bring to mind Eileen Chang’s “foreign eyes” perspective in writing colonial experience in “Aloeswood Incense: The First Brazier.”

“The Beast of Burden” is narrated in the second person pronoun, resembling a tourist guide introducing the scene to the audience. This story is not plot-based; instead, the narrative voice aggressively drags the audience into the storytelling and forces them to face the real daily presence of the labouring people closely, instead of watching it from a distance as something exotic and entertaining. There is a clear change of attitudes.
You see a string of coolies come along, one after the other, each with a pole on his shoulder from the ends of which hang two great bales, and they make an agreeable pattern. It is amusing to watch their hurrying reflections in the padi water. You watch their faces as they pass you. They are good-natured faces and frank, you would have said, if it had not been drilled into you that the Oriental is inscrutable; and when you see them lying down their loads under a banyan tree by a wayside shrine, smoking and chatting gaily, if you have tried to lift the bales they carry for thirty miles or more a day, it seems natural to feel admiration for their endurance and their spirit. But you will be thought somewhat absurd if you mention your admiration to the old residents of China.

[…] It is strangely distressing to watch. Then also you see the coolies’ backs. The pressure of the pole for long years, day after day, has made hard red scars, and sometimes even there are open sores, great sores without bandages or dressing, that rub against the wood; but the strangest thing of all is that sometimes, as though nature sought to adapt man for these cruel uses to which he is put, an odd malformation seems to have arisen so that there is a sort of hump, like a camel’s, against which the pole rests.

The narrator seems to guide the Western audience through the “observation journey” and points out the cruelty and ugliness in the reality behind the colonial viewing pleasure. The once amusing visual scene is ultimately something distressing and oppressing to face directly. Maugham ends the description of the coolies with “Their effort oppresses you. You are filled with a useless compassion. In China it is man that is the beast of burden.”

The narrator shows compassion and empathy towards the coolies, however, as a bystander, there is nothing he could do to ease their burden. It would also be “thought somewhat absurd if you mention your admiration” because physical work was such a common thing in this place. In addition, Maugham’s highlighting comment that “they are good-natured faces and frank, you would have said, if it had not been drilled into you that the Oriental is inscrutable” also clearly shows his disapproval of the sort of racist, Orientalist view that

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189 Ibid., 46.
190 Ibid., 45.
the people in China are impossible to understand. In other words, Maugham is quite aware of the tradition in which Westerners gain pleasure in the “colonial gaze” action out of the exotic Oriental world. The impression of an “exotic Orient” is also part of the acquired ideology perpetuated within the discourse of colonialism and imperialism. Moreover, by shortening the viewing distance between the Western audience and the Chinese natives, such a zoomed-in visualized perspective shows the common daily life of the coolies. The correlation between coolies and camels creates no entertaining viewing experience at all; rather, it naturally generates the narrator’s humane feelings toward the coolies that the readers could empathize with.

If it is precisely the close perspective focusing on the ordinary scene in Maugham’s story that invalidates the pleasure-gaining process of the colonial gaze, then the foreign-eyes perspective in Chang’s story creates a switched point of view in the colonial power system, which reveals that the “exotic” in colonial writing tradition could be nothing but manmade, fabricated sites that deliberately cater to the foreigners’ taste of gaze. To start with, as an avid reader of Maugham, Chang directly adopts the foreign perspective in Maugham’s colonial novel when she writes about the Westerners who live in British-colonized Hong Kong. In Chang’s Little Reunions, the narrator mentions once that “Julie had heard that the Head of the English Department and his wife were both alcoholics. […] Somerset Maugham’s stories spoke of the loneliness in the Orient and depression from life in a small town.” Such adoption of perspective is to observe the Western

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192 Eileen Chang, Little Reunions, trans. Jane Weizhen Pan and Martin Merz, (New York: New York Review Books, 2018). There is a connected context in between these two sentences in Chang’s original text that is
sojourners in the Orient from a Westerner’s (foreigner’s, as to Chang) point of view. Moreover, in “Aloeswood Incense: The First Brazier,” Chang once again uses this perspective, yet the focus is on the locals. This story revolves around the life of Ge Weilong, a young woman who moves from Shanghai to Hong Kong to pursue an education. Unable to gain further financial support from her parents, she moves in with her aunt, Madame Liang, a wealthy socialite with a dubious reputation. Weilong’s initial goal is to attend school and live a respectable life, but she soon finds herself drawn into her aunt’s social circle of the high society in Hong Kong, which gradually leads to her ultimate depravity and loss of innocence. At the beginning of the story, the narrator offers a detailed physical description of the protagonist Ge Weilong as well as Madame Liang’s house in Hong Kong:

The white house in the dip of the hills was smooth and streamlined – geometric like an ultramodern movie theatre. The roof, however, was covered with the traditional glazed tiles of emerald green. The windowpanes were also green, their chicken-fat yellow frames trimmed with red; the window grates, with their fancy ironwork, had been sprayed the same chicken-fat yellow. A wide, red brick veranda circled the house, with monumental white stone columns that were nearly thirty feet tall – this went back to the American Old South. From the veranda, glass doors opened onto a living room. The furniture and the arrangement were basically Western, touched up with some unexceptionable Chinese bric-a-brac. An ivory bodhisattva stood on the mantel of the fireplace, along with snuff bottles made of emerald-green jade; a small screen with a bamboo motif curved around the sofa.193

With an undertone of mockery, Chang describes in close detail the Oriental exhibition in

not well-translated in the English version. Chang wrote: “聽說英文系主任夫婦倆都是酒鬼。到他們家去上四人課，有時候遇見他太太，小母雞似的，壹身褪色小花布連衫裙，笑吟吟的，眼睛不朝人看，一溜就不見了。據毛姆的小說上，是因為在東方太寂寞，小城生活苦悶。” The translation for the last sentence would be: “According to Maugham’s novels, it is because of the loneliness in the Orient and depression from life in a small town.” See more in Eileen Chang 張愛玲, Xiao Tuanyuan 小團圓 [Little Reunions] (Hong Kong: Crown, 2009), 49.

Madame Liang’s house. The description is very much visualized. Colours are in strong contrast to each other; objects that represent the image of an ideal, traditional China are collected and well presented in order to be noticed at once by anyone who steps in. The jumbled styles ranging from the American Old South to the modern West strenuously show the owner’s wealth and social status in that she lives an advanced life, that is, more Westernized in the colonial land. Nothing is really in harmony with another in terms of aesthetic tastes. While naming the Oriental objects and decorations in this house, Chang uses the foreign-eyes perspective as if the narrator gains the pleasure during the observation process in a way that the foreigners would do in the colonial land – they see exactly what they intend to look for in this Oriental place.

Chang goes beyond simply describing the overall architecture and furniture; she critically and reflectively points out the falsity of the colonial gaze and the viewing pleasure it generates because the “ideal Oriental exhibition” is consciously constructed by the natives and deliberately caters to the foreigner’s gazing taste. Right after the depiction of Madame Liang’s house, the narrator comments:

These Oriental touches had been put there, it was clear, for the benefit of foreigners. The English come from so far to see China – one has to give them something of China to see. But this was China as Westerners imagine it: exquisite, illogical, very entertaining.194

Then, Ge Weilong notices and examines her own reflection in the glass doors:

She too was a touch of typically colonial Oriental color. She wore the special uniform of Nanyang Secondary School: a dark blue starched cotton tunic that reached to her knees, over narrow trousers, all in the late Qing style. Decking out codexes in the manner of Boxer-era courtesans – that was only one of the ways that the Hong Kong of the day tried to please European and American tourists.195

195 Ibid.
In this case, it is the natives, rather than the foreigners, who are projecting the gazing point of view. This is not simply a reversal of colonizer/colonized or Westerner/Chinese stance in the colonial hierarchy system; rather, the mechanism of colonial gaze is invalidated because, first, the narrator could easily take over the gazing perspective and, second, there is a reflective consciousness behind the colonial masquerade. It is not the colonial mechanism that produces or discovers the Orient, but the indigenous people here who consciously and consistently present the East in a manner that could be recognized by the Western audience as the so-called Orient.

Another story in Maugham’s *On a Chinese Screen* that I would like to compare with Chang’s “Aloeswood Incense: The First Brazier” and *Little Reunion* is “The Road” (1922). This story is about the scenery and people that the narrator encounters while walking along the causeway in the countryside. The depictions of stone bastion and sampans on the river in this story are entirely transplanted into the scenery in *The Painted Veil* (1925) when the female protagonist Kitty first arrived in Mei-tan-fu. This story also expresses Maugham’s thoughts regarding journey writing in China and the colonial pleasure of the colonial gaze:

The journey […] is devoid of adventures; but it is crowded with incidents. […] Poets have written of it with enthusiasm, but they are lie-a-beds, and they have trusted for inspiration rather than to their sleepy eyes. […] Your eye, amid the uniformity, for every Chinese town, at all events to the stranger’s eye, much resembles every other, takes pleasure in noting trivial differences, and so you observe the predominant industries of each one. Every town makes all that its inhabitants require, but it has also a speciality, and here you will find cotton cloth, there string, and here again silk.\(^{196}\)

When the visitor has seen and collected too many of the Oriental elements that he expects to observe, the Orient is no longer so exotic as the people and scenery in every Chinese

town just seem to resemble the other. Thus, the concentration moves to the merchandise on the market, as if the foreigners need something that is more metropolitan and material in order to satisfy their gazing pleasure. There is also a correlation between the goods on the market and the above-mentioned student’s uniform that Ge Weilong wears. As Chan Kwok Kou remarks, “the tourists neither have time to appreciate in detail of the totality of some ‘exotic land,’ nor do they have interests in wasting their precious time, so they seek novelty in all sorts of fragments. These fragments are attractive because they are small; being small means they are good for collection, memorizing, and imagination.”197 In other words, the exotic goods on the market, as well as student’s uniforms, are parts of the most accessible signs that could represent the Orient for the foreigners.

In “Aloeswood Incense: The First Brazier,” George Qiao is a “tall and well built” man of mixed blood with a very pale skin tone, who is a classical prodigal playboy in this story.198 Weilong indulges in her love for George even though she understands that he is looking for “nothing more than a moment’s pleasure; maybe he treated all women this way. But if he made a sincere declaration of love, she knew that she would accept him.”199 Weilong fell for him at first sight for “his very charm, of course; but in the end she loved him

197 Translation is my own. The original sentence: “他们对于某一‘异域’的总体（totality）来不及细味体会，也没有兴趣浪费宝贵的光阴，于是转以各式断章（fragments）为猎奇的重点。这些断章碎片，更以小为美；小，就利于收藏、利于记忆、更利于想象。于是各式小巧装饰、纪念品（以至物化了的异族身体局部特征——如黑发、细眼、黄皮肤），就是最方便的符号，随时发挥其神话功能。” See Chan Kwok Kou 陈国球, “Jiangping” 讲评 [Commentary]. In Zaidu Zhang Ailing 再读张爱玲 [Rereading Eileen Chang], ed. Xu Zidong 许子东, Leung Ping-kwan 梁秉钧, and Lau Shiu-ming 刘绍铭, (Ji’nan: Shandong huabao chubanshe 山东画报出版社, 2004), 188.
199 Ibid., 53.
simply because he did not love her.” Under the circumstances, Madame Liang proposed an offer to George that

A girl from a really rich family is used to getting her way, not nearly so easy to bring around as Weilong. [...] The reason you want money is to have a good time, and if you’re not having a good time, what’s the point of the money? Weilong’s earnings will decline sharply, of course, seven or eight years from now. When she can’t bring in enough to pay the bills, get a divorce. Obtaining a divorce, in the British legal system, is quite difficult; the only legal grounds are adultery. How hard will it be to find evidence of that?

At the end of this story, Weilong is practically trapped into a marriage with George Qiao that is furtively arranged by himself and Madame Liang. As the narrator hopelessly concludes, “[Weilong] was busy all day long, getting money for George Qiao and people for Madame Liang.” Within this marriage, Weilong gets the man she stubbornly loves; as for George, Weilong’s stubborn love, in return, is a solid promise that she would have to become a paid mistress for other men to earn the money that George needs. In the meantime, as “no doubt this wasn’t the first time that Madame Liang had sacrificed a girl in order to please [men],” Madame Liang “merely used [Weilong] as a signboard to attract the mainstream sort of youth” for her own benefits.

The following passage is the final scene of the story, in which Weilong and George visited the New Year’s market in Wanchai, Hong Kong:

Pushed back and forth by the crowd, she had a strange sensation. The sky overhead was a dark purple-blue, and the sea at the end of the winter sky was purple-blue too, but here in the bay was a place like this, a place teeming with people and lanterns and dazzling goods – blue ceramic double-handled flowerpots, rolls and rolls of scallion-green velvet brushed with gold, cellophane bags of Balinese Shrimp Crisps, amber-colored durian cakes from the tropics, Buddha-bead bracelets with their big red tassels, light yellow

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201 Ibid., 72.
202 Ibid., 73.
203 Ibid., 33.
Again, in this passage, Wanchai is described as a bustling site where merchandise brought from different countries is gathered together. Objects that would remind the Western audience of the Orient are presented in this market. This kind of market can be easily found in any other Southeast Asia colonies since the only purposes of it is to generate an exotic atmosphere in the colonial land. The narrative notes Weilong’s inner thoughts under the circumstances:

Endless emptiness, endless terror. Her future was like that – it didn’t bear thinking about; if she did think, it was only endless terror. She had no lasting arrangement for her life. Her fearful, cringing heart could find a makeshift sort of rest only in little odds and ends, like these spread out before her.

Leung Mo-ling comments on this paragraph that “in writings on Orientalism in the West, the colonizers depend on their fantasy about the Orient so as to escape from the oppression of Western modernity.” Alternately, Chang’s observation suggest that the allure of Western modernity and materialized fantasy also trap the natives within the colonial culture. The indigenous people also depend on the materialized, westernized modern life to escape from the tragic reality that they actually have to live through in the colony. Weilong is desperate because she can no longer live without the vanity that people such as George and her aunt bring. In this context, the market becomes not only a physical space but also a metaphor for the interplay of power, desire, and identity in colonial

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205 Ibid., 74.
Noting at the start of the story when Weilong first enters her bedroom at Madame Liang’s house, she opened the closet and “found the closet was full of clothes – gleaming, gorgeous clothes.”\textsuperscript{207} This closet, symbolizing the materialized enjoyment that such upper-class life in the colony could bring, is mentioned several times in this story. Thus, it is clear that Weilong finds this materialization of vanity an addictive gateway to the suffering reality when she realized herself being trapped as Madame Liang welcomes her merely as a young and beautiful hook to attract men. Therefore, she has to love George and marry him, for admitting love is more virtuous than admitting her addiction to vanity. The consumerism in the colony extends beyond the acquisition of exotic goods to the commodification of women, who are often objectified and exploited for their perceived exoticism. This further underscores the entanglement of materialistic desires, cultural stereotypes, and power dynamics within the colonial framework.

\textbf{2.4. Colonial and Male Gaze}

Compared with Maugham, Chang explores further the colonial mind in that she also notices that native women are under a dual-layered gaze that is both colonial and patriarchal. Following the earlier discussion on Weilong’s self-reflective comments about her looks of students’ uniforms in Hong Kong, Weilong continues examining herself with this dual-layered gaze:

Facing the glass doors, Weilong straightened her collar and smoothed her hair. She had a small, round face, bland but pretty, a “power-puff face” that would be considered old-

fashioned nowadays. Her eyes were long and lovely; the fine creases over the lids swept out almost to her hairline. Her nose was delicate and thin, her little mouth plump and round. Her face may have been somewhat lacking in expression, but vacuousness of that sort does impact the gentle sincerity that one associates with Old China. Once she’d been quite dissatisfied with her white skin; she’s wanted a tan, to match the new ideal of healthy beauty. But when she got to Hong Kong she found that the Cantonese beauties generally had olive complexions. Scarcity pushes value up: at Nanyang Secondary, her white skin had earned her an untold number of admirers. One time somebody made a wisecrack, saying that if girls from Canton and Hunan, with their deep-set eyes and high cheeks, were sweet-and-sour pork bones, then Shanghai girls were flour-dipped pork dim sum – an “ill-remark” that popped into her mind just as she was appraising her looks.208

To start with, Weilong observes herself from the perspective of colonial gaze. She is certainly aware of the “Chinese atmosphere” that she possesses as a Shanghainese girl in Hong Kong, and she is much more Chinese-like than any of the other girls in her school. As Leo Ou-fan Lee points out, Hong Kong was a “complement” and “other” to Shanghai, and Chang often “eroticizes Hong Kong […] like a mirror, [to reflect] back upon her own city of Shanghai.”209 In her analysis of Chang’s novella, Belinda Kong also notes that Kong Hong stands for “Shanghai’s colonial twin.”210 The delicate differences between the natives from the motherland of the colony and the natives from the colony are frequently highlighted in Chang’s writing. These differences mark Weilong’s self-reflective gaze as colonial because they reflect the internalized standards, hierarchies, and stereotypes imposed by the colonial context of Hong Kong. Her dissatisfaction with her white skin and initial intention to get a tan to match the favourable fashion are altered after she arrived in Hong Kong, where local beauties value an “olive complexion”. By comparing herself

208 Chang, “Aloeswood Incense: The First Brazier,” Love in a Fallen City, 9
with Cantonese and Hunan beauties, Weilong comes to realize her pale skin is highly valued in Hong Kong, a place colonized by the British Empire then. Weilong’s switch of self-assessment demonstrates how colonial environments impose specific aesthetic standards, compelling individuals to continually adjust their self-image to meet the criteria. Her attempt to fit the colonial “ideal of healthy” and the awareness of her attractiveness of as a native Chinese woman within this context ultimately reflect an internalization of colonial power dynamics.

