

Contesting Space in Semi-colonial Shanghai: The Relationship between Shanghai's Modernist Poetry and the City

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Abstract

The introduction of urban study and colonial/postcolonial theories to modernist research in the 1980s has helped us to have another look at the nature of cities. Although a lot of studies have been conducted on Shanghai's modernist poetry, the notion of a colonial or semi-colonial city, in Shanghai's case, is seldom addressed. This article will focus on the disparity between the built environment and the literary space created in Shanghai's modernist poetry. This study discusses whether Shanghai's modernist poetry is a literary product or a product of its environment by examining the poems of Chen Jingrong, Tang Shi, Hang Yuehe and Tang Qi.

Keywords: Shanghai's modernist poetry movement, Western modernist poetry, built environment of Semi-colonial city, literary space, Hardoon Garden

Izveček

Uvedba urbanih ter kolonialnih oziroma postkolonialnih študij v okviru sodobnih raziskav je omogočila nove perspektive v obravnavanju narave mest. Četudi obstaja precej študij o Šanghajski moderni poeziji, so med njimi redke takšne, ki upoštevajo, da je pri tem mestu šlo za kolonialni in polkolonialni prostor. Pričujoči članek se osredotoča na nesorazmerje med urbanim okoljem na eni, in literarne prostore, v katerih se je ustvarjala moderna književnost na drugi strani. Skozi optiko raziskovanja pesmi, ki so nastale pod peresom Chen Jingrong, Tang Shija, Hang Yueheja in Tang Qija izhaja avtor iz vprašanja o tem, ali je Šanghajska moderna poezija literarni produkt, ali pa proizvod okolja, v katerem je nastala.

Ključne besede: Šanghajsko gibanje moderne poezije, zahodna moderna poezija, pozidano okolje polkolonialnega mesta, literarni prostori, vrt Hardoon

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1. Introduction

Western modernism as an international movement has been reconfigured and redefined over time. The two things that have had the most significant impact on modernism are the emergence of urban study and colonialism/postcolonialism. The introduction of urban study and colonial/postcolonial theories to modernist research in the 1980s has helped us to reconsider the nature of cities, metropolises, colonial cities and semi-colonial cities. In fact, various kinds of architecture play a significant role here, because they are considered “one of the principal means used by colonizers to impose a new social and political order and to also maintain control over colonized subjects” (Hernandez 2010, 16). Extensive research has been conducted on the relationship between Western modernism and imperialism (colonialism, nationalism, orientalism and empire) since the 1980s. The result is that new perspectives and theories have been offered to the study of Western modernism. Nevertheless, the nature of the colonial city has been mostly ignored, since it is natural for most Western modernist critics to view the modern city as equal to a metropolis. Thus the notion of the colonial city would seem to be mainly the concern of third world modernist critics. But is it?

My study on the first Chinese modernist poetry movement in Shanghai in the 1940s suggests otherwise. Critics either ignore the relationship between modernism and colonialism/postcolonialism or engross themselves in discussion on whether the Western colonial/postcolonial theories are applicable to Chinese semi-colonialism. The notion of the colonial city is hardly ever addressed, although many researches have been conducted on Shanghai’s modernist poetry. My own particular concern is with the physical and spatial environment (the buildings, architecture and spatial structure of the city). What understanding of Shanghai’s modernist poetry can we accuire from examining the physical environment that nurtured it? What can we understand about the spatial environment involved by examining this poetry? To answer these questions, my study focuses on the poems of four Shanghai modernist poets, namely Chen Jingrong, Tang Shi, Hang Yuehe and Tang Qi. In this piece of research, my discussion will be focused on their works. However, before I start my analysis, I will first briefly examine the daily living space of these poets, i.e., semi-colonial Shanghai.

2. The Built Space of the Semi-colonial City

The physical environment of the colonial city has received a great deal of attention in the past few decades. Nevertheless, to what extent is a colonial city different from a semi-colonial city when it comes to its infrastructure and urban planning? This issue is seldom fully addressed. Theories about the colonial city's spatial arrangement, in fact, are numerous. Yet most theories stress the colonizers' influence on colonial cities, while the role played by the colonized is seldom addressed, and the compromises the colonizers made are always overlooked.

