

Space and Romance: a Study of Feminist Position in *Miss Sophia's Diary* and *Sealed Off*

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Abstract. Interrogating two cases, *Sealed Off* and *Miss Sophia's Diary*, this paper seeks to apply spatial narrative theories to extract two spatial dimensions, namely physical-space and subjective-space, and interpret the authoresses' feminist positions based on their deliberate writing on intricate feminine consciousness and psychology that male writers would not be able to experience. The images of men in the novels are also analysed to expose the independent and rebellious consciousness of the two heroines based on the two novelists' deconstruction of the male-centred portrayal of masculinity in female discourse. It has been found that for women whose consciousness is awakened to seek liberation, physical-space symbolises a double metaphor, offering the possibility of the birth of new women in China during the May Fourth period, but also a cage that imprisons women in their quest for independence; subjective-space more specifically represents the May Fourth new women's confrontation and mortification with their pursuit of free love, and the deviation of both male and female stereotypes prevalent in traditional Chinese literature.

1 Introduction

In exploring the significance of space for a text, modern spatial narrative theory differs from traditional narrative theory's singular focus on time. It originates from the findings of interdisciplinary research with the gradual shift of traditional narrative studies towards the spatiality of texts. Marxist theorist Henri Lefebvre published *La production de l'espace* in 1974, which was translated into English as *The Production of Space* in 1991. He posited that "(social) space is a (social) product" [1]. The three types of space he proposed, defined as (1) spatial practice, (2) representations of space and (3) space of representations, are illuminating for the analysis of fiction. According to Lefebvre, the products of "spatial practice" are various forms of physical space that can be visualised, such as cities, gardens, roads, and so on; while "representations of space" is space occupied by subjective feelings, for example, mental space; "space of representation" is social space, which is the space of everyday life based on the first two types of space. This kind of classification delineates the spatial composition of a text, including both physical and spiritual dimensions. Massey (2005) holds a similar view of social space, that "space is always under construction" [2]; it

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is a multiplicity of co-existent heterogeneities. Gabriel Zoran (1984) illustrated a spatial analysis model with both theoretical and practical value in his *Towards a Theory of Space in Narrative* from the perspective of literary criticism, suggesting three levels of space in narratives. The first is the topographical level, which is the highest level of reconstruction of space as a static existence; the second level of space is the chronotopic level, which was first introduced into literary criticism by Mikhail Bakhtin to denote a whole interweaving of time and space, but Zoran's definition is used to signify a combination of spatial and temporal concepts as movement and change; the third level of space is the textual level, which is influenced by the selectivity of the language (meaning that the author chooses specific words and tone to present space), the linearity of the text and the perspectival structure [3]. Hence, from the perspective of modern spatial narrative theory, it is essential to analyse the composition of space in novels, especially physical and subjective space.

Spatial imagery and the feminist position became inextricably linked in Chinese fiction during the May Fourth period (1917-1927), which overturned the traditional Chinese feudal ritual order and can be described as the true birth period of Chinese women. On the one hand, women's issues† were one of the key concerns in China's New Culture Movement (1915-1923), as part of social criticism and an important promotion of democracy and new morality. The feminist position, which refers to the critique of male-centricity and the awakening of female self-awareness, has come to the fore as the literary community has become more concerned about women's issues, with many writers' works featuring new women seeking freedom and equality. On the other hand, many writers who are largely inspired by Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, used the spatial imagery of the "room" to represent women's self-discovery, because in the past, women predominantly played the role of wife and mother in their homes. Thus, getting out of the room connotes a symbolic meaning. As Woolf states, "women have sat indoors all these millions of years, so that by this time the very walls are permeated by their creative force" [4].

This study focuses on two texts of two female Chinese writers: Ding Ling and Eileen Chang. Ding Ling, a politically engaged writer nurtured in Hunan inland culture, and Eileen Chang, a Shanghai-style writer who excels in depicting daily life, share some similar feminist ideas as demonstrated in their works albeit with different political leanings and literary backgrounds. One important fact is that Ding's works influenced Chang. For example, Chang once described Ding as the most endearing of female writers, praising Ding's *Miss Sophia's Diary* (1928) for its delicate psychological descriptions and strong personality. Chang also holds that Sophia represents the bitterness of women who feel the conflict between old and new ideas during the May Fourth period [5].