In addition, the simile between women and food at the end of this paragraph is rather sexualized. This “ill-bred remark” analogy that occurs to Weiling is not hard to find in conventional colonial writings. Chang makes it specific in pointing out the absurdity of such remarks. The connection between girls from different districts and the local food seems to come from the different skin tones as “Cantonese beauties generally had olive complexions” while Weilong, coming from the south-east district of China, “her white skin had earned her an untold number of admirers.”211 However, it is strange in this analogy that the “flour-dipped pork dim-sum” is not even local food of Shanghai but originated from Jiangxi, a landlocked province in the eastern part of China, let alone the offensiveness in its sexual association. Weilong immediately and subconsciously draws the correlation between women and food, which can also be frequently found in traditional Chinese culture in many examples of idiom such as “a feast for the eye” (xīn sè kě cān 秀色可餐) or “by nature we desire food and sex” (shí sè xìng yè 食色性也). Food becomes “a pertinent metaphor for double colonization (also termed gender colonization) as female

characters strive for recognition through the provision of appropriate nutrition to the male characters to validate their female identity."212 The sexualized culinary vocabulary has been internalized in the ways that Weilong regards herself, and women in the colony by large. The reference in which Weilong sees herself waiting to serve men's appetite does disturb her; nevertheless, this thought inevitably occurred to her when she examines herself from the male-gaze perspective. This also indicates her tragic ending in the story, luring men for her aunt and being a prostitute to earn money for her husband.

In Chang’s “Love in a Fallen City,” the protagonist Bai Liusu also lives under a dual-layered gaze. This story can be summarized as, in short, “a widow found love and livelihood in the meantime” by just getting married.213 Bai Liusu, a young woman from an old, aristocratic family in Shanghai, returns to her family home after a failed marriage. There, she is treated as a burden and urged to remarry to relieve the family’s financial strain. Fan Liuyuan was a British-born Chinese bachelor. His father was a wealthy and well-known overseas Chinese businessman who travelled widely and he met Fan’s mother in London. Fan’s parents were never officially married because his father’s first wife was in China. Therefore, Fan spent his childhood in England and returned to China when he was already twenty-four years old. Despite his reputation as a playboy, Fan and Liusu’s relationship quickly develops, although Liusu is cautious about Fan’s non-committal attitude towards

love. Fan invites Liusu to Hong Kong, where their relationship intensifies within the vibrant social scene until the Pacific War broke out and Japan invades Hong Kong. The city falls into immediate chaos, and the couple is forced to confront their feelings and their future together.

Bai Liusu is a distinct example in Chang’s writings that could represent the female consciousness under the dual-layered gaze. Fan Liuyuan, a second-generation immigrant who just returned to the British colony in Hong Kong, considers Liusu a perfect example of a “real Chinese girl.” Fan’s wealth and Western upbringing grant him a dominant position over Liusu, resembling the similar way that colonial authorities control over native populations. His return to the British colony of Hong Kong symbolizes the ongoing colonial influence on Chinese identity. Liusu finds herself torn between the expectations of traditional Chinese femininity and the new values brought by colonial modernity. This reflects the broader cultural dislocation faced by colonized societies as they struggle to reconcile their native identities with imposed colonial cultures. Fan called Liusu a woman whose “specialty is bowing the head” yet Liusu was never unconsciously doing such performance:

She leaned her head in his direction, and answered softly, “I do understand. I do.” But while comforting him, she suddenly thought of her moonlit face. That delicate profile, the eyes, the brow – beautiful beyond reason; misty, ethereal. Slowly she bowed her head.

There is a conscious, self-reflective subject beneath Liusu’s bowing head performance. Here, it seems there is a detached third-person viewer generated out of this female protagonist and gazing back at herself. She is performing not only the femininity but also

215 Ibid., 140.
the characteristics that are closely connected with the traditional, motherland culture, which certainly succeed in being recognized by and, at the same time, entertaining Fan, who intends to “become a little more like Chinese” yet is still culturally rooted with his British origin.

Liusu’s deliberate display of femininity is reminiscent of what Luce Irigaray terms “mimicry” as she borrows from post-colonial studies. Homi Bhabha defines mimicry as “the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same but not quite.” Irigaray borrows this concept into feminist studies. This is termed as a positive notion – a defense mechanism that women practice so as to “recover the place of her exploitation by discourse, without allowing herself to be simply reduced to it […], to make ‘visible’, by an effect of playful repetition, what was supposed to remain invisible.”

There is a clear sense of performance here in Liusu’s behavior. Her mimicry of the traditional Chinese femininity is very self-conscious and deliberately caters to Fan’s expectation about what “traditional Chinese women” should be like. Later in this story, Fan mentions his feelings while seeing Liusu: “What I mean is that you’re like someone from another world. You have all these little gestures, and a romantic aura, very much like a Peking opera singer.” Here, tracing back to Chang’s essay “Peking Opera Through Foreign Eyes,” she writes:

> The world within Peking opera is not contemporary China, and neither does it bear much resemblance to ancient China in any stage of its development. Its beauty and its narrowly

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218 Chang, “Love in a Fallen City,” *Love in a Fallen City*, 144.
tidy ethical system are worlds away from reality, but they are never a form of romantic escape, either.\textsuperscript{219}

In other words, Fan faces the dilemma that he believes that Liusu is the ideal Chinese woman, yet he does sense her unnatural gestures and her performance of traditional Chinese femininity. It reminds him of putting up the masquerade and performing on the stage, exactly resembling the Peking opera, which does not equal reality at all. Therefore, the “almost the same but not quite” ambivalence that Fan senses is always present during his interaction with Liusu. Critic Lim Chin Chown studies the female characters in Chang’s other stories and concludes that “they are the victims of patriarchy but also the agent of it [that benefits from it]; they are the parasites but also the conspirators; they are self-conscious subject but also the object that subordinate [to men].”\textsuperscript{220} This applies as well in analysing the above passages in terms of colonialism. Liusu is consciously performing the traditional Chinese feminine characteristics that cater to Fan’s understanding of China and the motherland cultures it represents. Liusu’s conscious performance of traditional Chinese femininity in response to Fan’s expectations represents her negotiation of identity under the dual pressures of colonialism and patriarch. Women like Liusu simultaneously navigate their own female agency and subordination within power dynamic of the colonial societies.

\textsuperscript{219} Chang, “Peking Opera Through Foreign Eyes,” 111.

In an essay entitled “True words about ‘Love in a Fallen City’” (1944), which was written one year after the publication of the story itself, Chang writes that “the plot in my story develops just with its own tempo, and I am only in charge of how it is represented on paper.” Both Eileen Chang and Somerset Maugham consciously keep a maintained distance from their colonial subjects and present the ambiguity of the colonial mind.

Maugham’s exotic tales in On a Chinese Screen involves the Western audience in his trip through China, by focusing on the travail and common people with a zooming-in foreign-eyes perspective. His writing attempts to generate empathy rather than pure reading pleasure out of the readers. However, Chang’s stories transcend Maugham’s in that she does more than just giving voice to the native Chinese female characters, who could hardly be found in Maugham’s colonial stories. Chang presents the colonial experience of the time with a localized foreign-eyes perspective, which she resembles Maugham’s tales, while exploring further in revealing that the oppression and marginality of the colonial natives, especially women, do not just come from the British colonizer, but also could be from the natives themselves and colonial “motherland” males from the “motherland”. The once involuntary masquerade gradually turns into a willing performance of both femininity and the exotic atmosphere. Meanwhile, the colonized become the products that are generated out of the entire colonial culture. As Lim remarks, “the authenticity of history and the fictionality of literature are challenged in Eileen Chang’s text. This kind of female writing

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221 Translation is my own. The original sentence: “我的情節向來是歸它自己發展，只有處理方面是由我支配的。” Eileen Chang 張愛玲, “Guanyu 'qingcheng zhi lian' de laoshihua” 关于《倾城之恋》的老实话 [True words about ‘Love in a Fallen City’]. In Duizhao ji – kan lao zhaoxiangbu 對照記——看老照相簿 [Mutual Reflections: Looking at My Old Photo Album], (Taiwan: Crown, 1999), 103.
narrates within history yet shatters history; while the history is also reconstructed by the female self-identity that Chang creates.” Chang relentlessly exposes the tragic and unpromising reality that the natives have to live through in the colonial land.

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222 Translation is my own. The original sentence: “历史的真实性和文学的虚构性在张爱玲文本中接受了作者的挑战。此种女性文本在历史中叙事，撕裂历史，又以她所形构的女性自我重构历史。” Lim Chin Chown 林幸谦, “Nixie Zhang Ailing yu xiandai xiaoshuo zhong nüxing ziwo de xinggou” 逆写张爱玲与现代小说中女性自我的形构 [Writing back Eileen Chang and the Construction of Feminine Self in Modern Fictions]. 166.
Chapter 3: In Pursuit of the Modern:

Love and Desolation in the (Semi-)colonial Land

In the autumn of 1919, Somerset Maugham spent four months in China with Gerald Haxton, his secretary and lover. Beginning from Hong Kong, for days they sailed and walked along the upper reaches of the Yangtze River before finally arriving in Shenyang (“Mukden” in its then Manchu name) in north China. In February 1921, they began the voyage to Singapore, Malaya, and other then outposts of the British Empire. Although Maugham is well-known for his colonial stories associated with the British Empire in the South Seas and the Far East, he “spent relatively little time there, six months in 1921 and four months in 1925”, together with another four months in China during their earlier trip in 1919. Maugham also stayed in the major cities such as Hong Kong, Shanghai, and Peking, though in his writings there is hardly any trace of these “metropolises of the East”. Instead, Maugham wrote considerably on rural China and the small islands from the South Seas, the only modern elements in the cities merely serve as the natural background for his American and European characters and their maintained modern life.

In his critique of Maugham’s travel vignette of China On a Chinese Screen, Philip Holden comments that

the narrator himself controls intercourse between the two worlds. He interviews representative types on both sides on his modern/premodern binarism, critiquing Europeans for their lack of understandings of China, and then applying the same caustic

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224 Ibid., 267.
irony to the Chinese. \textsuperscript{225}

The deliberate choice of portraying China as “premodern” also derives from the writer’s nostalgia that, according to Holden, “China reminds him of a rural Europe, a Europe persistently associated with his youth. […] From the vantage point of the modern, the narrator looks longingly back at what he constructs as pre-modern, and highlights the contrast for his narratees.” \textsuperscript{226} It is also interesting to note that in China, in 1919 when Maugham arrived, the contrast between the major cities and rural areas was already enormous. For example, Hong Kong, as in Maugham’s novel \textit{The Painted Veil}, was emphatically British, with sites such as the racecourse and clubs that are commonly seen in his writings. While earth roads and farm fields are characteristic of the inland city Mei-tan-fu, people still depend on horses or cattle as the main labour for work and transportation. Moreover, Shanghai, “commercial and cosmopolitan, was very different in character (from Hong Kong), with great banks and business lining the Bund, streets jammed with motor traffic, with a busy nightlife centered on the restaurants and nightclubs run mainly a glamorous White Russian population in flight from the recent revolution.” \textsuperscript{227}

The striking differences between these major metropolises and inland cities are due to the Qing government’s defeat to Britain in the First Opium War (1839-1842). Hong Kong was ceded to the British Empire as a colony, and Shanghai became one of the five earliest treaty ports that were opened to foreign merchants and trade. Economics flourished and traditional culture was hugely influenced by Western ideology in these two cities.

\textsuperscript{226} Ibid., 137-138.
The geopolitical condition of Shanghai from the 1920s to the 30s spatially divided this city into several parts – the French Concession and the International Settlement, together with an informal Japanese district Hongkou – making Shanghai a semi-colonial city owned by both the imperialists and the Chinese. Through the semi-colonial division of Shanghai, as Shu-mei Shih remarks, “the colonists enjoyed extraterritorial rights, modern conveniences, and capital power, while the colonized had restricted access to both modernity and power.”

During the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945), the Chinese-controlled districts of the city fell after the Battle of Shanghai in 1937, while the foreign concessions remained mostly intact for about four years until the Pacific War finally broke out in December 1941. This four-year duration is known as the “Solitary Island” period, during which the internal and foreign transportation and trade enjoyed temporary but complete freedom and the concession also witnessed unexpected economic prosperity. After the breakout of the Pacific War, the Japanese took over the Shanghai Concession, but ordered the Shanghai Municipal Council, the highest administrative authority in the Public Concession then, to continue operating. It is not until August 1943 that the history of Shanghai Concession period finally ended as the territory was returned to the City Government of Shanghai.

In 1940s Shanghai, the period during which most of Eileen Chang’s short stories are set, “modern” (modeng 摩登) has become a distinctive feature of Shanghai’s urban life. Throughout Chang’s early schooling years, things that were most common to her and the

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Shanghai citizens, such as cafés, movie theatres, cabarets, and tram cars, could hardly be imagined by most Chinese people from the inland cities. Modern, at that time, meant fashion and out-of-the-ordinary daily routine. From the domestic space to the public area, modern life was represented by imported foreign goods and Western notions, which altogether established the renewed ideology of Shanghai’s modern culture in the 1940s. Chang’s special attachment and frequent references to these modern elements construct her fictional characters’ daily domesticity. Leo Ou-fan Lee explains Chang’s preference for modern life that

> This wealth of objects – the old juxtaposed with the new – bespeaks a deep-seated ambiguity toward modernity that is the distinct hallmark of Eileen Chang’s fiction. Nevertheless, this sense of ambiguity should not be mistaken for nostalgic traditionalism. In both fiction and real life, Chang’s attachment to modern (modeng) life can likewise be traced through aspects of Shanghai’s material culture.229

Such favourism and pursuit of the modern has been seamlessly integrated into people’s ordinary daily life, a theme prominently featured in Chang’s Shanghai stories. On the contrary, in Maugham’s writing, the pursuit of modern life, or rather, the endeavor to maintain the customary Western lifestyle, is often evident in his portrayal of depressed European expatriate residing in overseas colony. By depicting the foreign land as premodern, Maugham’s characters appear to indulge in recreating their typical Western daily routine in the colony, while enduring the overwhelming homesickness and struggling to find their place in the East.

In this chapter, I will focus on Eileen Chang’s short stories “Sealed Off” (1943) and “Steamed Osmanthus Flower Ah Xiao’s Unhappy Autumn” (1944), along with Somerset

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Maugham’s three short stories titled “Rain” (1922), “Plain” (1922), and “The Philosopher” (1922). Through the analysis of these texts, I aim to demonstrate how Chang presents her female characters, Cuiyuan and Ah Xiao in particular, as “women from the metropolis” within the broader context of “modern domesticity” in semi-colonized Shanghai during the early 1940s. Chang’s combination of the wartime historical reality and the domesticity with romantic affairs in this specific Japanese-ruled period offers readers an alternative wartime narrative, challenging the traditional depiction of both Western-educated and working-class women of her era. I will illustrate how these two female characters explore the possibility of romance and assert their renewed subjectivity in their romantic relationships. The metaphorical employment of modern elements, such as tram, film, and telephone, creates a static space liberates women from the confines of daily repetitive works and moral judgements. In addition, by examining the juxtaposition of the modern West and pre-modern China in Maugham’s short stories, I aim to explore how the pursuit of “modern life” as a driving force in the (semi-)colonial land reconstructs the interpersonal relationship, both sexually and politically, in both writers’ works.

3.1. The Making of a Modern Romance in “Sealed off”

Chang published “Sealed off” in November 1943 and “Steamed Osmanthus Flower Ah Xiao’s Unhappy Autumn” in the following year. Both stories are set in semi-colonial Shanghai and narrate a typical day of the wartime life in the city. Chang’s particular preference for modern elements, especially tram and movie theatre, becomes the stage on which the female protagonist’s domestic events display.
Edward Gunn divides Chang’s stories into two main categories: “those in which an impersonal force in the environment acts out an individual’s fantasies, and those in which an active protagonist attempts directly to impose his or her will.”230 “Sealed off” is characteristic of the former group. The story depicts a common day in Japanese-occupied Shanghai when the streetcar is caught in the traffic during an air raid and features an accidental romantic encounter between a man and a woman on the tram. The romance between the two ends abruptly as the air raid ends and the traffic moves again. The dream-like encounter between the protagonists evaporates and they resume their initial position as strangers again as the narration finishes that “everything that had happened while the city was sealed off was a nonoccurrence. The whole city of Shanghai had dozed off and dreamed an unreasonable dream.”231 The wartime standstill interrupts the original pace of life and creates a static segment in terms of both space and time, within which the protagonists are able to resume to the state as “real people” instead of behaving like “good people” in their usual daily life, as the female protagonist Wu Cuiyuan calls, regardless of all the social norms and family pressures.