For example, one approach is to view the colonial city as articulating the transition from traditionalism to modernization, and with this, two kinds of space are often found in colonial cities, namely, modernized space and native space (Yeoh 1996, 4). Other theories hold that culture plays a significant role in the development of the colonial city, but the focus is always on the extent of the influence of the colonizing country on the colonial city, and the role that the colonized country played is undermined as a result (Yeoh 1996, 6–7). Indeed, Rahul Mehrotra notices that people who live in the colonial city help to shape its space. Mehrotra divides colonial cities into two kinds of spaces: the static and the kinetic. While the former refers to architecture and concrete, the latter refers to the spaces that the people actually inhabit (Mehrotra 2010, xi). Nevertheless, by dividing the spaces into two, Mehrotra again not only overlooks the possibility that the colonized contributed to the development of the static city, and also overemphasizes the colonizers' influence on the built spaces we are looking at.

Brenda Yeoh, while studying the colonial space in Singapore, notes that the significant contribution of the colonized to the built space of the colonial city is often ignored in the discussion of the colonial city. According to Yeoh:

[...] all too often the colonial city is not treated in its own terms, and the contemporary significance of the spatial configurations of the city for the actual inhabitants who live out their habitual lives within its confines remains uninterrogated. (Yeoh 1996, 9)

Yeoh further elaborates, saying that:

[...] [t]he built spaces of the colonial city were not, however, simply shaped by dominant forces or powerful groups, but were continuously transformed by processes of conflict and negotiation involving the strategies and counter-strategies of colonial institutions of authority and the different “colonized” groups within society [...] the built spaces of the colonial city were construed

as sites of control and resistance, simultaneously drawn upon, by, on the one hand, dominant groups to secure conceptual or instrumental control, and, on the other, subordinate groups to resist exclusionary definitions or tactics and to advance their own claims (Yeoh 1996, 313).

Yeoh's account, I believe, not only helps us understand the development of the built colonial space of the colonial city, but also, to a certain extent, those of the semi-colonial city. According to Yeoh, the colonizer and the colonized are a pair of binary oppositional powers. However, in the case of Shanghai, a semi-colonial city, both the colonizers and the colonized were, in fact, semi-colonizers and semi-colonized. What do these identities imply? The semi-colonizer was not a dominant power which could insert conceptual control, and likewise, the semi-colonized were not totally subordinate groups. Indeed, they could be considered to be semi-colonizers as well. According to Meleine Yue Dong, Shanghai people "evinced the mentality of a semi-colonizer vis-à-vis the rest of China" (Dong 2006, 220). Thus it is difficult to tell who actually decided on the nature of the built space of the semi-colonial city. It could have been dominated by the host colonizing country, by various semi-colonizers or by the characteristics of the locale in the semi-colonial city as well. A study of the built space of Shanghai vividly demonstrates that the space was shaped by various factors other than the binary opposition of the colonizer/semi-colonizer and the colonized/semi-colonized, and it was these factors that usually shaped the built space of the colonial city.

Rhoads Murphey remarks in his *Shanghai: Key to Modern China* that Shanghai was a meeting point of Chinese and Western cultures, and no single culture had the power to dominate the other. As for the foreigners, Shanghai, which was not under their influence and governance, did not belong to them. Nor on the other hand was Shanghai under the control of the Chinese people (Murphey 1953, 9). Shanghai was one of the treaty ports which was opened up for foreign trade and foreign concessions at the end of First Opium War in 1842. The British, the French, and the Americans, followed by the Japanese, not to mention the Chinese government, were the powerful groups who tried without success to secure conceptual control in the city in terms of shaping its built space. The reasons are indeed numerous. From the outset, the Chinese area and the foreign settlements continued to build Chinese-style and Western-style architecture respectively. Nevertheless, due to the limitations of the Chinese builders' craftsmanship and the architectural materials found in Shanghai, Western-style

architecture, in fact, was utterly under the influence of local architecture (Wu 2008, 21–23).