The primary texts studied in this paper, Ding Ling's *Miss Sophia's Diary* and Eileen Chang's *Sealed Off* (1943), both contain strong senses of space and feminism. For instance, on the one hand, confined space plays a vital role in telling the story in both novels as the two stories are presented in confined spaces – a tramcar and a room. It is in enclosed space, a tramcar, that the two protagonists in *Sealed Off* have an ephemeral encounter that sparks their love, and in *Miss Sophia's Diary*, it is the room that occasionally shuts Sophia off from the outside world, with only a diary at hand to save her lost mind. These confined spaces provide possibilities of revealing women's inner love desires and their pursuit of being treated as true and independent human beings. On the other hand, the texts show feminism in the application, because they not only reveal the contradictions and struggles of Cuiyuan and Sophia, the two female protagonists regarded as new women in the male-dominated society of the two novels, but also explore women's sexual liberation and autonomy, and thus modernity. Therefore, the two texts provide good examples to better

† The Chinese concept of Feminism was first translated by Shen Yanbing (Mao Dun) in *The Ladies' Journal*, Vol. 6, No. 2, 1920.

understand the interaction between the Chinese feminist position of the time and the spatial imagery of the “room”.

Thus, this paper expects to employ spatial theories to highlight the gender perspective in two novels and offers a keen insight into the often-overlooked male images in the writings of modern female writers to explore the feminist consciousness in the two novels. In the first part, this paper analyses the potential spatial structures in the two texts by extracting two spatial dimensions from them, defined as physical-space and subjective-space, following the spatial narrative theories proposed by Henri Lefebvre and Gabriel Zoran. Then the second part focuses on the first space – physical-space, arguing that it can be seen as both a cage and a chance for new women. It is precisely in such spaces that they offer the heroines the possibility of modern love, but at the same time, the bounded physical spaces also allude to the limitation of free love, due to the fact that the two female protagonists are not free to choose the space they are living or staying in. Finally, to explore the writers’ feminist tendencies and attitudes, the third part interrogates the subjective-space based on the two novelists’ deconstruction of the male-centred portrayal of masculinity in female discourse. On the one hand, the novels are rich in psychological descriptions that can separate or pause time in fiction; on the other hand, both Ding’s choice of diary form and Chang’s distillation of the love story require the writers’ to imbue a story with very delicate psychological descriptions. Moreover, the subjective-space of the two heroines is mainly refracted and shaped by the males in their eyes. Thus, the final part categorises the male images as wooer and love saviour in terms of their characteristics to explore the different responses of men between the educated new women from a modern authoress perspective and the traditional women described in the premodern works, and thus exposes the independent and rebellious consciousness of the two heroines.

2 Texts in the Contexts of Spatial Narrative Theory: Space in Two Dimensions

Physical-space is regarded as “a static entity” [3] in narrative texts. According to Gabriel Zoran’s spatial analysis model, the topographical level is the highest level of reconstruction of space as a static existence, considered as “self-existent and independent of the temporal structure of the world and sequential arrangement of the text” [3]. Writers usually achieve this space with direct descriptions, such as Balzac’s panoramic openings. Physical-space is often presented in traditional narrative texts as a setting for the story. For example, in Stendhal’s *The Red and the Black*, based on the changing trajectories of Julien Sorel’s life that drive the plot and characterisation, three classic physical spaces are built, namely, Verrières, Besançon and Paris. The room in which Sophia writes her diary in *Miss Sophia’s Diary* is similar to this, as she moves from one room to another, writing down her sometimes happy and sometimes disappointed states of mind. More importantly, the purpose of this movement is also to be a witness to her pursuit of love, as Sophia chooses to move in order to be closer to the man she longs for. In addition, sometimes, physical space can be used to represent time, mostly in modern and post-modern works, such as *A Rose for Emily* by American author William Faulkner. The narrator in this story recalls Emily’s erratic and strange behaviour over the years in a non-linear fashion, and the physical space – her house – is an indicator that reveals how Emily attempts to avoid change in a frozen time period. Chang’s *Sealed Off* is analogous to this as the tramcar “cuts through space and time” [6], severing the temporal connection between the people inside the tram and the outside world. The lovers on the tram can therefore temporarily set aside worldly prejudices

and immerse themselves in the love experience. Hence, such a physical space offers the possibility of the formation of a love utopia.