As Chang admits in the essay “Notes on Apartment Life,” she likes to listen to city sounds: “people more poetic than I listen from their pillows to the sound of rustling pines or the roar of ocean waves, while I can’t fall asleep until I hear the sound of streetcars.”232

In “Sealed off,” the narration begins with the ringing of an alarm bell, marking both the threat of war and the opening of the romantic drama between the protagonists. The opening of this story, as Eric Sandberg notes, is a typically modernist gesture that operates both on the level of the sign, as a textually self-aware typographical demarcation between pre- and post-alarm sections of the story; and on the level of the sign's referent, separating the two ‘worlds’ of the story – the everyday and the state of exception.\textsuperscript{233} The beginning highlights the demarcation, as the narration continues with people rushing on the streets, that “those on the left rushed over to the right, those on the right rushed over to the left. […] The two sides glared at one another through the bars, feeding off each other’s fear.”\textsuperscript{234} Sandberg describes the tramcar as “a closed room within the closed city” that nevertheless provides a space of relative freedom.\textsuperscript{235} Agreeing with his thoughts, I would like to argue that Chang’s creation of a sealed off space as the stage of this brief tale of a failed relationship is an alternative to the modern wartime narrative. This temporal and spatial isolation is portrayed as paradoxically dangerous but secure, lockdown but free, functioning as an allegory of life that is integrated with the individual’s both wartime and domestic experience. The sense of dissonance exists throughout the entire story in terms of not only the metaphorical space of the sealed off tram but also the characters’ intentions in acquiring subjectivity in their overt filtration.

Chang describes the air raid alarm on a metaphorical level in that the sound is visualized as a dot line “that [cuts] through space and time.”\textsuperscript{236} The immediate presence of everyday

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext[232]{Eric Sandberg, “Eileen Chang’s ‘Sealed Off’ and the Possibility of Modernist Romance,” \textit{Ariel}, vol. 49, no. 2, 2018, 241.}
\footnotetext[233]{Eileen Chang, “Sealed off,” 237.}
\footnotetext[234]{Eric Sandberg, “Eileen Chang’s ‘Sealed Off’ and the Possibility of Modernist Romance,” 242.}
\footnotetext[235]{Eileen Chang, “Sealed off,” 238.}
\end{footnotes}
life in a besieged city is caught into a stop, but only temporarily, therefore the blockade cuts through the spatial and temporal life like a dot line instead of a solid one. The acoustical and visual opening scene then leads the focus of the narration, resembling the movement of a camera lens, onto the male protagonist, Lü Zongzhen, who is an accountant for Huamao Bank. The plot of the story also generates like a typical romantic movie in which a middle-aged married man and a young, rebellious but innocent good daughter of her family fall in love with each other. Leo Ou-fan Lee comments that the relationship between Lü Zongzhen and Wu Cuiyuan is made possible because of Chang's “transportation of time into space.”237 The paused tram offers the two protagonists a stage on which their romance could happen only in the temporal isolation in a war-torn city.

In this romantic encounter, Lü Zongzhen and Wu Cuiyuan consciously play their contrasting roles – Zongzhen proactively approaches Cuiyuan as a cover of his initial intention to avoid being recognized by Dong Peizhi, a relative from his wife's family, who is “a man of humble origins who harbored a great ambition” and cunningly planned to make his way up by marrying Zongzhen’s thirteen-year-old daughter.238 Cuiyuan obediently listens to Zongzhen and observes his dramatic but awkward presentation of affection. However, Chang depicts this flirtation scene with an omniscient third-person narrative voice, which overtly reveals the female subjectivity behind Cuiyuan’s reserved expression. Cuiyuan constantly inspects Zongzhen's behavior and articulation, and deliberately uses her submissiveness also to conceal the real intention that could have been delivered by her

utterance, as Cuiyuan frankly claims that “a woman who has to use words to touch a man’s heart is a sorry figure.”

To start with, Zongzhen arbitrarily declares the beginning and end of their romance. The two do not fall immediately into their role in this tale of romance at the very beginning. Both Zongzhen and Cuiyuan are forced into the making of conversation and courtship, and Zongzhen is the one who proactively pushes their conversation forward. He describes his first impression of Cuiyuan in a theatrical way that the vision of her face is presented in fragments. As Zongzhen recalls:

“In the window at the front of the tram, there’s an advertisement with a piece torn out, and I saw part of your face, just a bit of your chin, through the tear.” It was an ad for Locova powdered milk, and it showed a fat little child. Under the child’s ear, this woman’s chin had suddenly appeared; it was a little spooky, when you thought about it.

The lens of narrative perspective highlights the incongruity of this image in which Cuiyuan’s chin is dislocated, and the combination of her face and the little child in the advertisement is so uncanny that makes Zongzhen’s utterance in fact a disastrous opening of the conversation. However, as Zongzhen is forced to play his role in the courtship, he continues that

“Then you looked down to search for change in your purse, and I saw your eyes, then your eyebrows, then your hair.” When you considered her features in isolation, one after another, you had to admit she did have a certain charm.

It is quite sarcastic here that Cuiyuan is even well flattered and considers “this man could talk so sweetly.” Contradictory to Cuiyuan’s feelings, Zongzhen was by no means sincere.

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240 Ibid., 244.
241 Ibid.
242 Ibid.
and seconds later he “had already forgotten what he’d said”. The inner thoughts right after his words make it even more ironic, implying that, for Zongzhen, the person in front of him is not a particularly charming woman, especially considering that he describes Cuiyuan’s face as “the dark border around an obituary” and her body “was like squeezed-out toothpaste, no shape at all” at first glance. The dislocation of not only Cuiyuan’s face through the advertisement poster but also both protagonists’ feelings towards each other indicates the discontinuity and fragmented modern experience of wartime life that Chang especially set for the framework of the story.

In addition, Chang describes in detail the two moments when Cuiyuan’s face blushed red in relation to the ideas of “good people” and “real people” as Cuiyuan repetitively refers. Cuiyuan is an English instructor at the college where she graduated from. Chang begins the introduction of this character with a focused scene in which Cuiyuan was grading the student’s papers. The paper she was marking is from a male student, which “railed against the evils of the big city”, is full of righteous anger and ungrammatical prose. Contrary to what she would usually do, Cuiyuan gave him an “A” and could not help but realize her affection towards the male student as he “was the only man who, with perfect frankness, no qualms whatsoever, raised such topics with her”. It is worth pointing out that this is one of the two moments in this story when Cuiyuan blushed. Cuiyuan feels that this man “treated her like someone who had been places and done things;

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244 Ibid., 240 & 243.
245 Ibid., 240.
246 Ibid.
he treated her like a man, like a trusted friend. He respected her” and that he is a “real person” instead of a “good” one.\textsuperscript{247} Rather than the normal way a student addresses his college instructor as the social norms constrain, Cuiyuan considers herself treated as an equal companion with respect – the kind of respect that she does not usually receive either at home or at school. However, unlike what she appeared to admit, she is by no means respected as a man in this relationship. Rather, the male student treated her as a woman who would tolerably takes whatever his self-righteous rambles are and Cuiyuan is in fact well-aware of her role as an obedient listener, and this point is further demonstrated in the other moment as she blushed when facing Zongzhen.

Chang uses the cinematic technique of a close-up shoot in highlighting this moment as this is when Cuiyuan realizes that they were falling in love with each other:

The street erupted in noise as two trucks full of soldiers rumbled by: Cuiyuan and Zongzhen stuck their heads out to see what was going on; to their surprise, their faces were drawn into sudden proximity. Seen near up, anyone’s face is somehow different – tension-charged like a closed-up on the movie screen. Zongzhen and Cuiyuan suddenly felt they were seeing each other for the first time. To his eyes, her face was the spare, simple peony of a watercolor sketch, and the strands of hair fluttering at her temples were pistils ruffled by a breeze.

He looked at her, and she blushed. When she let him see her blush, he grew visibly happy. Then she blushed even more deeply.

Zongzhen had never thought he could make a woman blush, make her smile, make her face away, then turn it back again. In this he was a man.\textsuperscript{248}

The sudden intensification of intimacy, as Sandburg explains, “resolves the two previously fragmentary characters into two whole beings”.\textsuperscript{249} Cuiyuan is no longer “a good daughter, a good student” with a “bland, limp, undefined” face.\textsuperscript{250} She became the focus of this

\textsuperscript{248} Ibid., 247.
\textsuperscript{249} Eric Sandberg, “Eileen Chang’s ‘Sealed Off’ and the Possibility of Modernist Romance,” 245.
close-up shoot – the heroine of the movie. Likewise, Zongzhen also retreats from his social roles as always “an accountant, a father, a head of household, a passenger on the tram, a customer in the store, a local citizen”. He was once again recognized and confirmed in this romantic encounter as “only and entirely a man”. The situation also creates the possibility that they can resume “real people” in this romantic relationship regardless of any other factors from their interpersonal relationships in the real life. It is particularly noticeable that, following their realization of love for each other, Chang continues with a commentary that is suddenly detached from the romantic scene: “A man in love likes to talk; a woman in love changes her way and doesn’t want to talk. She knows, without even knowing what she knows, that after a man really understands a woman, he won’t love her anymore”. There is clearly a deviation between the two characters in terms of their interpretation of “modern love”. As for Zongzhen, Cuiyuan is an understanding woman who can listen to him without any reluctance while he has all kinds of things to say, and this is the exact point that echoes with the male student who made Cuiyuan blush and explains in return why Cuiyuan also falls for Zongzhen at this moment. The neglect of social roles as student and instructor, and making it further in this situation, as a good daughter of a prim family and a married middle-aged man, is an overt rebellion against the rigid social norms and roles they had to obey in daily life.

Both characters endure the pointlessness of life as well as the constrained social restrictions and interpersonal relationships. Zongzhen despises his uneducated wife and

252 Ibid.
253 Ibid.
her interests in gaining petty advantages, while Cuiyuan usually feels that no one at the university respects her, and her parents “wished that she had slacked off a bit as a student and worked harder at getting them a wealthy son-in-law.”

Therefore, this overt flirtation presents them with a getaway from the mundane domestic routine of the wartime experience, in which they have to maintain the daily life while living under the threat of war. The citywide blockage and the stopped tramcar offer them temporary security in a locked-down space, and the romantic encounter offers both characters a vain chance to become the distinguishing leading roles as if in a romantic movie that is not defined by the wartime narrative.

It is also worthwhile to note that Cuiyuan is characteristic of the “modern women” that often appear in Chang’s short stories. They are well-educated under the Western educational system but were brought up in a rigid traditional Chinese family, much resembling what Chang had experienced herself. Chang also emphasizes the tension of being caught between modernity and tradition in writing about these female characters.

Following Rey Chow’s observation that “the modern metropolis is the key to its plot and background,” Leo Ou-fan Lee further explains that

such a sealed-off space is also a perfect metaphor for the state of Eileen Chang’s women characters as they yearn for love and romance within the confinement of their own existence, even though they remain aware of the ephemerality of love and the unreliability of men.

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The modern metropolis, often depicted with its chaotic combination of Western influence and traditional Chinese values, provides a unique space where these women navigate their desires and constraints. Within such settings, Chang’s female characters find themselves at the intersection of modernity and tradition, grappling with the newfound freedoms and persistent limitations that shape their lives. Cuiyuan is acutely aware of the transient nature of the circumstances this relationship, seizing the opportunities presented by this instability caused by the air raid. The realization of the inherent unreliability of men does not diminish her yearning but rather adds a layer of complexity to the romantic endeavors.

Moreover, Cuiyuan also resembles Bai Liusu in Chang’s other wartime story “Love in A Fallen City” in that they both deliberately act out the feminine characteristics that are designed to be recognized by the male characters. In “Sealed Off”, the omniscient narrator consistently reveals Cuiyuan’s inner thoughts to the readers, in particular, her inspection of Zongzhen’s furtive approach and awkward performance of flirtation. If Liusu in “Love in A Fallen City” is good at performing bowing her head, then Cuiyuan is intentionally showing her empathy by reacting with an obedient smile. From the start of the interaction with Zongzhen, Cuiyuan inspects this man with a rather sharp commentary, which is quite contradictory to what she shows to Zongzhen outwardly. She is very aware of what Zongzhen is looking for in her – a women who “being part of you, she understands everything, forgives everything. You tell the truth, and her heart aches for you; you tell a lie, and she smiles.”

Thus, it is amusing to observe the deviation between what Cuiyuan thinks and acts out:

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“Here it comes!” thought Cuiyuan. “His wife doesn’t understand him. Every married man in the world seems to be in desperate need of another woman's understanding.”
Zongzhen hesitated, swallowed hard, and forced the words out: “My wife – she doesn’t understand me at all.”
Cuiyuan looked at him, and frowned to show her sympathy.

Chang wrote this romantic encounter with almost a sense of humor that both characters proactively are manipulating this relationship – Zongzhen being overt while Cuiyuan being covert. Even though the protagonists claim that they are able to resume as “real people” and enjoy modern love as they wish, they are still trapped in the hetero-patriarchal roles that are defined and constrained by traditional Chinese social norms.

This wartime love story begins with Cuiyuan being courted and ends with her being abandoned and forgotten as Zongzhen is fearful of any real commitment, making Cuiyuan seem like a female character who hardly owns her initiative in a romantic relationship. However, Chang exposes her internalized subjectivity in the making of romance to the readers. She is allured by the fantasy of a modern love story and the vanity of becoming the heroine of the romance while also being conscious of the man’s intention and what is proper for her to react to make this relationship move forward. The ambivalence does not only exist in the contradiction between wartime experience and daily domesticity but also lies in the deviation of her romantic fantasy and actual reluctance to cooperate in completing this performance of romance. In this way, the modern setting of wartime Shanghai not only serves as a backdrop but also actively shapes Cuiyuan’s character and her pursuit of romance. Her ambivalence and internal conflicts are intensified by the transient nature of the wartime environment, creating a complex portrayal of a woman navigating her subjectivity in a time of uncertainty.
3.2. Ah Xiao’s Modern Life and Marriage

Published in December 1944, “Steamed Osmanthus Flower Ah Xiao’s Unhappy Autumn” differs from Eileen Chang’s previous short stories that were produced during her most productive years in Shanghai. It tells the story mostly from the perspective of a working-class amah, who serves her foreign master living in the Shanghai International Settlement. The focus is projected entirely on Ah Xiao and her surroundings within about twenty-four hours, showing a slice of this woman’s life in the autumn of 1941, just before the Pacific War broke out. The depiction of this single day is filled with trivial details of domesticity: Ah Xiao urging her son Baishun to study and behave; her coping with different women on the phone for her master Mr. Garter; her receiving friends when Mr. Garter is out and their gossiping about their own masters and the newlyweds upstairs, together with Ah Xiao’s inner thoughts about her master and unmarried husband from time to time.

Ah Xiao is very uncharacteristic of the traditional depiction of working-class women of the era. The life of the working class was once a quite popular literary topic in the 1930s since the May Fourth Movement, and the most representative image of the domestic worker would be Xiang Lin’s wife (Xianglin sao 祥林嫂) from “New Year’s Sacrifice” (Zhufu 朱夫)...

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257 According to Shui Jing 水晶, a writer and scholar of Zhang Studies, “Steamed Osmanthus Flower” is set in September 1941 at Shanghai Foreign Settlement, as later that year, in 8th December, the Pacific War broke out and the Japanese trope took over the Foreign Settlement. Many Europeans and Americans were caught in the concentration camp after that, in which case Ah Xiao’s story would have to be rewritten. Translation is my own. Original text: “时间应是民国三十年九月，因为到了 12 月 8 日，珍珠港事变一发生，租界的外国人被关进了集中营，这阿小悲秋的故事也就需要改写了。” See more in Shui Jing 水晶, Ti Zhang Ailing buzhuang 替张爱玲补妆 [Reapply Makeup for Eileen Chang] (Jinan: Shandong Pictorial Publishing House, 2004) 169.
祝福, a short story by Lu Xun 鲁迅 published in 1924. Xiang Lin’s wife is a widowed woman who works hard, but is tortured by her ex-mother-in-law and forced to remarry He Laoliu, with all of her hard-earned money taken away. Just when she thought she could finally live a relatively peaceful life with He, he passed away due to disease, and their young child was eaten by a wolf. The continuous accidents eventually drive Xiang Lin’s wife crazy. People regard her as “bad luck” and claim that she would have to endure the punishment and suffer even in the afterlife. Such tragic working-class female images can also be found in Eileen Chang’s contemporaneous female writers’ work, for example, in Xiao Hong’s 松红 Tales of Hulan River (hulanhe zhuan 呼兰河传). The morbid relationship between the son’s wife and mother-in-law reoccurs; rigid disciplines over women and the celebrations of superstitious activity remain, eventually causing the tragic death of a young wife, aged only twelve.