In addition, though both the foreign merchants and Chinese authorities were against the Chinese and foreigners sharing the same living space at the beginning, the influx of refugees after the Taiping Rebellion, and the economic opportunities generated by real estate investment contributed to the demolition of the invisible wall between the foreign settlements and the Chinese area. Chinese builders were hired to build houses in the settlements, and Chinese architectural styles further mixed with Western ones as a result (Liang 2010, 87-92). Last but not least, some foreigners or colonizers were attracted to Chinese culture. The renowned Hardoon Garden is a case in point, and I will discuss this in detail in the following section.

Western architectural styles, on the other hand, also had a great influence on the Chinese styles, but this did not necessarily occur for political reasons. For instance, due to concerns over hygiene, residents in the Chinese area stressed the need for modernization, thus westernization (Wu 2008, 40). The Shanghai skyline, especially the Bund, the most Westernized area in Shanghai, signified, in fact, Shanghai's economic strength rather than its political power, and most of the buildings were banks and commercial buildings, the Bank of China being one of them.

A study of the physical environment of Shanghai reveals that the built space of this particular semi-colonial city did not serve as a means for the semi-colonizers to impose colonial order. Instead, the nature of Shanghai's built space was decided upon and designed by all its stakeholders, including the semi-colonizers, the semi-colonized and perhaps the Chinese authorities as well. Although still at the beginning of the development of the semi-colonial city, there were tensions between the semi-colonizers and the semi-colonized in terms of the fact that both sides insisted on building particular styles of architecture. Still as I have pointed out above, conflicts quickly disappeared due to practical concerns. Nevertheless, the semi-colonial city depicted in Shanghai's modernist poetry seems to suggest otherwise, and holds that the tensions and the binary oppositional relationships between the semi-colonizers and the semi-colonized seemed to linger on persistently. The discrepancy between the sentiments embodied in the built and the literary spaces, among the other issues involved, also helps us to reconsider whether Shanghai's modernist poetry is a literary product bearing a complicated

relationship with its environment or simply a product of its environment. The study can also be seen as offering an alternative approach towards the popular conception of Shanghai literature as being embodied by Hai Pai literature of urbanism (Li 2000), and a contribution to a more comprehensive account of literary history in Shanghai, as already observed in Wang (1999)'s work.

3. The Literary Space in Shanghai Modernist Poetry

The literary space depicted in Shanghai's modernist poetry embodies characteristics which are quite contrary to those we find in the real daily living space. It cannot reflect the actual reality as experienced by Shanghai's people. In the rest of this paper, I will use the poems of Chen Jingrong, Tang Shi, Hang Yuehe and Tang Qi as examples to explain those characteristics in detail.

The urban space depicted in modernist Shanghai poets' works can be further divided into two types. One type is rather general, which can refer to all modern cities, while the other is more specific and refers to Shanghai in particular. Shanghai's landmarks can be found in this second type of poems. Between these two types of poems, we will most often find a general model of the modern city. Nevertheless, to what extent is the complexity of Shanghai semi-colonial life reflected in these poems? Below, I will firstly discuss the archetypal modern city as depicted in the modernist Shanghai poems, and then the city of Shanghai in particular.

Regarding urban life, alienation and loneliness are two major themes we can find in Shanghai modernist poetry. For example, in Chen Jingrong's "I am Strolling Around the City," she writes:

I am strolling around the city/bearing my loneliness/To me, no matter whether they are a sound of a whistle/or the drunken eyes among the city lights/those are only ephemeral reckonings/Like a mask,/the City, the steel, the concrete/and those insincere smiles/Each advertisement is a thick wall/the more beautiful they are, the more scary they become/Like dirty mud, our customs/we laugh at ourselves, and are laughed at by the others/Similar on the surface, how can we distinguish between/the low and the high/knitting of our brows, or get a wry smile spread across our faces/We, as pathetic as we are, are tided up as well/until one day we cannot tell the difference between the far away countryside and the nearby surrounding walls/the past and present are kneed into a centre/Having been conceived unconsciously/the future has already had enough of our giggles and crying/Embracing all sand and

gravel,/the future is refined by the passing of the years/the most purified pearl
is formed eventually. (Wang 1994, 208, my translation)

Despite the general public's beliefs, Chen considers modernization, westernization and commercialization to be negative rather than positive phenomena which are undoubtedly one-sided and cannot reflect the whole picture of Shanghai's modern daily life. As mentioned before, although Shanghai was literally dissected by various semi-colonizers, the city was basically divided into the foreign settlements and the Chinese area. The modern Shanghai depicted in Chen's poem only represents the settlement area, which ironically was favoured by the general public.