Subjective-space is composed of a series of psychological activities of characters, which are triggered by events and detached from time. Although Henri Lefebvre approached the theory of social space from a Marxist philosophical perspective, he proposed a space occupied by thoughts and sensations as a representation of space [1]. Also, in Zoran's chronotopic level of space, Zoran uses this concept to signify "an integration of spatial and temporal categories as movement and change" [3]. In *Miss Sophia's Diary*, for example, the diaries are written by Sophia each day – the time unit of each diary is only one day, but Sophia's subjective-space can be extended indefinitely. In the diary on January 3, Sophia is distressed by the many bitter and useless medicines she has to take, and at this time, her subjective-space includes three points: the past, the present and the future. Specifically, she recalls the love letters she received in the past and then writes: "How I despise grandstand affection from people I loathe" [7]; she also expresses her expectations of life in the present, and is not reconciled that her young life is coming to an end, "I don't fear death. I just feel that I haven't gotten any pleasure out of life" [7]. For the future moment of her death, Sophia even thinks of several specific scenarios: "I imagine myself resting on a bed in a gorgeous bedroom, my sisters nearby on a bearskin rug praying for me, and my father sighing as he gazes quietly out the window. I'll be reading long letters from those who love me..." [7]. In regard to *Sealed Off*, Chang is similarly adept at portraying the inner tension of his characters with a delicate tone. For example, a subtle analogy is her comparison of the tension between a man and a woman when their faces are close together to the tension brought by a close-up shot on a screen: "Seen near up, anyone's face is somehow different – tension-charged like a close-up on the movie screen" [6].

3 Physical-space: Chance or Cage?

Physical-space offers Sophia and Wu Cuiyuan the chance and courage to pursue their love. Sophia, the heroine of *Miss Sophia's Diary*, spends most of her time in a tiny room, where she simmers milk four times a day – not necessarily to drink, but simply to pass time. As a result of her boredom, Sophia constantly writes diaries every day in her tiny room, and all of them cry out for the liberation of individuality and express her desire for love in body and soul. For instance, Sophia writes in her first diary: "I've always wanted a man who would really understand me" [7]. Also, Sophia tries to challenge the norm of women where men are placed at the centre of their love and daily life, and struggles to avoid the overriding of men's feelings. Thus, Sophia forms a clear judgment of the two men she is closest to, even if she was wildly attracted to Ling Jishi's masculine beauty when she first met him. In Sophia's view, Weidi is a faithful and reliable man who cannot easily evoke females' affection, while Ling Jishi is handsome and attractive but only has "really stupid ideas" [7]. Neither of them satisfies Sophia's pursuit as a new woman. Therefore, Sophia does not choose either of them and ends up going alone to a place where nobody knows her. From this perspective, Sophia is avant-garde and bold, and her room becomes a shell that protects her pursuits and gives her courage, enabling her to have a corner of her own to write her true inner monologue.

In *Sealed Off*, Wu Cuiyuan is a highly educated university English instructor with a restless heart who deviates from the tradition and is dissatisfied with the status quo under her mask of being a good student and a good daughter. The physical space in this novel – a closed tramcar – gives Wu the possibility of short-lived ecstasy, where she uncontrollably abandons her prudishness and perceptions. This provides her the possibility of gradually departing from her daily routine with Lv Zongzhen and delving into very private emotional topics, cautiously but willingly touching on a romantic but unreasonable dream of love.

Even when Lv Zongzhen leaves, Cuiyuan “shuts her eyes fretfully” [6], and inwardly longs for this person who is “dead” to her, to call her, and then return to her life. Unfortunately, but clearly, this dream can only exist in the space of the tramcar, and once the tramcar starts moving again, this love is reduced to nothing. Due to the exceptional nature of this encounter, the gender relationship between Cuiyuan and Zongzhen is ambiguous, and thus it is defined very differently by scholars. Some studies have defined this kind of love as merely something romantic and illusionary. For example, Gunn (1980) and Xudong Zhang (2000) defines the story as “an imagined romance” [8] and a “romantic fantasy” [9], however, from the perspective of physical space, the story is interpreted to be the one that both contains conjunction of and departure from romance. More precisely, the fleeting love that happens on that tramcar goes beyond the realm of love, because in the time of Japanese-occupied Shanghai, where freedom of love and marriage was still out of reach, it was difficult and impractical for two unrelated young people to have a romantic love story or marry. But Chang’s new narrative, structured on temporal and spatial dimensions, constructs a special physical space for these two characters and thus offers the possibility of love in the context of modernity.