Eileen Chang’s heroine, on the contrary, has almost nothing in common with these suffering female characters. Ah Xiao is a diligent Suzhou amah who hardly received school education but speaks English, not very fluently though. She takes a tram every morning to work at her foreign master Mr. Garter’s apartment building. She is professional in cooking, cleaning, and sorting out his tight schedule with different girlfriends. She is always energetic, accommodating, and very tidy. Although Ah Xiao is not a victim of the traditional relationship between mothers and daughter-in-laws, nor a revolutionary heroine fighting...
for the country’s future during wartime, nor an ideal mother, modern woman, or virgin female character.

As Shui Jing comments on Ah Xiao, leftist writers of the time found this character uncommendable because she is “uncharacteristic” and not worth writing about.\textsuperscript{259} Ah Xiao is also considered an “incomplete” character according to Chang herself.\textsuperscript{260} Yet, sometimes it is precisely the “uncharacteristic” role that is characteristic and complete; in our daily life, such a person is the real and common one.\textsuperscript{261} Ah Xiao is an obvious paradox: she is generous but quite particular about every penny spent; she despises her master, Mr. Garter, but ultimately shows a maternal attachment to him; she values the traditional kind of marriage with “candles lit in the bridal chamber at the wedding” (\textit{huazhu}花烛) and loathes Mr. Garter’s dissolute relationships with women, yet she herself is never officially married to her man and still had their child.

There is one scene in the story when Xiuqin, the amah of one of Mr. Garter’s girlfriends, comes to visit Ah Xiao, and the two have a conversation about Xiuqin’s marriage. Xiuqin’s mother and the family of Xiuqin’s husband-to-be want them to get married soon, but then she will have to move into his home in the countryside. Xiuqin asserts that she will come back to Shanghai immediately after they get married because she

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext[259]{Shui Jing 水晶, \textit{Ti Zhang Ailing buzhuang}替张爱玲补妆 [Reapply Makeup for Eileen Chang], 39.}
\footnotetext[260]{Ibid.}
\footnotetext[261]{Translation is my own. Original text: “丁阿小这个苏州姨娘，很难邀博到左翼作家的青睐。因为她是一个不值一写的‘不典型’，也就是张爱玲自己所谓的‘不彻底’。其实，‘不典型’有时是到时典型的，彻底的，为的是我们在日常生活中，反而常常会碰到这样的人物！” See more in Shui Jing 水晶, \textit{Ti Zhang Ailing buzhuang}替张爱玲补妆 [Reapply Makeup for Eileen Chang], 39.}
\end{footnotes}
“could never get used to living in the country!”\footnote{Eileen Chang, “Steamed Osmanthus Flower Ah Xiao’s Unhappy Autumn,” in \textit{Traces of Love and Other Stories}, trans. Simon Patton, ed. Eva Huang (Hong Kong: Renditions Paperbacks, 2000), 72.} She complains to Ah Xiao that her mother bought household items in Shanghai only to show off, but the clothes she picked are never presentable for Xiuqin herself to wear in Shanghai. Furthermore, Xiuqin insists that a gold ring is necessary, and this must be included in the betrothal presents provided by the husband’s family. Ah Xiao feels unpleasant and discomfited by Xiuqin’s display of pride, and the reason for that is:

She and her husband had not had a proper marriage ceremony. All these years she had regretted her decision to move in with him without going through all the excitement of a wedding.

[…]

The worry was all hers, it seemed. It didn’t make much difference to a man whether he got married or not. At the same time she also felt bored by the whole affair. Their child was a big boy now, so what use was there thinking about such things? It was true he wasn’t supporting her, but he probably wouldn’t have been able to support her even if they had been legally married. What powers had chosen this life of drudgery for her? He only made enough to cover his own expenses. Sometimes he even asked her for money to pay into his savings club.\footnote{Chang, “Steamed Osmanthus Flower Ah Xiao’s Unhappy Autumn,” 73 \& 79.}

This explains why Ah Xiao “had intended to make a few rather icy remarks but couldn’t manage.”\footnote{Ibid., 73.} Ah Xiao’s own marriage seems not comparable at all to Xiuqin’s, as in accustomed traditional \textit{huazhū} 花烛 marriage, there shall be a proper wedding ceremony. The bridegroom’s family would present betrothal presents to the bride’s while the bride’s family prepares the household items.

A few hours later that day, two other friends come and visit Ah Xiao, and the four women gossip about the newlyweds upstairs from Mr. Garter’s apartment. The newlyweds paid 1.5 million for the apartment and moved in with “furniture, several dozen sets of
bedding, as well as ten piculs of rice and the same amount of coal! Four servants accompanied the bride: a male and female domestic, a cook and a trishaw-puller.”265 As mentioned by philosopher Henry Lanz, “in gossip we are pleased to discuss other people’s faults, seldom their merits. We thus seem to enjoy evil for evil’s sake. For we are pleased by faults and errors. We are content to see them endure and grow. We are eager to augment their number and to exaggerate their importance.”266 Yet in Ah Xiao’s situation, she somehow celebrates other people’ merits particularly to bring up a comparison to Xiuqin’s upcoming marriage. The gossip is framed when the third party is not present, hence this little community is formed among these women. However, Ah Xiao takes the side of the absent newlyweds, and even defends the bride when they continue to gossip about her appearance. The extravagance of the newlyweds, in return, eases Ah Xiao’s inferiority for not having a proper wedding ceremony herself. Ah Xiao embodies the tension between traditional values and the encroaching forces of modernity. Despite valuing traditional marital customs, she finds herself in a modern dilemma: she has a child with a man she is not officially married to. This situation highlights the disruption of traditional norms by modern circumstances, and Ah Xiao struggles to reconcile these conflicting aspects of her life in reclaiming her subjectivity.

As implied in Love in a Fallen City and “Aloeswood Incense: The First Brazier” discussed in previous chapters, Eileen Chang considers marriage to be an endless calculation of benefits, and love is a desperate thing that seems only to exist when there is

265 Chang, “Steamed Osmanthus Flower Ah Xiao’s Unhappy Autumn,” 74-75.
no hope for life during wartime. Therefore, it is not surprising that in this story, the seemingly perfect marriage of the newlyweds is soon doomed. At the end of that day, Ah Xiao overheard this couple's argument before she falls asleep:

The newly-weds upstairs started arguing. There was a loud noise which sounded like someone stamping her feet, or being kicked or pushed back against a kitchen cupboard or the window. Sobbing, the woman ranted on at length in what sounded like Yangzhou dialect: ‘Go on, hit me! … Hit me! … Kill me, I dear you! …’ Ah Xiao listened attentively, her head on her pillow, thinking to herself: ‘They’ve bought a 1.5 million-dollar apartment so they can fight in it! They’ve only been married three days. They’ve got no reason to argue! … Unless of course the woman hasn’t been completely honest….’ By some obscure connection she thought of Xiuqin and the family of her future husband who had specially put down a proper floor in what was to be the couple’s bedroom. Xiuqin had no choice but to get married.267

Accidently peeping into other people’s marital life and discovering their secrets make Ah Xiao assured that there is no marriage a good one. Her own marriage does not fit the traditional customs, while the upstairs couple’s traditional huazhu 花烛 also looks unfortunate. Their misfortune eases Ah Xiao’s dissatisfaction. Thus, Ah Xiao could not help but looking forward to Xiuqin’s marriage, in that a shared misfortune is much endurable for people who are already experiencing it. Chang uses the contrast between Ah Xiao’s unofficial, modern marriage and the traditional, yet failing, marriage of the newlyweds to emphasize the fragility of traditional social norms during wartime. Ah Xiao’s attempt in reconciling these conflicting values reveals her resilience and adaptability in a time marked by social upheaval.

Nevertheless, it is worth pointing out that, for the writer, Ah Xiao’s relationship seems to be the most acceptable one in this story. In an essay entitled “Writing of One’s Own,” Eileen Chang comments on the kind of relationship that Ah Xiao has with her unmarried...

husband:

Modern people for the most part are exhausted, and the modern marriage system is irrational as well. Thus silence reigns between husbands and wives. There are those who look for relief by engaging in sophisticated flirtation, so as to avoid having to take responsibility for their actions, and those who revert to animal desires by patronizing prostitutes (but these are only beastly men and not beasts and are thus all the more horrifying). Then there is cohabitation, which is not as serious a bond as marriage, involves more responsibility than sophisticated flirtation, and is not so lacking in humanity as whoring. People who go to extremes are, in the final analysis, the minority, and so living together out of wedlock has become a very common phenomenon in recent years.\(^{268}\)

In relation to the flirtation that Cuiyuan in “Sealed off” falls into and the modern marriage that Xiuqin chooses, Chang’s depiction of Ah Xiao’s cohabitation is a unique response to the literary representation of modern women of the time. As Chang remarks,

> The new-style writers, on the other hand, dislike that these relationships seem to resemble neither love nor prostitution and are thus neither healthy enough nor sufficiently perverse to lend themselves to the articulation of an unmistakably clear main theme.\(^{269}\)

Although Ah Xiao is rebellious enough to choose to live with her man out of wedlock against her parents’ wishes, she is ultimately caught in the dilemma that she also must endure her husband’s redundant financial problems and the lifelessness of their marriage, which she has neither intention nor courage to abandon. Chang’s narrative delves into the internal and external conflicts faced by women during the wartime period within the modern settings. As Leo Ou-fan Lee comments, “it was the Chinese writers’ fervent espousal of Occidental exoticism that turned Western culture itself into an “other” in the process of constructing their own modern imaginary. This process of appropriation was crucial to their own quest for modernity.”\(^{270}\) Chang’s portrayal of Ah Xiao’s life represents


\(^{269}\) Chang, “Writing of One’s Own,” 21.

this dynamic appropriation. While Ah Xiao’s situation is shaped by modern influences – cohabitation, economic independence, and growing self-awareness and agency – it also remains deep ties to traditional values, such as her inner desire for a proper wedding and her maternal instincts towards Mr. Garter.

In terms of the characteristics of men in cohabitation, taking Ah Xiao’s husband for example, Chang continues in the essay commenting on those who choose cohabitation over marriage as a better alternative:

The social status of the men who support these kinds of arrangements is roughly middle class or below; they work hard and live thriftily. They can’t afford to let themselves go but aren’t so reserved that they are willing to let themselves sink into boredom, either. They need vibrant, down-to-earth relationships with women, relationships that are just as vibrant and down-to-earth as the other aspects of their lives. They need women to look after their homes and are consequently less preserve in their dealings with them.271

Ah Xiao’s husband is a tailor who lives in his own shop; therefore, the couple rarely has a chance to stay together, and “this made them extremely affectionate towards one another”.272 Their “vibrant, down-to-earth relationship” certainly involves responsibility and humanity, if compared to sophisticated flirtation or whoring to be precise. The man came and visited Ah Xiao and cared about their son, but “he only made enough to cover his own expenses. Sometimes he even asked for her money to pay into his saving club”.273

They seem like a loving family in front of friends, but letters from Ah Xiao’s hometown never mentioned or had any concern for this man and their child. This to some extent indicates that Ah Xiao, “a modern woman in the metropolis” as so called by herself, aspires the recognition from the surroundings in the city over the traditional thoughts from home.

272 Chang, “Steamed Osmanthus Flower Ah Xiao’s Unhappy Autumn,” 78.
273 Ibid., 79.
When Ah Xiao tells her husband about Xiuqin’s marriage and her extravagance at the ceremony and the ring, her man replies with a cagey smile that is very understanding and sympathetic and somehow hurts and angers Ah Xiao. The man immediately understands the undertone of Xiuqin’s marriage story but also clearly shows that he could not and would not offer Ah Xiao corresponding legal marriage or official ceremony. The couple’s conversation on this topic ends with Ah Xiao’s inner thoughts and retrospections on this relationship: “it didn’t make much difference to a man whether he got married or not. At the same time, she also felt bored by this whole affair. Their child was a big boy now, so what use was there thinking about such things?” However, their cohabitation is in a rather stable condition regardless of Ah Xiao’s complaint: Ah Xiao looks after their marital life and takes care of his financial and sexual needs, and she is willing to do so for firstly, their son, and secondly, her strong wish to stay in the city rather than returning back home in the rural area. This is exactly what Chang regards as “a fiery will to live” on women in cohabitation, such as Ah Xiao, who is uncharacteristic of a heroine of a romantic story but characteristic of humans in the real life.

3.3. Pre-modern Chinese Landscape

Unlike Chang’s highlight of struggle for agency and female subjectivity amidst the rapid social changes brought about by modernity and war, Maugham’s stories reinforce a sense of displacement and nostalgia. Similar to Chang’s “Sealed Off” in structure, Maugham’s “Rain” (1922) included in On A Chinese Screen, is also framed around the dream-like

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274 Chang, “Steamed Osmanthus Flower Ah Xiao’s Unhappy Autumn,” 79.
narration about one’s life in London, while beginning and ending with the reality in which the protagonist is trudging through an unknown Chinese countryside. This is one of the very short writings in Maugham’s travel notes, only three pages long. It begins with a second-person narrative voice, which suddenly shifts into a first-person perspective in the middle of the narrative, dragging and guiding readers to the dream-like imagination of one ordinary, random day in London. By juxtaposing the narrator’s substantial experience of a Chinese countryside in the rain with the stream of thoughts about life in London, Maugham creates a striking contrast between the pre-modern Chinese landscape and the modern, civilized Western cultural memory. However, throughout the story, Maugham makes it clear that the narrator of the imagined life is someone who had spent his early ages in China and eventually returned to England, considering himself a so-called Sinologist while discussing traditional Chinese philosophy and so on. Therefore, instead of writing from an imperialist stance, as Maugham is often criticized for, this short story serves as a straightforward critique of the colonial and imperialist mindset.

The beginning and end of “Rain” depict the exhausting experience of walking in the cold rain. There are no specific descriptions of the surroundings, which indicates nothing more than what could be any pre-modern Chinese countryside scene. It begins with:

Yes, but the sun does not shine every day. Sometimes a cold rain beats down on you and a north-east wind chills you to the bone. Your shoes and your coat are wet still from the day before and you have three hours to go before breakfast. You tramp along in the cheerless light of that bitter dawn, with thirty miles before you and nothing to look forward to at the end but the squalid discomfort of a Chinese inn. There you will find bare walls, a clammy floor of trodden earth, and you will dry yourself as best you can over a dish of burning charcoal.275

This seems a sudden intrusion of moments as the narrative voice drags the readers into the common experience of walking in the early dawn of nowhere. It assumes that the addressee was possibly a frugal European tourist or sojourner during his stay in the foreign place, as opposed to the many white male protagonists in Maugham’s other Far East tales who lived a comparable English life in the colony. It also shows no sense of “the exotic” but the desolation and discomfort of the journey in the East.

The tiring tramp leads to the stream of thoughts of the imaginary experience in which the addressee is back in London. This is reminiscent of Chang’s “Steamed Osmanthus Flower: Ah Xiao’s Unhappy Autumn” as well in that Maugham writes about the trivial domestic and social affairs of one random, common day that the protagonist lives, though with a different background in terms of social hierarchy and location. The narrative begins with:

Then you think of your pleasant room in London. The rain driving in squalls against the windows only makes its warmth more grateful. You sit by the fire, your pipe in your mouth, and read The Times from cover to cover, not the leading articles of course but the agony columns and the advertisements of country houses you will never be able to afford.276

The habit of reading updated newspapers can be frequently found in Maugham’s male protagonists, especially in those who live in solitary in the colony and barely have any connections with their European cultural origins. Newspapers, even though no longer so updated when they are finally delivered to the foreign colony, are the fundamental symbol of bonding with the modern world that they aspire to be still involved with. In another story entitled “The Outstation”, Maugham writes with sarcasm on how the snobbish protagonist Warburton enjoys the moments of being reassured as part of the social

community of London when he reads *The Times* that took six weeks to finally reach the foreign colony: “the illustrated papers told him how people looked and on his periodical visits to England, able to take up the treads as though they had never been broken, he knew all about any new person who might have appeared on the social surface.”

In “Rain,” likewise, Maugham lists in redundant detail in brackets the “advertisements of country houses” on the newspapers that the addressee could never be able to afford, which seems an implied criticism of such ritual of reading newspapers is nothing more than a presentation of self-reassured involvement of the London upper-class community. For Maugham’s characters, the modern West symbolizes a lost paradise, while the pre-modern Chinese countryside represents a space of isolation and discomfort. This contrast illustrates the cultural and psychological alienation experienced by colonial subjects. The characters’ yearning for their European cultural origins underscores their inability to integrate into the foreign environment, despite their superficial engagements with it.