Nevertheless, the images Chen Jingrong embodied in her poem correspond to those of the Western modernist poems. The images of "mask" and "centre" are among the examples. The hypocrisy and coldness delineated in the poem, especially in the following lines: "Like a mask,/the City, the steel, the concrete/and those insincere smiles" strongly echo the mood of T. S. Eliot's poem, "Morning at the Window." Eliot used images, namely "twisted faces" and "aimless smiles" not only to demonstrate the hypocrisy and indifference of the citizens of a metropolis, but also their hollowness: "Twisted faces from the bottom of the street,/And tear from a passer-by with muddy skirts/ An aimless smile that hovers in the air/ And vanishes along the level of the roofs" (Eliot 1980, 16). The tear from a passer-by is, in fact, (a mask or) a hypocritical smile worn on her face. Another image—that of "centre" embodied in Chen's poem again directly reminds us of the one depicted in W. B. Yeats' "The Second Coming": "Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold" (Ferguson 1996, 1091). The "centre" here refers to the tradition of pre-modern society, and Yeats laments its demise in the modern period. The centre Chen mentions in her poem, however, points to a new world, perhaps a better one, which is symbolized by a pearl in the last line of the poem. I will discuss the imagined space later when Hang Yuehe's poem is examined.

Perhaps the most subtle similarity between Chen Jingrong's modernist poem and those of her Western counterparts is the invisible *flâneur* or *flâneuse* portrayed in her poem. The *flâneur* plays a significant role in the discussions of modernist literature in general, and modernist poetry in particular. Despite the fact that new perspectives on the issue of the *flâneur* have been advocated in recent decades, the extensive research into Baudelaire's *flâneur* conducted by Walter Benjamin remains an exemplary case in the study of the relationship between modern urban

space and metropolitan people.¹ Baudelaire's *flâneur* clearly demonstrates the dialectical relationship between the modern city and the modernist writers and poets. On the one hand, the *flâneur* enjoys strolling around the modern city; on the other hand, he remains a detached observer, who does not want to follow the rapid pace of city life. Similarly, modernism emerged from the modern city and most modernist writers lived in the city. However, modernist works always embody a sense of anti-urbanism.

Chen Jingrong's poem undoubtedly embodies a sense of anti-urbanism but the dialectical relationship between metropolitan people and modern urban space is nowhere to be found, which is, in fact, similar to the urban landscape depicted in Baudelaire's poems. Although Baudelaire enjoys strolling in the streets, the poet once complains that Brussels has "No shop-windows. Strolling, something that nations with imagination love, is not possible in Brussels. There is nothing to see, and the streets are unusable" (Benjamin 1983, 50), and as far as the topics of his poems are concerned, only the darker side of urban space is revealed. His poems mainly portray murderers, beggars, prostitutes and the like.

We could not locate other literary works written by Chen which show the bright side of the urban space, but the prominent novelist Eileen Chang, Cheng's contemporary, helps to supply the missing pieces. In Chang's prose, for example, "Daolu Yi Mu" ["Seeing with the Streets"] and "Gongyu Shenghuo Jiqu" ["Notes on Apartment Life"], we find Shanghai to be a lovely city which mingles the old with the new:

There are a lot of things worth looking at on the streets. At dusk, a rickshaw rests by the side of the row, with a woman sitting at a slant on the seat, a mesh bag in her hands, full of persimmons. The rickshaw man squats on the ground, lighting the wick of an oil lamp. The sky darkens, and the lamp at the woman's feet gradually grows bright (Chang 2005, 58).

