

ENTERING THE HOUSE

Domestic Space, Colonial Modernity,
and the Making of the Female Subject in
Eileen Chang's *The First Incense Burner*

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A WOMAN BETWEEN WORLDS

张爱玲 Eileen Chang

1920–1995

Shanghai-born modernist writer

The First Incense Burner

《沉香屑·第一炉香》

1943· Colonial Hong Kong

Writing from colonial Hong Kong,
Chang examines how modernity enters
ordinary private life.



WHY SPACE

Modernity has interiors.



garden

architecture

furniture

objects

clothing

In *The First Incense Burner*,
modernity lives inside the room.

THE FIRST INCENSE BURNER

Ge Weilong (Violet)

- Shanghai student in colonial Hong Kong

Liang Tai-tai

- Violet's wealthy aunt who agrees to support her education

The Liang Residence

- Where Violet begins living and enters her aunt's social circle

Qiaoqi Qiao (George)

- The man Violet falls in love with



RESEARCH QUESTION

How does domestic space shape Violet's subjectivity under colonial modernity?

The Liang residence materializes colonial modernity through space and consumption, gradually reshaping Violet's perception and desire.



FRAMEWORK

01 HETEROTOPIA - Michel Foucault “*Of Other Spaces*”

A real place in which otherwise incompatible space, locations, or systems of meaning can be juxtaposed.

02 ORIENTALISM - Edward Said “*Orientalism*” (1978)

The Western construction of “the East” as exotic, irrational, and different from the West.

03 COLONIAL MODERNITY

Modernity developing under colonial conditions. Modernization, cultural exchange, and unequal relations of power occur simultaneously.

INTERIOR



The presence of this splash of Eastern color was transparently for the benefit of foreign guests. Since the British had traveled from afar to catch a glimpse of China, it was only fitting to put some 'China' on display for them. However, the China presented here was merely the China of the Western imagination — grotesque, exquisite, and ludicrous. (Chang 2)

这一点东方色彩的存在，显然是看在外国朋友们的面上。英国人老远的来看看中国，不能不给点中国给他们瞧瞧。但是这里的中国，是西方人心目中的中国，荒诞、精巧、滑稽。(Chang 2)

THE REFLECTION

葛薇龙在玻璃门里瞥见她自己的影子——她自身也是殖民地所特有的东方色彩的一部份…… (Chang 2)

Weilong caught sight of her own reflection in the glass door — she herself was part of the Oriental color unique to the colony. (Chang 2)



THE WARDROBE

薇龙一夜也不曾阖眼，才阖眼便恍惚在那里试衣服，试了一件又一件；毛织品，毛茸茸的像富于挑拨性的爵士舞；厚沉沉的丝绒，像忧郁的古典化的歌剧主题曲；柔滑的软缎，像《蓝色的多瑙河》，凉阴阴地匝着人，流遍了全身。(Chang 17)

Weilong did not close her eyes the whole night—and the moment she did, she was in a daze, trying on clothes there in her room, one after another: the woolen knits, fuzzy and teasing, like provocative jazz; the heavy, plush velvets, somber as the leitmotif of a classical opera; the sleek, fluid satins, like *The Blue Danube*, coolly winding about her, coursing through her entire being. (Chang 17)



SPACE to SUBJECTIVITY

THE HOUSE

“the China of the Western imagination”

THE BODY

“she herself was part of the Oriental color”

THE MIND

“trying them on, one after another”

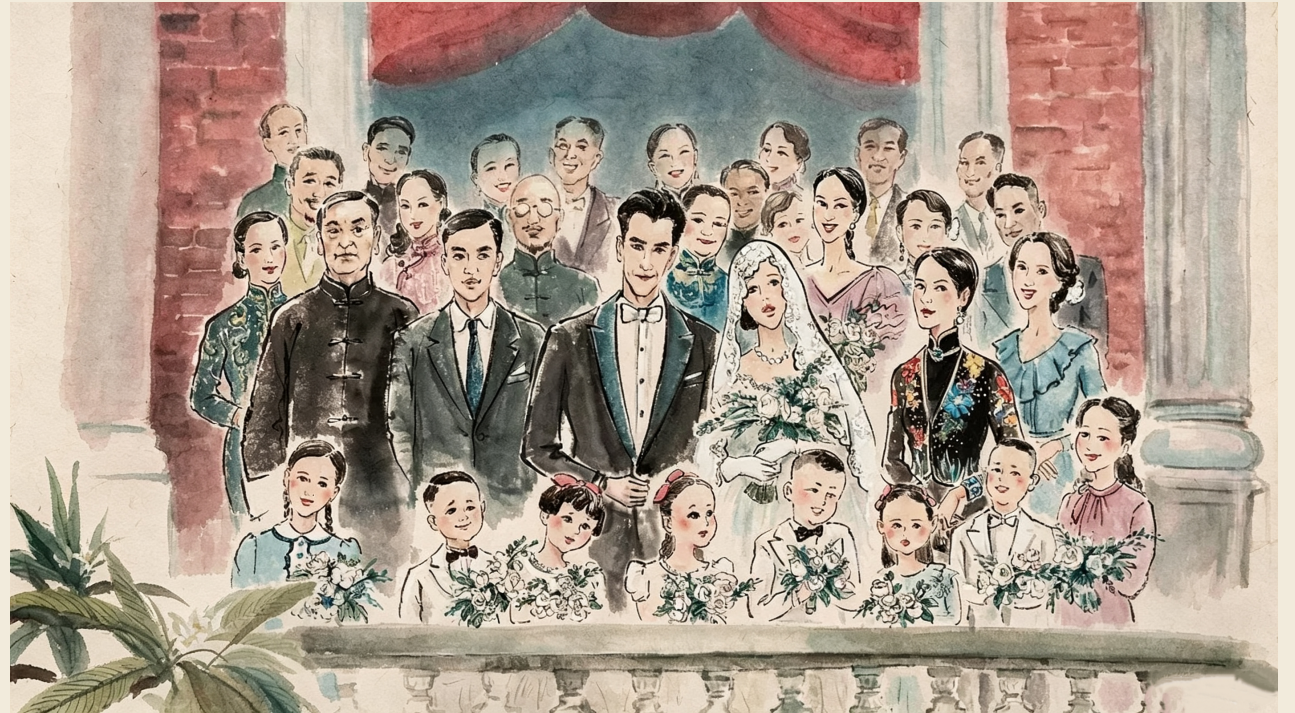


SPACE → REPRESENTATION → SELF-PERCEPTION → DESIRE

ENTERING THE HOUSE

*Weilong enters the house.
The house enters Weilong.*

*Domestic space is not merely where
colonial modernity is represented; it is
one of the mechanisms through which
colonial modernity becomes lived and
internalized.*



CREDITS

Primary Text

Chang, Eileen. *The First Incense Burner* (《沉香屑·第一炉香》). 1943.

Theoretical Framework

- Foucault, Michel. "Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias."
- Said, Edward W. *Orientalism*. 1978.

Image Credit

Love After Love 《第一炉香》

Directed by Ann Hui, 2020.

Promotional posters and official film imagery.

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1bKhIx2rn6cMOgyJDACBUIUdRwiSLSfmU/view?usp=sharing>