It might be confusing when reading this dream-like story as the narrative voice makes no clear indication at first whether this is an imagination about the possible future or the memories of London in the past. I would consider that this is the depiction of the protagonist’s fantasized life in London after his stay in China. The persona, with a seemingly modest tone, turns the topic to the pretentious discussion on Confucius and Zhuangzi, in relation to his comments on other European writers, which hardly convey any meaningful messages other than listing writers’ names one after another. In addition,

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the persona mentions the rest schedule of your day, from reading, having luncheon with amusing people to the Christie’s, and dressing for the dinner party, attending a first night for a play before finally arriving home to your daughter named Elizabeth. The addressee, “you,” is assumed as someone who considers himself an obvious expert of Chinese philosophy, art, and history as Maugham writes: “You see some Ming figures there, but they are not so good as those you brought from China yourself, and then you watch being sold pictures you are only too glad not to possess.” However, this seems ironic in relation to the beginning of the story while the protagonist is possibly someone “from the lower-class whites […] working as sailors with their colourful pasts being vagabonds tramping through China” with nothing particular to look forward to at their meaningless destination. The pre-modern landscape of the foreign land is largely marginalized and described as primary and savage, as opposed to the modern city life in London. Maugham’s use of pre-modern Chinese landscapes as merely a backdrop for European cultural memory contrasts with Chang’s depiction of modern urban settings as spaces of both possibility and constraint. Nevertheless, the emphasis is on an implied criticism of such self-proclaimed Sinologists, who, for the mere stay in the foreign land, boast the exotic experience as someone professional.

Another short sketch entitled “The Plain” (1922) is more evident in making the Chinese landscape the background on which a nostalgic European cultural memory is projected. The scenery of the Chinese countryside in front of the persona serves merely

278 Maugham, “Rain,” On a Chinese Screen, 64.
as something that could generate the memory about his cultural origin and reconfirm his cultural identity. In this short piece of writing, the narrator “marched among the uplands” and came to “the great plain in which lay the ancient city whither [he] was bound.” The narrator reaches the destination in the middle of the story as he comments that

But it was no Chinese landscape that I saw, with its padi fields, its memorial arches and its fantastic temples, with its farmhouses set in a bamboo grove and its wayside inns where under the banyan trees the poor coolies may rest them of their weary loads; it was the valley of Rhine, the broad plain all golden in the sunset, the valley of the Rhine with its river, a silvery streak, running through it, and the distant towers of Worms; it was the great plain upon which my young eyes rested, when a student in Heidelberg, after walking long among the firclad hills above the old city, I came out upon a clearing.281

Then the rest of the story turns to the recollections of the old days in Heidelberg. The narrative can be considered as somewhat autobiographical as Maugham himself did spend some of his student years in Heidelberg at the age of 16, where he “lodge with a professor and his wife who ran a pension for foreign students” since the late Spring of 1890.282 Thus, this makes it quite personal when Maugham writes on his experience in the city where he enjoyed his cakes and coffee, leisure evenings with music and waltzes, as well as beer-garden when the band played.

David Spurr points out the appropriation of colonial discourse in the “writings of European colonial administrators who saw the natural resources of colonized lands as belongs rightfully to ‘civilization’ and ‘mankind’ rather than to the indigenous peoples who inhabited those lands.” 283 In “Plain,” the pre-modern landscape, traditional and

281 Ibid., 116-117.
undeveloped, is set against the idyllic European experience of the countryside and a German city. Spurr continues that “this utopian vision imposes an entire series of European institutions on the natural landscape.” The attachment to the memory of the youth spent in Heidelberg makes him oblivious to his Chinese surroundings. This imposition of European ideals and memories onto the Chinese landscape reflects a broader colonial mindset where the colonized space is seen as a blank canvas ready for the imprints of Western civilization. Maugham’s narrative, while appreciative of the pastoral beauty of the Chinese countryside, ultimately reduces it to a mere backdrop against which European nostalgia and cultural superiority are projected. This perspective undermines the intrinsic value of the local culture, portraying it instead as an incomplete and waiting recipient of Western modernization.

“The Philosopher” (1922) records Maugham’s personal experience when meeting with Gu Hongming, the well-acclaimed British-Malaya-born Chinese scholar, who received his education at the University of Edinburgh. Gu Hongming is depicted as a polymath, fluent in multiple languages and well-versed in both Eastern and Western philosophies. During their conversation, Gu criticizes the Westernization of China and explain his views about the superiority of Chinese civilization and Confucian values, emphasizing the moral and spiritual decline he perceives in the West. This story begins with the depiction of the city in which this scholar lived:

It was surprising to find so vast a city in a spot that seemed to me so remote. From its battlemented gate towards sunset you could see the snowy mountains of Tibet. It was so populous that you could walk at ease only on the walls and it took a rapid walker three

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hours to complete their circuit. There was no railway within a thousand miles and the river on which it stood was so shallow that only junks of light burden could safely navigate it. Five days in a sampan were needed to reach the Upper Yangtze. For an uneasy moment you asked yourself whether trains and steamships were as necessary to the conduct of life as we who use them every day consider; for here a million persons throve, married, begat their kind, and died; here a million persons were busily occupied with commerce, art, and thought.

Unlike earlier extracts, this story shows Maugham’s positivity towards the Chinese landscape as well as its primitive nature and pre-modern life. The reference to railways and steamships reminds the readers of the Industrial Revolution and British imperialism. Often seen as symbols of cultural superiority and Western civilization, these industrial constructions are questioned, given the peaceful pre-modern life that people still live in this far-away small city. Maugham’s depiction of the Chinese landscape reveals a complicated combination of feelings that, on the one hand, the rural, barbaric landscape is the obstruction in resuming the modern, civilized European life, while on the other hand, the pre-modern, undeveloped Chinese countryside is also reminiscent to the pastoral utopian cultural memory before the Industrial Revolution. The pastoral utopian vision of pre-modern landscapes in Maugham’s stories highlights a longing for a simpler, idealized past, contrasting sharply with the reality of colonial exploitation and cultural superiority.

To sum up, this chapter closely examined two of Chang’s short stories set predominantly in the early 1940s, “Sealed Off” and “Steamed Osmanthus Flower Ah Xiao’s Unhappy Autumn,” both depicting the events that occur in one day in the life of a woman. Chang’s unique combination of wartime narrative and mundane domestic affairs,

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along with her artistic preference in staging the story in modern Shanghai with modern elements such as film techniques and trams, altogether presents an alternative modern wartime narrative that is distinctive among her contemporaries. “Sealed off” creates a static period and space during wartime, offering the protagonists a secured shield in which they can resume their true selves in pursuing love as if in a romantic film, regardless of the uncertain surroundings and the restrictions imposed by family and society. “Steamed Osmanthus Flower Ah Xiao’s Unhappy Autumn”, on the other hand, discusses the frequently mentioned topic in Chang’s story – modern marriage. The female protagonist, Ah Xiao, is typically considered an uncharacteristic character in the literature following the May Fourth Movement. As a working-class woman who is heavily influenced by the concept of “modern” in metropolitan Shanghai, Chang explores the ambiguity of this character as she is torn between modern and traditional culture, while at the same time, seeking to acquire a sense of self in the making of a romantic relationship.

This chapter also briefly discussed three pieces of Maugham’s writings collected in On A Chinese Screen, namely “Rain,” “The Plain,” and “The Philosopher.” All three stories begin with the scenic portrayal of the pre-modern Chinese landscape, generating the writer’s nostalgic cultural memory of the modern, civilized European experience. The Chinese landscape mostly serves as meaningless background. Yet, the juxtaposition of pre-modern China and the modern West also makes the writer reconsider the necessity of modern inventions such as railways and steamships, indicating a political undertone that reveals his anti-imperialistic point of view.

Both Eileen Chang and Somerset Maugham explore the interplay of modernity and
tradition, but from different angles. Chang incorporates the modern elements into her wartime narratives, which often revolve around the limitations and paradoxes it imposes on her characters. For instance, while modernity offers new opportunities for personal freedom and social mobility, it also brings about new forms of alienation and instability, as seen in the failed marriages and unfulfilled desires of her female characters. Chang’s female characters parallel Maugham’s depiction of the isolation and static cultural memory of his male characters. Maugham’s use of pre-modern Chinese landscapes as a backdrop for European cultural memory contrasts with Chang’s depiction of modern urban settings as spaces of both possibility and constraint. Both authors, through their unique perspectives, reveal the complexities and contradictions of modern life, highlighting the enduring tensions between the past and the present.
Chapter 4: Domesticating the Other or Himself:

Orientalizing Romance and Colonial Transgression

For years Eileen Chang was mainly known by her short stories published in 1942-44 in Japanese-occupied Shanghai. While her stories sold exceedingly well, little of her literary and personal career was known by the public, especially after she left Mainland China in 1952. It was not until C.T. Hsia’s influential study, *A History of Modern Chinese Fiction*, in the early 60s that Chang was again brought back to the stage. Chang’s stories often feature romances, courtships, or affairs that happened in Shanghai and Hong Kong, which is also the reason that her works are criticised for lack of literary significance. According to Chang herself, she admitted in an article published in 1944 that

> all I really write about are some of the trivial things that between men and women. There is no war and no revolution in my works. […] I like forthright simplicity, but I must portray the rich duplicity and elaborate designs of modern people in order to set them off against the ground of life’s simplicity. This is why my writing is too easily seen by some readers as overtly lush or even decadent.286

Chang’s stories are quite frequently set within a story-telling frame, in which gossip grows from the domestic sphere of everyday life.

Likewise, Somerset Maugham’s stories embody similar characteristics in representing Western expatriates and commissioners in their foreign colonies in the Far East. Maugham focuses on the domestic affairs of his white protagonists and their efforts in romanticizing the Orient. Although his fictional heroes usually are the ones who take professional occupations in the British colony, the stories often revolve around their domestic and

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personal affairs. By and large, the practice of the Empire or its expanded activities in the Far East colony are predominantly masculine, and the colony provides an environment in which a tightly bounded male homosocial society can be established. As Boehmer points out, “the expanding colonies had offered the ‘mother country’ a practice and testing ground for its manhood. […] The forms of relationship and codes of behaviour were overwhelmingly masculine.”

Thus, colonial fiction is usually more preoccupied with “the day’s work’ performed by white men” than occasional romance or love intrigue.

However, Maugham’s colonial stories, featuring considerable amounts of dialogue, devote little space to portraying white men’s professional occupations but abundantly deal with the “colonial gossips” between them and the native women.

As discussed in chapter 2, native women in the colony often endure the double gaze – both masculine and colonial. Further questions arise when examining Eileen Chang’s and Somerset Maugham’s colonial stories. First, does the portrayal of the relationship between the white male colonist and native woman necessarily denote a colonial subjugation and domestication of the native women, and furthermore, the native land? Or, on the contrary, does it signify a degradation of the purity of whiteness? Second, does modern native women enjoying the courtship of white men correspond to her acceptance of the colonial gaze, or even sexual exploitation? Additionally, to what extent can a female character’s challenge against the colonist’s male desire be understood as her resistance against imperialistic subjugation? This chapter aims to answer these questions by analysing


288 Ibid.
Eileen Chang’s “Steamed Osmanthus Flower Ah Xiao’s Unhappy Autumn” and Somerset Maugham’s four short stories entitled “The Outstation” (1926), “The Letter” (1926), “Masterson” (1963), and “The Force of Circumstance” (1926). Chang’s characters frequently embody the ambivalence of mimicry, adopting Western customs and attitudes while retaining their own cultural identity, while Maugham often portrays Western characters who, while trying to impose their cultural norms, often express their own insecurities and the fragility of their authority. Therefore, I am interested in both authors’ representation of such ambivalence, as explained in Homi Bhabha’s notion of colonial mimicry, and how such ambivalence is materialized and further subverted in their works.

The postcolonial theorist Homi Bhabha’s analysis of colonial mimicry calls into question the authority and authenticity of colonialist hegemony in a foreign land. For Bhabha,

> Colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite. Which is to say, that the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an ambivalence; in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference.289

The native people in the colony often imitate and mimic the Western or colonial culture, perceiving the West as embodying a more civilized and modern ethos within the colonial discourse. Through this practice of colonial mimicry, the natives come to realize that the authority of the imperialist hegemony is actually constructed through the repetition of –

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289 “The Outstation”, “The Force of Circumstance”, and “The Letter” were first published together in a collection of short stories *The Casuarina Tree* in 1926 by Heinemann. “Masterson” was published later in his *Collected Short Stories volume four* in 1963, but this story was set also in 1920s, the same with other two mentioned here.

as Bhabha calls it – “partial presence”, which “articulates those disturbances of cultural, racial, and historical difference that menace the narcissistic demand of colonial authority.” Meanwhile, the colonial hegemony, in return, asserts its superiority and maintains its purity through the representation of slippage of difference. Therefore, colonial mimicry calls into question the authority and authenticity of colonial representations in that the colonial and the colonized cultures are in mutually exclusive but interdependent ambivalence, thereby challenging the dominance of colonial discourse.

4.1. The Materialization of Domesticity

Maugham’s short story “The Outstation”, written in 1926, like most of his exotic fiction, investigates how the white male protagonist preserves the authenticity and legitimacy of being English in a Far East colony called Borneo, an island situated southeast of the Malay Peninsula. The story revolves around the conflict between Mr. Warburton, a Resident of Borneo, and Cooper, his new assistant. Warburton takes pride in maintaining British decorum and traditions. On the contrary, Cooper is a self-made man from a lower-class background, who grew up in a colony of the British Empire and has little regard for Warburton’s refined manner. Warburton sees Cooper as uncouth and disrespectful, while Warburton’s snobbishness antagonizes Cooper. As their mutual disdain grows, Cooper’s racist and pugnacious behaviour also incurs the threat to his own life from the natives. With Warburton’s connivance, the strife between this newcomer and the natives eventually ends with the death of Cooper, who was murdered in his sleep by a native boy.

\[291\] Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 86
Before Cooper arrived at this colonial island, Warburton “had been so long the only white man there that he could not face the arrival of another without misgiving.” He is flattered to find himself enjoying this job: “he was no longer the sycophant craving the smiles of the great, he was the master whose word was law.” However, Warburton’s authority collapses upon Cooper’s arrival. Cooper was born in Barbados and “had lived little in England and he had a peculiar dislike of the English.” Cooper introduces himself as “I was what was called a Colonial. I hadn’t been to a public school and I had no influence.”

Cooper’s presence makes Warburton come to realize that his authority over the colony does not come naturally from his race of being white and English, but is rather constructed from the continuous, repetitive display of such whiteness and Englishness.

In one crucial scene where Warburton welcomes Cooper over for a fancy dinner party, Warburton shows an excessive materialization and romanticization of his English identity to his guest, or rather, audience:

He went into his room where his things were neatly laid out as if he had an English valet, undressed, and, walking down the stairs to the bathhouse, sluiced himself with cool water. The only concession he made to the climate was to wear a white dinner-jacket; but otherwise, in a boiled shirt and a high collar, silk socks and patent-leather shoes, he dressed as formally as though he were dining at his club at Pall Mall. A careful host, he went into the dining-room to see that the table was properly laid. It was gay with orchids, and the

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293 Ibid., 62.
294 Ibid., 68.
295 Ibid., 58.
silver shone brightly. The napkins were folded into elaborate shapes. Shaded candles in silver candlesticks shed a soft light. Mr. Warburton smiled his approval and returned to the sitting-room to await his guest. Presently he appeared. Cooper was wearing the khaki shorts, the khaki shirt, and the ragged jacket in which he had landed. Mr. Warburton’s smile of greeting froze on his face.  

Notably in this paragraph is a sense of ambivalence generated from Warburton’s efforts in reproducing an “almost the same, but not quite” English dinner party. His Malay servant is almost an English valet but not quite; the dining-room is almost his club at Pall Mall but not quite; his guest is almost white but not quite. The Malay boy, the compromising white dinner-jacket, and the utmost materialization of domestic decorations are exactly what Homi Bhabha suggests as “authorized versions of otherness”, which are the appropriate objects within “a colonist chain of command.” As Bhabha continues, such demand of mimicry indicates “a desire that, through the repetition of partial presence, which is the basis of mimicry, articulates those disturbances of cultural, racial and historical difference that menace the narcissistic demand of colonial authority”. Under the circumstance, Cooper’s presence causes a complete deviation from Warburton’s maintained English identity.

Warburton’s feast is a performance of “purity” – an efficient display of his racial, cultural, and nationalist differences from the locals. It is through highlighting such differences, to specific, the superiority of being white and English, that Warburton is able to consolidate his authority over the natives. Warburton and Cooper have a conversation about the dinner dress:

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296 Maugham, “The Outstation,” 54.
298 Ibid. 88.
299 Ibid.
‘Hulloa, you’re all dressed up,’ said Cooper. ‘I didn’t know you were going to do that. I very nearly put on a sarong.’

‘It doesn’t matter at all. I daresay your boys were busy.’

‘You needn’t have bothered to dress on my account, you know.’

‘I didn’t. I always dress for dinner.’

‘Even when you’re alone?’

‘Especially when I’m alone,’ replied Mr. Warburton, with a frigid stare.