If this passage quoted from "Seeing with the Streets" describes mainly the old city, the following one is about the modern city revealed in "Notes on Apartment Life":

¹The topic of the *flâneur* has become a controversial issue in recent years. For example, the possibility of having a female "*flâneur*" is a significant issue which is worthy of thorough research. However, since this topic lies beyond the scope of this study, I will not deal with it in depth here. For the simple sake of convenience, this study assumes that the *flâneur* is a male. For further research on the female "*flâneur*" a look at the following works will be helpful: Janet Wolff's paper "The artist and the flâneur: Rodin, Rilke and Gwen John in Paris" *The Flâneur*, ed. Keith Tester, London: Routledge, 1994. pp. 111-137. Linda McDowell. *Gender, Identity & Place: Understanding Feminist Geographies*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999.

I like 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 [...] (Chang 2005, 24).

Chang enjoys strolling in the streets no matter whether it be in the old or the new parts of Shanghai. Indeed, it is difficult to tell the real situation in Shanghai merely based on the descriptions of Chen and Chang. However, it seems that Chen's work is deeply influenced by Western modernism, whereas the sentiments embodied in Chang's work are more original.

When we compare the poems of Tang Shi and Hang Yuehe with the one written by Chen Jingrong, we find that these other two poets' works are quite straightforward and ready to opt Western modernist themes with only slight differences. For instance, Tang Shi shows us an uncanny city in his poem "A Restless City":

Shopkeepers go on strike, the whole place is in an uproar/Workers go on strike, the gigantic buildings in the city are shaken/Evening's nights, lamp posts are extinguished/the city's eyes are extinguished/ the city's pulse stops beating/People who are like phantoms rushing to and fro [...]/the doors and windows of the shops—the nose of the city which sniffs out the gold—are closed/All the sensual and sexual attraction—the city's temptations/are dissipated by the wind [...]/Prices rush out from cigarette butts/which are like dark smoke soaring up into the sky [...]/This city will never be peaceful/O, restless city, chaotic city/the plough of our daily lives drags our footsteps/running into the heart of the city (Wang 1994, 204–5, my translation)

The binary oppositional relationship between the infrastructure and facilities of the modern city and the citizen are clearly delineated in this poem. The buildings, the lamp posts and the city's activities seem to be "threatened" during the strike. The modern city is associated with evil things, which for a long time intimidate people in their daily lives. This poem was written in 1947 after a full scale war between the Kuomintang and the Communist Party of China which broke out in 1946, and social unrest was on the rise in China. Thus the tension described in the poem undoubtedly reflects reality. Nevertheless, in addition to the anti-urban sentiments expressed, the line, "People who are like phantoms rushing to and fro [...]," Tang's poem bears a suspicious resemblance to Ezra Pound's most famous poem "In a Station of the Metro." In his poem, Pound compares the crowd in a metro station to an apparition or a phantom. With "the apparition of these faces in the crowd" (Ferguson 1996, 1190), the poet suggests that the hustle and bustle of urban life is

wearing down the people of the metropolis. The minor variations between Pound's and Tang's poems perhaps lie in the way in which Tang perceives urban life. Tang implies in his poem that city dwellers focus on a kind of materialism and sensuality which contributes to making them the living dead or hollow men, and this theme again echoes T. S. Eliot's "The Hollow Men."

In a similar fashion, Hang Yuehe, in "The Resurrection of the Land," reinforces the binary opposition between the city and the people:

Let us rush out of this room which is suffocating/and lock up both nightmares and falsehood [...]we go out to the street, go out to the street [...]Gigantic buildings, the petrified giants, rise up on the roof/which make you drop your hats, burning your desire/and you find yourself a pathetic ant.../Everyday the running wheels sweep away numerous lives, under the humid/roofs, we will find frozen lives/the hustle and bustle on the pavements, where we will also find/ dying people, in a heavily guarded prison/where we will find missing people [...]. However, this is/ Shanghai—the flower of the modern city/ People flock here with various dreams/Wisdoms and labours are accumulated here/ which was a pile of rubbish in the past, but a heaven now [...]. (Wang 1994, 303–4, my translation)

This quoted passage is only a small part of the long poem. However, the message is clear. People did not feel at home either inside or outside of the buildings. When they are inside their rooms, they feel suffocated. They do not feel better when they are out on the streets. Again modern buildings are associated with monsters and people are compared with ants which are insignificant. Life is fragile and we can find dead bodies and missing people everywhere in the city. At the end of the poem, which I have not quoted here, the poet suggests that people are aware of their rights; they fight against a corrupt government and create a brave new world.

The theme of conjuring up a poetic or imagined space is, in fact, essential in Western modernist poetry.² In addition, most Western modernist writers and poets were either immigrants, expatriates or exiles who felt nostalgic for their homelands. Even people who stayed living in their hometown might also feel alienated due to the process of urbanization, thus, they also felt nostalgia for their old hometown. The imaginative space embodied in these modernist works may refer to the writers' hometowns as well as a fictional place. The future world that

² A detailed account of the relationship between the imagined space and modernist literature can be found in my book *Modernist Aesthetics in Taiwanese Poetry since the 1950s*. The "Introduction" and the chapter on the "Imagined Literary Community: Language, Memory and Nature" are the most relevant to this study.

both Chen Jingrong and Hang Yuehe refer to in their poems is actually a variant version of the imaginative space in Western modernist literature.

Contrary to creating a general model of a modern city, Tang Qi was one of the few who depicted Shanghai's landmarks. In his poem, "Time and Flags," though the city is taken into account in particular, the complex relationship between the semi-colonial city and its citizen is again overlooked. Since Shanghai's landmark, Hardoon Garden, is delineated in this poem, the discrepancy between the city's built space and literary space is vividly manifested.

This long poem consists of eight parts. The passage quoted below shows only the parts where Shanghai's landmarks are mentioned. On the whole, Tang's interpretation of the colonial situation is similar to that of his contemporary and one-sided. Since the Hardoon Garden is mentioned several times in the poem, we can have a clearer picture of the extent to which Tang Qi misinterpreted or oversimplified the colonial situation.³ This poem, to a certain extent, is similar to the other poems I mentioned above in terms of the portrayal of the *flâneur* and the depiction of a binary oppositional relationship between the colonizer and the colonized.

At the beginning of the poem, Tang Qi presents a picture of social unrest in Shanghai: "People tolerate excessive reality/sometimes they cannot find the meaning of it/ Cold wind blows away/gorgeously, hopes are like fading flowers, like papers/are torn into pieces [...]" (Wang 1994, 237, my translation). The poet compares hopes to "fading flowers" which obviously reminds us that the situation is totally hopeless.

Significant issues such as those of the *flâneur*, Hardoon Garden and the tensions between the colonizer and the colonized are found in the second stanza. Tang Qi writes:

It is still under the Chinese parasol tree, inside the colonial area/I walk around
Hardoon Garden/My words linger on persistently among numerous people
[...] who are not allowed to question openly/Time, the hollowness of the
capitalists/moves gradually, shivering, predicting a fatal disappearance [...]
(Wang 1994, 239).

³ My discussion of Hardoon Garden and Zhang Garden is mostly indebted to Yue Meng's *Shanghai & the Edges of Empires* (2006). I found Chapter Five on "Reenvisioning the Urban Interior: Gardens and the Parox of the Public Sphere" to be the most useful.

In these few lines Tang uses Hardoon Garden as a symbol of the colonial powers, and the Chinese parasol tree here refers to the French concession, where the garden is located. The “words” Tang refers to here represent the grievances he depicts in the first stanza. Here the poet complains about the cruel reality that Shanghai’s people have tolerated, and implies that the Chinese people have been repressed by the colonial powers. Repression is represented by Hardoon Garden where people are unable to freely express themselves. In addition, the narrator, as a *flâneur*, is portrayed in this part of the poem. He strolls around Shanghai with readers, similar to the *flâneur* depicted by Baudelaire, who is compared to a detective (Benjamin 1983, 41). Tang’s *flâneur* also finds crimes everywhere in Shanghai—crimes committed by the colonizers.