On the contrary, however, Warburton is never really alone when he dresses up for dinner every single time over the past years. He has dinner alone in a typically English manner, but always with Malay boys serving by his side. It is also these boys who perform all the housework and preparations for a formal dinner. The representation of such Englishness is never completed and could not succeed if not witnessed by the locals.

Likewise, Cooper’s caddishness and “lack of self-respect”, as Warburton suggests, would not really antagonize Warburton if the Malay boys were not serving their dinner.

Warburton remarks on Cooper’s choice of outfit that

when a white man surrenders in the slightest degree to the influences that surround him he very soon loses his self-respect, and when he loses his self-respect you may be quite sure that the natives will soon cease to respect him.300

Warburton’s comment suggests a few points. First of all, from Warburton’s perspective, instead of dressing in formal dinner suits, Cooper’s ragged khaki clothes resembling the locals are considered a degradation of his identity as a white man. Second, as Bhabha points out, “the question of the representation of difference is therefore always also a problem of authority.”301 The representation of identity is constructed through how one dresses, and the elimination of differences in clothing would also diminish the hierarchy between the colonist and the colonized. Last but not least, to the natives, Cooper is of the

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300 Maugham, “The Outstation”, More Far Eastern Tales, 55.
301 Bhabha, The Location of Culture, 89.
same kind as Warburton. However, Cooper’s localized clothing and ruthlessness overtly ridicule Warburton. It completely shatters the illusion of Warburton’s Orientalising efforts in recreating an authentic, civilized British high society in a Far East colony. Therefore, the uneasiness of racial transgression is always present in Warburton’s narration.

In Eileen Chang’s “Steamed Osmanthus Flower Ah Xiao’s Unhappy Autumn”, there is one similar scene where the foreign master Mr. Garter’s bedroom is inspected and described from the perspective of the young Chinese amah Ah Xiao:

By this time the sun had come out a little and shone into the room like a blue haze the shade of cigarette smoke. Colourful silk cushions lay scattered on the bed. There was a wireless and some illustrated magazines on the bed-head. By the bed there was a pair of slippers, a small blue and red Peking rug, a waste-paper basket in the shape of a palace lantern, and a set of carved tables of different sizes neatly stacked one inside the other. Hanging on the wall was a Peking opera mask; on the table, a pair of tin candle-holders. The knick-knacks which filled the room made it look somewhat like the boudoir of a high-class white Russian prostitute who had gathered together some Chinese odds and ends to build herself a nest of peace and happiness. Most exquisite of all were the smoky-purple glasses arranged on top of a small cabinet. They came in various shapes and sizes for different sorts of drinks. There was an orderly row of bottles sealed with large wooden egg-shaped stoppers lacquered red and blue and green. And then in the bathroom there was a whole set of light yellow-grey glass combs, seven or eight in all, arranged according to the fineness of their teeth. The sight of these made one’s heart ache with sadness because the master had already begun to lose his hair. The more he worried about it, the more those precious strands became like eyelashes to him: prone to fall out at the slightest touch.302

This scene happens the morning after Garter’s party with a Chinese woman, Miss Li, who gifted him a set of silver bowls and chopsticks as the birthday present, noting “she knows how much he likes Chinese things so she had them specially made by a jeweller.”303 In contrast to Warburton’s meticulous Anglicization of his space, Garter’s bedroom lacks

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303 Ibid., 69.
nostalgic Englishness but showcases an extravagant collection of items that materialize his
Orientalised romance. The Oriental items, as a colonial exhibition displayed, embody the
metaphorical reference to the women Garter encountered and subjugated in this foreign
land. Garter views his stay in Shanghai as an extended adventure of conquering not only
rationally but also sexually. The presentation of these Chinese decorations reveals Garter’s
paradoxical desire for self-affirmation: on the one hand, a celebration of his dominant
power in sexualizing the Orient; on the other hand, the dependence of the Other, through
conquest and possession, to establish and confirm his Self.

It is also interesting to note that Garter is one of the only two male characters in this
story. The other man is Ah Xiao’s husband, a reticent, dull working-class Chinese man.
The two characters have little direct contact with each other in the story considering their
contrasting social hierarchy and professions. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick brings up the
concept of “male homosocial desire”, which refers to activities as “male bonding” and is
“characterized by intense homophobia, fear and hatred of homosexuality.”304 Japanese
sociologist Ueno Chizuko demonstrates this further that “the mechanism of confirming
the subjectivity/Self of male is to objectify the female. It is through the sexual
objectification of the female body that the intersubjectivity and bonding between men are
achieved. […] Male homosocial desire, established on misogyny, is maintained by the
hatred of homosexuality”.305 The social and racial hierarchy between Garter and Ah Xiao’s

304 Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, _Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire_ (New York: Columbia
University, 2015), 1.
305 Chizuko Ueno, _Onna Girai - Nippon no Misogyny_ 厌女：日本的女性嫌恶 [Hated to Women: Japan’s
Misogyny], (Shanghai: Shanghai Joint Publishing Company, 2015), 20-21. The book was published
husband makes it impossible for these two characters to form any kind of “male bonding”
directly. However, Chang’s story creates the scenario in which these two men are able to
share tacit “male homosocial desire”, though Garter bears the superiority in dramatizing
an imperialist desire of romanticizing the Orient. Moreover, Chang also problematizes
such masculine and colonial desire in claiming the Self and ridicules such desire by
feminizing the male characters from the perspective of Ah Xiao.

To begin with, in the stereotypical discourse of sexual binary, women are divided into
two categories – either virgin or prostitute, for the purpose of either reproduction or
sexual pleasure. For Garter, the most ideal woman would be a combination of both
childlike innocence and mature seduction, able to be captured and domesticated. There is
one scene in which Ah Xiao describes a poster in her master’s chamber featuring an
advertising girl:

> On the wall there was an advertisement for a brand of Western spirits enclosed in a narrow
silver frame. Leaning in the darkness was a naked beauty of astonishing proportions with
red hair and fair skin. The caption read: ‘The best in town’, rating her as highly as this
particular brand of whiskey. She was resting one arm on an invisible piece of furniture for
support and it looked very uncomfortable, stiffly propping up her entire frame. She was a
real Snow Queen, her body like a Popsicle with sinews of ice congealed on its surface. She
tilted herself to highlight her large, turned-up breasts, her exaggeratedly slim waist and her
tapering thighs. Her feet were bare, but she was doing her best to balance on the very tips
of her toes as if standing in high-heels. She had the face of a child, squat and square, and
large brown eyes indicating neither pleasure nor voluptuousness that gazed out blankly at
her viewers beyond the frame.306

The mechanism of the colonial and masculine gaze is to highlight both the mysterious and
dissolute aspect of the female. Within the traditional colonial discourse of power and

originally in Japanese (Tokyo: Kinokuniya Company LTD., 2010). No English translation is found, so I
translated this to English from its Chinese version.

306 Chang, “Steamed Osmanthus Flower Ah Xiao’s Unhappy Autumn,” 70.
occupation, the colonized people are “evolutionable” in that they can be civilized and domesticated under the imperialist education. Ueno Chizuko straightforwardly comments that “Orientalism is masturbation for Western man” when she mentions Pucchini’s musical Madam Butterfly. Moreover, the advertising girl that Ah Xiao describes, is also a combination of both Western and Eastern female features. Her red hair and pale skin, together with her squat face and brown eyes, make her more like a hybrid of both. This poster girl practically embodies Garter’s sexual fantasy comprehensively. In Chang’s story, Garter further projects his sexual fantasy of a romantic conquest in Shanghai from the advertising girl in the poster to the women he encountered in his real life.

Ah Xiao’s narrative also makes it noticeable that Garter hardly has any concern about his sexual power in the colonial land. As the narrative voice observes, “[Ah Xiao] brought out breakfast, and noticed that the photograph of the Blonde had been removed from the small cabinet. Tonight’s guest was presumably the new woman. He was never willing to take away the photograph when Miss Li and her like came to dinner.” Ah Xiao presumes that Miss Li was the concubine of some very rich family but also doubts it because she seemed to enjoy more freedom than those women from good families. Chang later devoted one paragraph solely to describing Garter’s non-extant ideal partner, and as the narrative perspective switches from Ah Xiao’s voice to an omniscient third-person perspective, Garter is overtly ridiculed for his snobbishness and the fallacy of Orientalised sexual fantasy:

This was Mr Garter’s ideal. But he had as yet never met her in the flesh. Had he done so,

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307 Chizuko Ueno, Ouma Gairu - Nippon no Misogyny, 30.
308 Chang, “Steamed Osmanthus Flower Ah Xiao’s Unhappy Autumn,” 65.
he would have only tried to gain some slight advantage by her. If it involved too much trouble, it wouldn't have been worth it. He himself was a mature beauty, and had become more and more economical with time and money as he grew older. Moreover, it was now clear to him that women were all more or less the same. He had always believed in making relationships with women of good families, or with ladies of the *demi-monde* in search of a little romance outside working hours. He didn't expect them to rob the rich for his benefit; all he wanted was an equitable exchange. He knew that 'long-term gamblers had to lose, just as long-time lovers had their blues'. At the gaming table he always checked to see which way the wind was blowing and, if things were favourable, took advantage of situation to make a bit of a profit. But he always knew when to stop.\(^{309}\)

It is intriguing to observe that Garter prefers relationships with “women of good families, or with ladies of the *demi-monde* in search of a little romance.”\(^ {310}\) This preference serves a dual purpose for Garter: first, the logic of “it is she who seduces me at first” relieves Garter’s responsibility from any kind of sexual exploitation he practices; second, relationship with women from the wealthy, respectable families, such as Miss Li, ensures that Garter takes the initiative in starting or ending the relationship at any time, as these women are obedient enough to manipulate. Besides, it is necessary for Garter to maintain relationships with white women as well, such as “the Blonde” mentioned earlier, to affirm his identity as sufficiently white. Similarly, courting native women in Shanghai reinforces his dominant role in such sexual encounters and, of course, saves his money.

The relationship between Garter and Ah Xiao is therefore delicately balanced, as Garter appears to desexualize this young amah. Ah Xiao, being both a wife and a mother, sets her from the female guests that Garter typically entertains in the first place. Second, although Garter is “determined to make women like him, regardless of who they were,” and frankly admits that “in the light of day, this amah was actually extremely pretty and

\(^{309}\) Chang, “Steamed Osmanthus Flower Ah Xiao’s Unhappy Autumn,” 71.

\(^{310}\) Ibid., 66.
quite charming,” he “had never had any intention of getting involved with her.”311 From Garter’s point of view, engaging in an affair with a woman from the serving class is the most unwise thing to do as it “would have given her ideas above her station.”312 In other words, it is correspondingly a degradation of the purity of his racial and cultural identity. What Garter does not explicitly state is that Ah Xiao also fulfils a maternal role in his life, making it nearly impossible to sexualize their relationship. It is noteworthy when Chang writes “[Ah Xiao] suddenly felt a motherly protectiveness towards Garter that was both firm and ferocious” when Ah Xiao comes to her master’s defence as Miss Li complains about him.313 Despite Ah Xiao’s complaints about Garter’s snobbishness and immorality, she surprisingly exhibits tolerance and care towards him, mirroring her treatment of her own son Baishun.

As for Ah Xiao’s husband, this nameless, taciturn man is financially dependent on his wife while still trying to be sexually dominant in their lifeless marriage. Ah Xiao responded to her man’s request for a “favour” and had to meet him in the depth of night in a storm. Broadly speaking, Ah Xiao’s entire life is devoted to three men: working compliantly for the foreign employer during the daytime, responding to her husband’s requests for intercourse occasionally at night, and taking care of her son all by herself at any time. Her surroundings are practically determined and defined by men in terms of both time and space.

However, Chang does not merely depict Ah Xiao as an acquiescent, submissive female

311 Chang, “Steamed Osmanthus Flower Ah Xiao’s Unhappy Autumn,” 90.
312 Ibid.
313 Ibid., 83.
character. For one thing, she stood her husband up that night and returned alone to the master's empty apartment, while her son was taken care of by the amah who worked for the neighbour. She acquires temporary and ephemeral gratification in this vacuum without any men in her life:

Her head and the rest of her body had been drenched by the dark waters. She took off her shoes and socks. The colour in the red flowers embroidered on her white satin shoes had run, bleeding all over the uppers. [...] The unexpected arrival of this insane freedom startled her and made her feel vaguely ill at ease.314

Ah Xiao found herself insulated from her surroundings – the storm outside, the waiting husband, the son who slept over at the neighbour’s, and the foreign master who indulged himself in the endless late-night parties. Yet, the temporary peace she felt at that moment was fragile, as these intrusions could occur at any point. This is reminiscent of what Garter commonly experiences during his stay in Shanghai – a temporary paradise for extravagant sexual pleasure and gratification. “If he wasn’t in Shanghai, he would have been killed off long ago in the foreigners’ own war.”315 For Garter, Shanghai serves as a ramshackle shelter during wartime. However, Ah Xiao was startled by the sudden absence of the males who usually determine all when and what she should do suddenly all disappear, a situation in which seems she loses the anchor of life but is finally in her full charge. In the meantime, she found herself in an “insane” status of complete freedom, unfettered by any forms of oppression.

Chang’s story further ridicules Garter’s romanticizing the Oriental fantasy by feminizing this white male character from the perspective of Ah Xiao, a working-class

315 Ibid., 72.
Chinese woman. Boehmer notes that “it becomes clear how the ranking of cultures relative to a dominant and warlike Europe might have led to the feminization of other peoples.”

By depicting the native men as feminine, male colonists rationalize the colonized as the inferior Other, both racially and culturally, further justifying imperialist invasion of the colony. “It was in the context of such representations that European colonizers advocated hard work as a means of toughening the native male, masculinizing him.” However, in this story, Ah Xiao’s narrative subverts such colonial dynamic between the masculine West and the feminine East. As mentioned earlier that when Ah Xiao inspects Garter’s chamber, she comments that “it [looks] somewhat like the boudoir of a high-class white Russian prostitute who had gathered together some Chinese odds and ends to build herself a nest of peace and happiness.”

The collected items, such as colourful silk cushions and exquisite smoky-purple glasses, add evident feminine touches to the chamber. The slippers and Peking rug, together with a palace lantern-shaped waste-paper basket, also create an atmosphere in which Garter resembles the obedient Manchu woman in Somerset Maugham’s The Painted Veil. In addition, the metaphorical comparison between Garter and the white Russian prostitute is noteworthy. It seems that Garter builds this nest and, quite contrary to his dominant role in courtship, becomes the one who lives on sexual relationships with different guests and customers. Garter’s heroic, romantic adventure in the foreign land is reduced to a cheap display of his sexual and colonial desire.

Ah Xiao continues to comment on the advertising girl from the poster:

317 Ibid., 82 – 83.
318 Chang, “Steamed Osmanthus Flower Ah Xiao’s Unhappy Autumn,” 69.
[her] large brown eyes indicating neither pleasure nor voluptuousness that gazed out blankly at her viewers beyond the frame. She was like a small child being photographed in new clothes. There wasn’t even a trace of pride in her look. She wore her trim suit of armour – her magnificent breasts her things her bouffant hair – like a fashion model parading a store’s garments for the customers to admire.319

The female body parts that generate Garter’s masturbatory fantasy are somehow de-sexualized as mere garments, which can be taken on and off at her will. Ah Xiao offers an entirely female perspective, or say, feminine gaze while looking at the female body that is usually inspected by the male. The analogy of female body parts as “trim suit of armour” also implies that the sexualized body is a burden that is installed onto the female. Ueno Chizuko explains prostitution as a means of men buying the signified, with the female body as the signifier. It is precisely because men projected their sexual desire onto the signified that prostitution is thus one form of masturbation.320 On the one hand, heterosexual men degrade women as sexual reproductive organs; on the other hand, they have to be dependent on the female body to satisfy their sexual desire.321 Therefore, it is not surprising that Ah Xiao considers “there was nothing obscene about the photo-like painting on the wall.”322 Ah Xiao’s narrative not only “unmanned” her foreign master, but also de-sexualized the female body, and ultimately exposes the fallacy of Garter’s Orientalised fantasy.

4.2. Orientalizing Romance and Colonial Transgression

As mentioned earlier, among Maugham’s colonial works of fiction, many stories share a

319 Chang, “Steamed Osmanthus Flower Ah Xiao’s Unhappy Autumn,” 70.
320 Chizuko Ueno, Onna Girai - Nippon no Misogyny, 192.
321 Ibid., 186.
322 Chang, “Steamed Osmanthus Flower Ah Xiao’s Unhappy Autumn,” 71.
similar narrative structure – the white male protagonist / expatriate lives in solitude in the Far East or South Seas colony, having affairs with the native women while still trying to have a relationship with white women of his own kind; and the story generates from such domestic affairs alike and often leads to the dramatic and pathetic failure of his Oriental romance. “The Force of Circumstance” (1926), “Masterson” (1963), and “The Letter” (1926) are three of the most representative among all, in which the narrative structure, the depiction of characters, and the ending are almost the same with each other. These stories showcase Maugham’s relentless satire of his white male characters, demonstrating that their concubinage with the natives typically ends pathetically in desolation.