At the beginning of the fourth stanza, for example, the *flâneur* implies that the gorgeous buildings in Shanghai have been built by the exploitation of the lower class. Perhaps the most important description embodied in this part is Tang Qi’s impressions of Hardoon Garden:

A pale sunset in Shanghai, I walk near to the hill, a glimmering place/which is occupied by capitalists and machines/Marbles are like Smoky Quartz, under the architectures which are built with polished volcanic rock/numerous coolies are pushing loaded carts [...]/At Scott Road, an English church’s night/its ancient lamps have the ability to preach [...]/I walk back to the garden:/people love the exotic/flowers, women’s fashion /beauty, arm in arm with prideful gentlemen/They share too many nights before, the darkness/in comparison with Sundays’ sunshine/the glittering of the pond, a bird/flies over, at the moment someone is deep in his thoughts among the trees/at the moment people gather around the garden’s gate [...]/the gorgeous midday sunshine/shining, are in fact illusions and beyond all reason/they derail your thoughts. (Wang 1994, 243)

After having strolled around different scenic places in Shanghai, the narrator decides to revisit Hardoon Garden again as if it has some kind of compelling power which attracts people and keeps them going back. The garden was built by Hardoon, a Jewish merchant. Although he enjoyed great success in Shanghai as an opium dealer and a real estate merchant, as a British subject his social status in Great Britain was still very low, and we can see that his cultural identity was ambiguous through the way he constructed his private paradise. Hardoon, a colonizer in Tang Qi’s eyes, in fact, built a Jiangnan-style garden which contains:

Three major halls, two pavilions...and another eighteen landscapes
miscellaneously decorated by pagodas, stone boats, pavilions, artificial

mountains, ponds, and flower gardens [...]. The landscapes and structures were detailed reproductions of Chinese ideal gardens, such as the Summer Palace in Beijing and the Grandview Garden. (Yue 2006, 152)

It is noteworthy that although Chinese style or oriental style once has great influence on European gardens in the seventeenth century or earlier, British character was stressed from the nineteenth century on due to the rise of the British Empire. The Chinese style embodied in Hardoon Garden or the garden itself is actually a symbol of rebellion against the Empire.

If we compare Hardoon Garden with some other residential buildings, for instance, Zhang Garden, owned by a Chinese merchant, we find that Hardoon favours Chinese culture over Chinese people. Before it became the (then) Zhang Garden, the property was originally constructed by a British company. The Chinese merchant Zhang Honglu (a former Qing official) purchased the property and wished to build a European-style garden. As pointed out by Yue, building a Western-style garden definitely helped to strengthen one's socio-political status and aesthetic authority in the late nineteenth century Shanghai (Yue 2006, 154). Thus both Hardoon and Zhang used their gardens as symbols to signify their border crossing identities. An interesting twist, in fact, is found in Hardoon's and Zhang's examples. It seems, aesthetically speaking at least, that the garden built by Zhang, a Chinese individual, could represent colonial power more than the one built by Hardoon, a Westerner. Hence, the description in Tang Qi's poem cannot reflect reality.

In the passage quoted above, two kinds of people are depicted, the underprivileged and the privileged. Both are charmed by the garden, especially by its exotic atmosphere: "I walk back to the garden:/people love the exotic/flowers, women's fashion/beauty, arm in arm with prideful gentlemen". The "people" mentioned here are rather ambiguous; the poet does not make it very clear who these people are. On the one hand, Tang seems to imply that these people are the underprivileged, who are attracted by the exotic flowers and foreign beauty. On the other hand, these people may as well refer to the privileged, or the colonizers, who are enchanted by the oriental flavour of the garden. In either case, the women and gentlemen Tang depicts inside the garden are obviously well-off since they can spend money on their clothes and have time to take a walk in the garden. Generally speaking, the garden was not open to the public, and only the most privileged would be invited to visit it. The general public might only be able to

gather around outside the garden. The following lines, however, make it clear that to a greater extent, these “people” in fact represent the underprivileged: “the gorgeous midday sunshine/shining, are in fact illusions and beyond all reason/which derail your thoughts” (Wang 1994, 243). The “you” mentioned here reminds us of the narrator, who walks towards the garden. The narrator basically shares the thoughts of the underprivileged, and although he is not necessarily one of them, he shows sympathy for their situation. Nevertheless, the exotic garden creates an illusion which contributes to the derailment of his or the underprivileged people’s thoughts.

Tang Qi considers the garden to be an illusion due to its exotic atmosphere, which is the most interesting point made in the poem. As I pointed out above, aesthetically speaking, Hardoon Garden is a Chinese garden, at least. Hardoon wanted to reproduce an ideal Chinese garden. Although the extent to which Hardoon Garden is different from or similar to an authentic Chinese garden remains in question. We may consider that the differences indicate an orientalist gaze which may contribute to the exotic flavour of the garden. However, this kind of exoticism is not what Tang Qi points to, and I believe that the exotic atmosphere the poet refers to is in fact that of the Western lifestyle, which is undoubtedly a misunderstanding of the garden.

Tang Qi further elaborates and confirms his misinterpretation of Hardoon Garden, at least on an aesthetic level, through depicting the social unrest which is associated with it.

Numerous patients are sleeping/near the station [...]/Around the garden/where we found the lawn beside the traffic area/houses have various kinds of music, balconies and windows/Jews, British and armed American soldiers, navies who are/patrolling their homes in the colony/the psalm music drifting from the International church/helps cleanse their guilt/which is like a lightless bathroom storing all the dirt.../Merchandise can be found everywhere in this idiotic colony [...]/Counting their fortune in every minute/in the end, the colonizers’ fortune will be shipped back to their faraway/home, the colonizers finally know that/everything comes to an end—/fortune is not fortune/occupation does not last forever/arms cannot protect them in the colony [...]. (Wang 1994, 243–44)

Tang Qi at last clearly indicates the relationship between the Hardoon Garden and colonial power. The garden represents the centre of the power in the poem, which radiates a negative influence throughout the city. Sick people, guilt and dirt are

everywhere. However, the poet is different from his fellow poets in terms of the fact that he understands more about the colonizers' mentality. For instance, Tang points out that the colonizers are not as confident as we imagined. They also have a sense of insecurity. The colonizers are afraid that their military force cannot protect them forever, and the colonized subjects will eventually overthrow them.

Judging from the above discussions of Tang Qi's as well as other Shanghai poet's poems, we find that most of Shanghai's modernist poets did not understand their urban space very well, and the space delineated in their poems tends to be an imaginary one, which could not present a real picture of Shanghai in the 1940s.

4. Conclusion

If we go back to the questions I raised at the beginning of this paper, what can we understand about Shanghai's modernist poetry through examining the physical environment that nurtured it? What can we understand about the spatial environment by examining Shanghai's modernist poetry? The answers are interesting. It seems that the urban space could not help to nurture Shanghai's modernist poetry and those modernist poems likewise cannot help us understand the spatial environment of Shanghai in the 1940s. Or, at least, it can be said that the relationship between the two is not a self-evident one.

The discrepancies between people's idea of the city and those of the poets, the actual urban space and the literary space depicted by the poets signify that the first modernist Shanghai poetry movement was a literary product rather than a product of its environment. As my discussions above vividly demonstrate, the portrayal of the *flâneur*, the theme of anti-urbanism, the allusions to the works of Western modernist poets, namely T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, W. B. Yeats, found in those Shanghai modernist poems are solid evidence of Western influence in the Chinese modernist poetry movement.

On the contrary, the built urban space would seem to play a lesser role in terms of nurturing Shanghai's modernist poetry movement. Despite Shanghai's people's preference for the foreign settlements, the Chinese style of Hardoon Garden and Eileen Chang's eulogy to urban space, Shanghai's modernist poets still associate foreign settlements, Hardoon Garden and urban space with negative sentiments. This perhaps leads to another question: Why did the modernist poets refuse to respond to their environment? This question is in fact outside the scope of the

current study. However, I suggest that these poets did not refuse to respond to their built environment, and I believe that the crux of the problem is the disparity between the built space and the means they can employ to express their feelings towards it. Western modernism, to a certain extent, can help to make their voices heard, but not without distortion. The fundamental difference between Western modernism and its Chinese counterpart lay in the socio-political and built environments that nurtured them. While the former was a product of empire and metropolis, the latter was a product of colonization and colony, or semi-colony in Shanghai's case, and these differences are undoubtedly worth further study in the future.

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