To introduce the plot respectively in brief, “The Force of Circumstance” centred on Doris, a young English woman who married Guy, a British colonial officer in Malaya, who was born in Sembulu and his father had also served for decades under the second Sultan. Doris moved to Sembulu in Indonesia from England with her newlywed husband, where she initially looked forward to a new life together in the colony. However, it was not until she had lived there that she discovered in despair that Guy had been with a native woman for ten years and had three children. This woman still lived nearby and was supported by Guy. Despite the fact that Guy explained that his past relationship with the native woman was a result of loneliness and difficult circumstances instead of love, Doris feels betrayed and eventually decided to leave him and return to England. “Masterson” is narrated from the first-person perspective and records the narrator’s meeting with a man named Masterson in Thazi in Burma, now Myanmar. The two had conversations with each other and it reveals that Masterson had been together with a Burmese girl since she was very
young. They had three kids (though one died only six weeks old) and lived like a real family until she requests to marry him formally, in an English way. “The Letter” begins with a criminal case in Singapore in which Leslie Crosbie shot a friend of her family, Geoff Hammond, at her home. Initially supported by her husband, Robert, and their lawyer, Mr. Joyce, Leslie claimed that it was merely an act of self-defence as Geoff Hammond was trying to assault her when her husband was away. However, the plot had a twist when people realized the existence of a letter, which was written by Leslie on the day of the shooting, inviting Geoff to come to her place. This letter suggested that the relationship between Leslie and Geoff was much more complicated than she had explained. To Leslie’s despair, she came to realize that the vital evidence of her crime – the letter – was now in the hands of Geoff’s Chinese mistress, who demands a substantial amount of money in exchange for it.

It is evident that all three stories feature the conflicts caused by the relationships between a white male character and native women. Hsiu-Chuang Deppman criticizes Maugham’s Eurocentric perspective in his writings that his work “seeks to solidify, in particular, the image of a feminine, submissive, and silent East.” Deppman points out that Maugham’s works, abundant with speechless native women, lack the speech of the Other, “whose presence is made invisible and voice inaudible.” Indeed, Maugham does not show much mercy or empathy towards these native women, who are exploited by the British male protagonists in the colony. However, it is also important to point out that

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324 Ibid.
Maugham also relentlessly satirizes these male characters, showing that their concubinage with the native usually ends pathetically with desolation once again. Nevertheless, the narrators within the framing narratives somehow collude and collaborate with the male protagonists so that everything is acceptable and remains as a temporary gossip with socially sanctioned acquiescence.

To start with, it is necessary to examine the role of white women in the British overseas colony. In “The Force of Circumstance,” Doris was shocked to find out that her husband Guy had been cohabiting with a Malay woman and she was basically deceived into this marriage. When confronted by his wife, Guy explained as such:

‘Didn't she know that you were married till you suddenly turned up here with a wife?’ asked Doris.
‘She knew I was going to be married.’
‘When?’
‘I sent her back to the village before I left here. I told her it was all over. I gave her what I'd promised. She always knew it was only a temporary arrangement. I was fed up with it.
I told her I was going to marry a white woman.’
‘But you hadn’t even seen me then.’

Guy does not marry Doris but essentially marries a white woman, and it does not really matter who that woman exactly is. Ann Laura Stoler points out that European women in the colony play an essential part in racial vigilance because “[a] man remains a man as long as he stays under the gaze of a woman of his own race.” In addition, as Philip Holden states, “memsahibs in Malaya thus served an important symbolic […] function in the tightening of the boundaries of the European community.” The purpose of Doris’s

presence in the colony is to restore Guy’s deviation from his interracial sexual practice, which threatens the unity and purity of the British community, even though “in the early years of colonial administration in Malaya […] concubinage was widely practiced.”

Conflicts between wives and husbands are transformed into hostility between memsahibs and native concubines, and males often become invisible during the process. Doris sometimes addresses Guy as “my boy” and herself as “mother.” The maternal role also makes her both an enforcer and an excuse for the interracial connection. At the end of the story, Doris decided to leave Guy and what she could not stand is in physical – “I think of those thin black arms of hers round you and it fills me with physical nausea.”

This remarks Doris’s surprising tolerance to Guy while she bears racist rancour towards the native women, which ultimately excuses Guy for his extravagant desire.

Maugham’s short story “Masterson”, echoing Mr. Garter in Chang’s story mentioned above, likewise represents a white man who looks for only “a little romance outside working hours” in the colony. The story opens within a framing narrative in which the protagonist, Masterson, and the first-person perspective narrator have a conversation over Masterson’s affair with a native Burmese woman. It is a typical storytelling structure in Maugham’s writing – “one man listens while the other gives an account of a transgression against colonial discipline which he has witnessed, and which centres upon a woman.”

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The narrator, on the one hand, intends to detach himself from the story that Masterson tells and remains a committed recorder; on the other hand, he also colludes with the storyteller within the patriarchy and colonial system, agreeing with the sexual and racial exploitation of the native women.

Like Garter, Masterson finds himself a native girl at her very young age, who practically plays the role of a combination of both Ah Xiao and Miss Li:

‘She was a damned good housekeeper, my girl; I used to feel like a fighting-cock when she was here. She’d have had the cook out of the house in a quarter of an hour if he’d sent in muck like this.

[…] ‘Did you have a row?’

‘No. You could hardly call it a row. She lived with me five years and we never had a tiff even. She was the best-tempered little thing that ever was. Nothing seemed to put her out. She was always as merry as a cricket. You couldn’t look at her without her lips breaking into a smile. She was always happy. And there was no reason why she shouldn’t be. I was very good to her.’

Masterson considers that he had been treating this Burmese girl very well particularly because he “treated her in every way as [his] wife and put her in charge of the house.”

However, the conflict arises when the Burmese woman asked to marry him officially after years of their “family life.” Masterson rejected the proposal and regarded it as merely a fuss. The reasons for his refusal are, first, he does not want to stay in Burma for the rest of his life, and ultimately, one day, he would be marrying a white woman, exactly like Guy in “The Force of Circumstance” claims; and secondly, Masterson reproaches the Burmese woman for being rapacious to be with him in the first place, while not being rapacious enough in that she would rather give up everything and take the children back to her home than continuing the “unofficial” marital life.

333 Ibid., 254.
In addition, this female character also subverts the collective image of silent passive women concluded by Deppman when she criticizes Maugham’s stories. Although Maugham presents the image of this Burmese girl within the dialogues between the male narrator and Masterson – noting that this narrator is practically on Masterson’s side as he records Masterson’s version of the story – making the narration dubious to some extent. The Burmese girl, for one thing, is not silent at all, differing from the stereotypical image of voiceless female natives in colonial stories. She clearly states what she wants and thinks to Masterson multiple times. Her voice is always present in the narration even if not recounted by the narrator directly. For another, she is resolute and uncompromising, much more than Masterson himself is. Even when Masterson reaches her again and again, asking that “if she wanted to come [he’d] take her”, she firmly refused. This probably also accounts for Masterson’s refusal to marry her in the sense that she is in fact no longer what Masterson considers obedient and docile.

Therefore, Masterson was pretty certain that marriage is no more than a random thought of his children’s mother in that as long as he pays enough money, he acquires what he wants. The materialization of goods can naturally be applied to that woman under the circumstance. At the beginning of the story, when the narrator is invited into Masterson’s house, the narrative focus is on the goods displayed in Masterson’s room:

He had some lovely things. He showed them to me with pride, telling me how he had got this object and that, and how he had heard of another and hunted it down and the incredible astuteness he had employed to induce an unwilling owner to part with it. If comparing this with later what Masterson remarks on his Burmese mistress, these two

335 Ibid., 250.
parts are remarkably similar: “I didn’t think she’d give up a house like this, and the presents I made her, and all the pickings, to go back to her own family. They were as poor as church mice.”336 For libertines like Masterson and Garter, Oriental romance is always welcome, as long as it is just sufficient enough to highlight their Self, but it could never turn from domestic affairs into anything official. Official marriage, or even acknowledging there is actual love within the relationship, is the colonial transgression that threatens the pure cultural and colonial status of these European men.

The same logic is underlined in Maugham’s short story “The Letter.” If “The Force of Circumstance” exemplifies the conflicts within the white community being simplified but escalated into racial alterity, then “The Letter” shows how a racial group outside the white community, the Chinese, causes trouble and threatens racial hierarchy between the natives and the British colonist in Malaya. If the protagonist of “Masterson” intends to seek sympathy from his interlocutor for having a failed relationship with the native woman, “The Letter” directly represents how destructive the entanglement with the local women is within the English community.

As Holden notes, the Chinese presence in British Malaya is often considered a racial transgression.

the British encouraged Chinese immigration and commercial involvement, yet they did not encourage integration of the Malay and Chinese communities. The Prosperity of traditional Malay rulers fitted into British constructions of Malay society; that of Chinese merchants did not.337

In “The Letter,” the Chinese community is involved throughout the entire crime and

domestic affair, but somehow remains partly an outsider as well. The British colonists fail to integrate the Chinese group with the natives on the Peninsula. “The Letter” begins with a scene in which the chaotic East/Other and orderly West/Self are paralleled as contrast with each other:

Singapore is the meeting-place of a hundred peoples; and men of all colours, black Tamils, yellow Chinks, brown Malayas, Armenians, Jews and Bengalis, called to one another in raucous tones. But inside the office of Messrs Ripley, Joyce and Naylor it was pleasantly cool; it was dark after the dusty glitter of the street and agreeably quite after its unceasing din.  

The striking hierarchy of race is implied straightforwardly through the representation of the busy quay of a random day. Right after this scene comes a Chinese man – Ong Chi Seng, a clerk who works for Mr. Joyce. He introduced the client Robert Crosbie, who was a rubber-planter at the colony, and that his wife Leslie was involved in a murder crime. Then Mr. Joyce had an inspection of these two men who were right in front of him:

A Chinese clerk, very neat in his white ducks, opened [the door]. He spoke beautiful English, accenting each word with precision, and Mr. Joyce had often wondered at the extent of his vocabulary. Ong Chi Seng was a Cantonese, and he had studied law at Gray’s Inn. He was spending a year or two with Messrs Ripley, Joyce and Naylor in order to prepare himself for practice on his own account. He was industrious, obliging, and of exemplary character.

Mr. Joyce noticed now the old felt hat, with its broad double brim, which Crosbie had placed on the table; and then his eyes travelled to the khaki shorts he wore, showing his red hairy thighs, the tennis shirt open at the neck, without a tie, and the dirty khaki jacket with the ends of the sleeves turned up.

As Holden observed, there is a subtle triangle established between these three men that “Chi Seng’s discreetly extravagant mime of British couture suggests a potential appropriation of constructions of manliness based upon observation and somatic

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339 Ibid., 1-2.
340 Ibid., 3.
repression.” The distinction between the chaotic East and orderly West is intruded upon and disturbed by this Chinese clerk, whose clothing, manners, and educational background are considered as “cultural transvestism” and transgression by Mr. Joyce, especially when compared with Mr. Crosbie. This also reminds the readers of the tension between Warburton and Cooper in Maugham’s “The Outstation.” Chi Seng’s outfit that is “dressed in the height of local fashion,” and contrasted by Mr. Crosbie’s localized clothing, proves that his European impersonation is so successful that it surpasses the real European man. This also gives Mr. Joyce a sense of ambivalence as he loses the superiority to categorize Chi Seng as a random “yellow Chink,” while also being reluctant to call Mr. Crosbie a racial companion.

The plot develops with Mrs. Crosbie (Leslie) being charged with murdering Geoff Hammond, who had been in a relationship with a Chinese woman for decades but had also been involved in the extramarital affair with Leslie. Leslie denied the charge but later realized that the vital evidence, which was a letter she wrote to Hammond, was in the hand of that Chinese mistress. Ong Chi Seng played the role of conducting the negotiation for the purchase of the letter between the Crosbies and the Chinese woman. There are two main occasions in which Mr. Joyce is able to meet these two women respectively, namely Leslie and the nameless Chinese mistress. The narrative focus is predominantly written from Mr. Joyce’s perspective and presents another parallel comparison between these two

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342 Ibid., 213.
female characters.

Leslie Crosbie’s poise is continuously questioned throughout her encounter with Mr. Joyce. There is a clear sense of performance in her seemingly collected self-control. Mr. Joyce comments during their meeting that

She was quiet, pleasant, unassuming woman. Her manner was engaging, and if she was not very popular it was because she suffered from certain shyness. 

Though she was not pretty there was something agreeable in her appearance. She had elegance, but it was the elegance of good breeding in which there was nothing of the artifice of society. You had only to look at her to know what sort of people she had and what kind of surroundings she had lived in. [...] It was a pleasure to hear her speak, her voice and her accent were so distinctive of her class.

It is notable that Mr. Joyce's compliment on Leslie is largely racial and culturally related, which is a common ground for both of them. In other words, Mr. Joyce does not praise Leslie as a person; but presents the approval of their shared racial and cultural breeding.

In addition, this scene happens before Mr. Joyce discovered that Leslie was having an extramarital affair with Hammond. According to Ueno Chizuko, man’s Selfness is established by making woman the Other, and the possession of (at least one) woman is a prerequisite for man to acquire such subjectivity. For Mr. Joyce, Leslie is in such an assuring “official possession” of his client, Mr. Crosbie.

However, when confronted with the possible existence of the letter as proof of her affair with Hammond, Leslie oscillates from well-performed equanimity to “hidden possibilities of savagery [...] in the most respectable of women”. The discrepancy

345 Ibid., 18-19.
reaches its climax at the end of the story when Leslie realized that her husband had seen the letter at the party thrown especially for her acquittal. Her deportment switched from “cruelty, and rage and pain” right to composed when she realized that Mrs. Joyce was about to intrude. \(^{348}\) This startled Mr. Joyce as he observed Leslie’s performance of the masquerade. Leslie’s hysterical confession is put in strong contrast with the nameless Chinese woman while Mr. Joyce also being the witness.

Compared with Leslie, the narration does not depict the Chinese woman in much detail. There is only one glance at her during the purchase of the evidence letter:

She was a stoutish person, not very young, with a broad, phlegmatic face, she was powdered and rouged and her eyebrows were a thin black line, but she gave you the impression of a woman of character. She wore a pale blue jacket and a white skirt, her costume was not quite European nor quite Chinese, but her feet were little Chinese silk slippers. She wore heavy gold chains round her neck, gold bangles on her waists, gold earrings and elaborate gold pins in her black hair. \(^{349}\)

As Mr. Joyce remarks, this Chinese woman is “a woman sure of herself, but with certain heaviness of tread.” \(^{350}\) Mr. Joyce failed to identify her as “yellow Chink” from her outfits, neither European nor Chinese, the same problem also caused earlier by Chi Seng. She arrived last and entered the meeting chamber as an unveiled mystery; and stayed while everyone left, “sitting quietly on the bed smoking a cigarette.” \(^{351}\) Her undemonstrative poise, together with such mysterious background, represents a troubling mime to the Europeans. Moreover, this Chinese mistress is also represented to the readers through Leslie’s later description: “I saw her with my own eyes, walking in the village, with her gold

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\(^{348}\) Maugham, “The Letter”, in More Far Eastern Tales, 41.
\(^{349}\) Ibid., 35–36.
\(^{350}\) Ibid., 36.
\(^{351}\) Ibid., 37.
bracelets and her necklaces, and old, fat, Chinese woman. She was older than I was. Horrible!

The dramatization of contrast escalates as Leslie continues that “when I passed her, she looked at me and I knew that she knew I was his mistress too.” Leslie purported to be mad at Geoff Hammond for ending their relationship, yet the narration here completely betrays Leslie and exposes that she was more intolerable to the fact that a native woman won his heart, and that Leslie’s repression and self-control are nothing more than deliberate performance.

In these three short stories by Maugham, the protagonists in “The Force of Circumstance” and “Masterson” reach the same conclusion on the relationship between the white man and native woman:

But she was never in love with me any more than I was in love with her. Native women never do really care for white men, you know.

‘I think, perhaps, if I thought she loved me I would [marry her]. But of course, she doesn’t; they never do, these girls who go and live with white men. I think she liked me, but that’s all.’

In contrast, Hammond in “The Letter” confessed a different attachment to his Chinese mistress, but his life ultimately ended with death. When confronted by Leslie, Hammond admitted that “he’d known [the Chinese woman] for years, before the war, and she was the only woman who really meant anything to him, and the rest was just pastime.” It is the exact remarks that enraged Leslie and led to her fatal gunshot. In addition, Hammond’s overt affairs with his Chinese mistress are also regarded as a local scandal even

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353 Ibid.
354 Maugham, “The Force of Circumstance”, Far Eastern Tales, 266.
The fact, which was discovered after his death, that he had been living with a Chinese woman gave us something very definite to go upon. That robbed him of any sympathy which might have been felt for him. We made up our minds to make use of the odium which such a connection cast upon him in the minds of all respectable people.

Bearing this in mind, if we look back at what Guy and Masterson state, it becomes clear that it is not the native women who do not “love enough,” but the white men’s avoidance to be “officially bound” with the natives. Colonial transgression is only allowed if it could be a display of European masculinity.

It is notable in Maugham’s colonial fiction that the natives rarely have any voice or ability to represent their own perspectives. In most of his Oriental stories, and especially in these four stories discussed, the native women are mostly nameless and speechless. Although the plot develops centred around their relationship with the European white male, such as in “Masterson” and “The Letter,” the native women are usually either represented by an English-speaking witness or articulated by men. In addition, they play the role as secondary characters solely to create conflicts and tensions within the British community in the colony, adding a somewhat exotic atmosphere to the story. The smoothness of the plot development, together with the blankness of these Oriental secondary characters, indicates Maugham’s lack of consciousness in writing something more than just ridiculing colonial masculinity.

In traditional Chinese terms, the role of woman in the Confucian family is commonly associated with and defined as mother, daughter, and wife, which are all tightly bounded

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to her relationship with men. In “Steamed Osmanthus Flower Ah Xiao’s Unhappy Autumn,” Ah Xiao is such a character who endures the repression within the colonial and patriarchal system. In Chang’s stories, female protagonists rarely experience fulfilled love within marriage. Chang’s comparatively neutral writing perspective offers her female protagonists more freedom in setting aside social and racial norms; while also rejecting the possibility that their identity would be determined within the economy of marriage.

Chang’s subversion of the oppositional cultural, racial, and sexual politics of Self and Other, by positioning an articulated female gaze onto the white man, calls into question the imperialist superiority and purity and exposes the fallacy of colonial authenticity. While Maugham’s white male protagonists aspire to solidify the boundary between Self and Other, they are faced with the dilemma that with the Other’s absence, the identity of the Self is merely artificiality. The materialized nature of romanticized Englishness and Orientalised fantasy is disclosed as the enslaved desire of the natives.
Conclusion

This dissertation looked at several of Eileen Chang’s and Somerset Maugham’s short stories, novellas, and essays produced predominantly during the 1920s to 1940s. As the first English author who wrote about China and one of “perhaps the most widely read colonial writer of the Malayan Peninsula” along with Conrad, Maugham arrived in China in the autumn of 1919, a period marked by radical cultural and political transformation after the May Forth Movement earlier that year and the declaration of the Republic of China in 1912. Maugham not only wrote about his own experience in the travelogue but also turned them into the fictional background of his later production of short stories and novels. As for Chang, her most popular works were mostly published during a four-year period from 1941 to 1945 in the Japanese-occupied city of Shanghai. War and colonial matters became the background of her anti-romantic stories, which provided an alternative to the colonial and wartime literature.

This comparative research on Eileen Chang and Somerset Maugham began with both author’s mutual interests in representing “colonial matters” based on their personal experiences in the 1920s and 1940s. Both are considered popular authors nowadays; Chang was also an avid reader of Maugham when she started writing. There are frequent references to Maugham’s characters and his writing styles in Chang’s own essays and short stories. She also criticised writing techniques that could also apply to Maugham’s Oriental

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stories. Although Maugham’s stories set in China and Southeast Asia were published twenty years before Chang’s professional writing career started, these two authors shared a lot in common in terms of their writing subjects, the critique of British colonialism and imperialism (although Chang was not as explicit as Maugham was, while Maugham also purported to be apolitical in his literary production), and their shared preference for writing about romantic affairs in the colony.

Research on Eileen Chang and Somerset Maugham has explored their approaches to colonial and wartime narratives respectively, shedding light on subjects such as feminism, post-colonialism, and Orientalism in Southeast Asian studies. However, there is still an absence of a comprehensively comparative reading of these two authors’ colonial encounters between the East and the West and the constructed image of Britishness and whiteness in this context, considering the direct connection between the two and the similar narrative subjects in both authors’ writings.

The first chapter of this dissertation, “Re-imaging the Exotic: Demonized Fantasy and Romantic Exaggeration,” demonstrated how the substantial Oriental world in Maugham’s Chinese-based novel, The Painted Veil (1925), and selected short stories from his collection of travel writings, On A Chinese Screen (1922), render the paradoxical re-imagination of “monstrous beauty” that is often perpetuated in conventional colonial writings. Maugham presents his protagonists’ arrival scene into the unknown Oriental world with delicacy that their Eurocentric, biased imagination of the exotic, jumbling their first impression of the unfamiliar reality, altogether generate a demonized horror fantasy. On A Chinese Screen is produced based on Maugham’s personal travel experience in China.
and shows abundant counterparts that can be found in his later production of the novel *The Painted Veil*. Therefore, the examination of these two books together provides a clearer picture of how Maugham transformed these “raw materials” of the topic from his trips into a fictional work about the East.

Dreams also play an important role in Maugham’s colonial stories as a tangible and elusive form of fantasy that reveals the nostalgic connection to their domestic European origin. However, rather than a sentimental bond to their native homeland, such nostalgia seems to be driven by their discomfort with the Oriental world. The male protagonists in Maugham’s stories often experience the dilemma that they depart from their homeland and cultures for so long that they can no longer belong there, while at the same time, emphasizing the inseparable connection to their cultural origin that provides them with cultural and colonial superiority in the colony.

Maugham’s colonial stories also present the journey into the Orient as a potential safari into a primitive world, which is regarded as a place waiting to be explored and domesticated. The notion of “romantic exaggeration” that I invoked in this chapter means a way of seeing the East whereby objects are collected and considered as taken-for-granted representative symbols of the East. This way of seeing the East indicates a narcissist Orientalist mindset in that beauty can only be appreciated if the landscape is reminiscent of their homeland so that the ideal European civilization and ideology can project itself upon the colony.

The second chapter “Localized Colonial Gaze and Foreign-eyes Perspective” continues with Maugham’s two books but juxtaposes them with Eileen Chang’s essays and
two Hong Kong short stories, “Aloeswood Incense: The First Brazier” (1943) and “Love in a Fallen City” (1943). Inspired by Chang’s essay “Peking Opera Through Foreign Eyes” (1943), in which she suggests seeing China with localized foreign eyes, an altered colonial gaze, would maintain a comfortable and proper distance from reality and be able to examine it with more rationality. In comparison with Chang’s writings, Maugham’s depiction of the East also reveals a unique perspective in observing and representing his foreign objects. The obvious limitation of Maugham’s set travel agenda and his lack of understanding of the local culture and language also inevitably create a distance from his writing subjects. I proposed in this chapter that the “foreign eyes” perspective is a constant alarmed undertone in both authors’ representation of the colonial experience.

As shown in On A Chinese Screen, Maugham reached a wide range of the local and diverse occupations ranging from government officials, and prominent intellectuals, to working-class people like coolies and boatmen. However, his depiction of the locals remains homogenous and shallow in that the representation of the natives is dependent largely on his white protagonists who serve as the essential intermediary. This recalls what Chang wrote in her essay “What Are We to Write?” which can also be seen as a direct comment on Maugham’s colonial stories, as he failed to reveal much about the psychology of the characters in the colony, and these characters do not have much further development in the narration. Other than that, Maugham was also much more straightforward than Chang in criticizing British colonialism in China. He satirized the white colonist’s ambivalent performance in displaying the European civilization as well as their ruthlessness. Maugham also frequently expressed his critical thoughts about Western
travellers and conventional colonial stories, as well as travel writing. His narrative intended to invalidate the pleasure generated from the traditional colonial gaze and offered a more compassionate portrayal of the natives especially in *On A Chinese Screen*.

Unlike Maugham, Chang is more at ease in writing about the colonial minds in China providing her cross-cultural educational background and personal experience in Japanese-occupied Shanghai and British-colonized Hong Kong. The stance of her observation of the writing subject, what she terms the “foreign eyes” perspective, is not in agreement with the colonist or Orientalist standpoint. Instead, it is a deliberately detached point of view that enables her to re-examine the trivial and common colonial reality, which is often marginalized in conventional colonial writings such as Maugham’s. In addition, contradictory to the wartime literature in the 1940s in Shanghai that centered on literary topics such as revolution and national salvation, Chang avoids such nativist narratives or anti-imperialist critique in her stories. Chang’s narratives depict the romantic experiences of individuals’, especially women, while the war and the colonial background in general serve as components of the urban sensibilities.

Both Chang and Maugham write about the ambivalent characteristics of humanity. However, what makes Chang’s short stories distinctive is that she switches the stance of the colonial gaze, and further reveals how the “exotic” in conventional colonial narrative tradition is fabricated sites deliberately waiting to be collected and observed by the colonists. Not only does she point out the materialized nature of the Oriental exhibition, but she also makes it noticeable that the native narrator could easily mimic this colonial gazing perspective. In “Aloeswood Incense: The First Brazier” and “Love in a Fallen City,”
Chang makes it clear that there could be a self-reflective, conscious subjectivity behind the colonial masquerade and the performance of femininity. Native women from the colony usually have to endure both male and colonial gazes.

Therefore, if Maugham’s stories expose the absurd and hypocritical masquerade that the white characters perform in order to consolidate their authority and cultural identity, and further generate compassion from his readers rather than the pleasure of the colonial gaze, then Chang’s writings about the colonial minds give more voice to her female characters who adopt a “foreign eyes” perspective. Under such double gazes, both male and colonialist, the forced masquerade of femininity and the exotic could also become involuntarily performance to cater to the male’s and colonist’s taste.

The third chapter “In Pursuit of the Modern: Cohabitation and Desolation in the (Semi-)colonial Land” concentrates on the notion of the “modern” (modeng 摩登) as expressed in Chang’s short stories “Sealed Off” (1943), “Steamed Osmanthus Flower Ah Xiao’s Unhappy Autumn” (1944), and Somerset Maugham’s three short stories “Nightfall” (1922), “Plain” (1922) and “Democracy” (1922). This chapter demonstrated how Chang presents her short stories within a background of “modern domesticity”. The daily mundane domesticity and love affairs are set in a contrasting modern metropolis – the Japanese-occupied Shanghai, with the Foreign Concessions controlled by other European countries in different districts. Chang’s personal preference for the modern elements constructs an integral stage for her characters. The female characters, such as Wu Cuiyuan and Ah Xiao in these two stories, explore the possibility of romance and acquire subjectivity in relationships in this specific time and space. The metaphorical employment
of tram, film, and telephone, creates a static space that is free from daily repetitive work and the moral judgement oppressing women.

Unlike other female characters of the era after the May Fourth Movement, Ah Xiao is distinctive in that she is not a victim of the traditional relation between mothers and daughters-in-laws, nor is she a revolutionary heroine fighting for the country’s future, an ideal mother, or wife, or virgin female character at all. As an “incomplete” character, Ah Xiao has a somewhat paradoxical mindset. Chang provides this character with a conscious initiative that she is rebellious in not having a traditional marriage. She has a husband she chose for herself, and their union was not blessed by the parents. Without official registration of marriage, their cohabitation with a child also made her choices radical at the time.

This chapter also explored the juxtaposition of the modern West and pre-modern China in Maugham’s short stories – the colonial appropriation of the Oriental landscape as a pastoral paradise that the Western civilization and nostalgia could project onto. For Maugham’s male characters, constant references to the pre-modern countryside in the colony serve as a substitute of their homeland, leading to a state of isolation, static in their cultural memory and away from the colonial reality. Chang and Maugham both delve into the tension between modernity and tradition within the colonial context, albeit from different perspectives. While modern lifestyle and mindsets introduce new forms of uncertainty and alienation, Chang’s female characters seize opportunities for psychological independence and assert their subjectivity in romantic relationship. These characters mirror Maugham’s portrayal of the isolation and static cultural memory experienced by his
male characters. Through their distinct approaches, both authors illuminate the complexities and contradictions of modern life, emphasizing the persistent tensions between modernity and tradition.

The fourth and last chapter of this dissertation, “Domesticating the Other or Himself: Orientalizing Romance and Colonial Transgression”, compares Chang’s “Steamed Osmanthus Flower Ah Xiao’s Unhappy Autumn” (1944), and Somerset Maugham’s “The Outstation” (1926), “The Letter” (1926), “Masterson” (1963), and “The Force of Circumstance” (1926). Starting from Homi Bhabha’s notion of colonial mimicry and Luce Irigaray’s borrowing of this term in feminist studies, this chapter mainly discussed how ambivalence is materialized and further subverted in the works of these two authors.

Maugham’s “The Outstation” presents a performance of “purity” at Warburton’s English dinner party. This is an efficient display of his cultural, racial, and nationalist difference from the natives in the colony. It is through highlighting the differences that he could prove his superiority of being white and English, and that Warburton is able to consolidate his authority among the locals. Therefore, Cooper’s cultural origin, localized clothing, together with his ruthless manner and educational background that does not belong to the gentry, completely shatters the illusion of an authentic English civilization that Warburton aimed to reproduce in a Far East colony.

Unlike the concentration on the modern cultural and political background in Shanghai discussed in the last chapter, this chapter chiefly focused on the white male character Mr. Garter in “Steamed Osmanthus Flower Ah Xiao’s Unhappy Autumn”. Mr. Garter’s chamber, as inspected by his amah Ah Xiao, was compared with Maugham’s depiction of
Warburton’s dining hall in “The Outstation”. The extravagant collection of Oriental items shows Garter’s materialization of his Orientalised romance with native women. These objects are self-affirmation of his desire – first, a celebration of his dominant power in sexualizing the East; and second, a confirmation of his Self, which is established through conquest and possession of the Other.

Chang also emasculated the white male character, Mr. Garter, and desexualized the female body in general from the perspective of Ah Xiao in this story. Ah Xiao takes on a potential mother role in the relationship with her foreign master Mr. Garter, therefore offering this female character a unique perspective to inspect her master’s romantic affairs in Shanghai. Ah Xiao’s narrative in the story subverted the racial and colonial dynamic between the masculine West and the feminine East. Ah Xiao’s analogy between her master’s chamber and a prostitute’s turned Garter’s heroic, romantic adventures into a cheap display of his sexual and colonial desire in the foreign land. In addition, by projecting the female gaze onto the female body, Chang pointed out that the sexualized body could also be a burden installed onto the female body.

The second section of the last chapter continued with the examination of three short stories by Maugham: “The Force of Circumstance” (1926), “Masterson” (1963), and “The Letter” (1926). What these three stories have in common is that they all feature conflicts caused by racial transgression that is substantialized by the relationship between the white male character and the native women in the British colony. The presence of the European wife in the colony is only for the purpose of restoring the white male protagonist’s racial identity. Maugham’s depiction of conflicts between husbands and wives is often
transformed into racial transgression caused by the native concubine, which therefore excuses the male characters for his extravagant desire. Moreover, the protagonists in “The Force of Circumstance” and “Masterson” come to the same conclusion that the failure of the relationship between the white man and native woman is due to her insincerity and cunning and that the native woman craves only for money and position rather than true love. However, Maugham reveals his disapproval in the stories, showing that it is the white men’s own avoidance of being “officially bounded” by marriage with the natives. After all, colonial transgression is only approved when it can be a display of European masculinity.

Maugham’s colonial writings, such as The Painted Veil, have been criticized for representing an Orientalist view of the East – the Orient being demonized and worshiped simultaneously. In most of his stories, native characters in the colonial land rarely have any voice or ability to represent their own perspectives, remaining as minor background figures. Native women, in particular, are typically portrayed through the lens of an English-speaking witnesses or male characters. Although Maugham’s stories indicate a lack of consciousness in presenting something beyond a satire of colonial masculinity, he also created several native characters who transcend conventional portrayals in colonial writings, such as Ong Chi Seng in “The Letter,” the Burmese girl in “Masterson,” and most characters in On A Chinese Screen. These characters challenge traditional colonial narratives despite Maugham’s limited focus on native voices, especially women. The pursuit of modernity for colonized people serves as a temporary escape from the harsh realities of wartime and colonial experiences, while for the colonizers, it reinforces their identity. Maugham’s mockery of colonial masculinity, though lacking a conscious presentation of
native voices, includes characters that subtly subvert the racial hierarchy.

Unlike Maugham, or even most of the fellow writers of her time, Chang’s stories do not aim to construct a comprehensive picture of the war, individual awakening, or resistance against imperialism or colonialism. Instead, Chang focuses on how individuals navigate their daily mundane lives and immediate realities amidst the disruption and anxieties caused by war. Her works highlight the conscious and continuous production of the Orient by native people, presenting the East in a manner recognizable to its Western audiences as the so-called exotic Orient. This dynamic process of mimicry involves both the colonizers and the colonized, particularly evident in how native women live through the double-layered gaze of both masculinity and colonialism.

In examining both authors, this research argues that Somerset Maugham and Eileen Chang share similar writing perspectives, techniques, structures, and colonial subjects. However, Chang provides her marginalized characters with more freedom and opportunities to explore personal desires or assert self-control over their wartime and colonial lives, offering a richer, more nuanced exploration of individual agency within oppressive contexts.


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