While confined physical space offers the possibility of brief modern love and can be regarded as a shelter for the liberation of women, it also serves as a cage. As the two stories end with the implication that women are not in control of, or free to construct, the physical space in which they live. For Cuiyuan, her encounter with Lv Zongzhen is the result of numerous coincidences. It happens that the city is sealed off, she was on the tramcar with Lv Zongzhen, and that Chang deliberately provided her with the possibility of instant love, so it is impossible to be replicated if any of these incidents lack. At the end of the story, even Cuiyuan herself clearly realises: “Everything that had happened while the city was sealed was a non-occurrence” [6]. In other words, although the story is framed under a realistic setting, it will never become a reality, that is, women may be in such utopian spaces for a short time, but never for long. Chang also uses a very graphic metaphor in the novel: “life was like the Bible, translated from Hebrew into Greek, from Greek into Latin...Gaps were unavoidable” [6]. This gap exists in the connection between the “room” and the world, in women’s perception of love, marriage and the self, and in their pursuits of freedom and equality against patriarchal society.

A similar gap is also evidenced in *Miss Sophia’s Diary*, which can be traced in Sophia’s two rooms. Sophia describes her original room in the first diary as: “..., the silence scares me to death. Particularly inside the four whitewashed walls that stare blankly back at me no matter where I sit. If I try to escape by lying on the bed, I’m crushed by the ceiling, just as oppressively white” [7]. The imagery of the walls and ceiling brings a sinking depression that contrasts with Sophia’s inner fire and desire. Specifically, Sophia is a weak woman with signs of an illness that requires her to take medication several times a day – as the flower of health withers, there is a huge change in the human spirit and an otherwise unseen kingdom in the heart is opened up. Thus, this desire is fuelled by Ling Jishi later, who is stunning, with “pale delicate features, fine lips, and soft hair” [7], and immediately Sophia moves out of her room in order to get closer to this man. However, Sophia’s new room is also depicted in a very depressing way, as “a small, mouldy room with low ceilings” [7]. The recurring imagery of ceilings looms in Sophia’s mind like one heavy cloud after another, and her fire-like desire can only leak into the room little by little through gaps between the clouds. This repression is thus reflected in Sophia’s contradictory actions. For example, when Ling Jishi shares a room with her, Sophia lies and cools her passions in the face of Ling’s advances. Only when Ling leaves, Sophia starts to be “consumed with regret” [7], for all the obvious chances she missed out, and she even asks herself: “Why had I moved to this shabby room?” [7]. It is evident that Sophia is obsessed with her desire, yet fearful of it, because it is not what a decent woman in a male-dominated society should

possess. The shackles she wants to break are precisely the same ones that imprison her thoughts and, by extension, her actions. It is also a side issue that in these enclosed spaces, where the bolder the females' aspirations for love and the sharper their perceptions of independence, the more unlikely they could claim these rights in society.

4 Subjective-space: Treatment of Two Kinds of Men

Wooper is one type of man who begs for love from a young woman, which is rarely seen in premodern fiction. On the one hand, the dominant male figures in traditional fiction are typically masculine heroes; on the other hand, a traditional Chinese value holds that a hero should prioritise his country over a beautiful woman. Thus, even if there is such an image, the characters are usually young scholars, such as Xu Xian (*Legend of the White Snake* 《白蛇传》), Zhang Sheng (*Romance of Western Bower* 《西厢记》), and Ning Caichen (*Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio* 《聊斋志异》). Taking Zhang Sheng as an example, Zhang is a frail scholar who falls in love with Cui Yingying, the daughter of a chief minister of the Tang court, at first sight, and never gives up his love, even when he is opposed by Yingying's family. Yingying is also deeply in love with Zhang, and they are eventually married when Zhang passes the civil service examination. In this novel, Zhang Sheng is typical of wooer in traditional Chinese stories, and his love for Yingying is unflinching until death. However, almost all of these love stories are written by male writers, so the true attitude of women towards wooer is not clear as the perspectives of female writers might be different from male writers and there is no way of comparing them at that time.

With the rise of the May Fourth women's liberation movement in China, women's subjective consciousness was enhanced and thus their real attitudes towards wooer gradually surfaced. The real attitude is a kind of ambivalence in which affirmation and denial are intertwined, and acceptance and rejection coexist. In *Miss Sophia's Diary*, Weidi, who often cries in front of Sophia, is a wooer and he does not want to give up on his love even though Sophia teases him and does not cherish him. But how does Sophia respond to this kind of love? On the one hand, Sophia rejects Weidi, which is clearly depicted in her inner monologue: "Has he captured me? That is not my responsibility" [7]. Sophia does not accept the pleasures and ingratiation of a wooer as do heroines in traditional stories, and she argues that it is not a responsibility that she must take on as a woman. From this point of view, the "new woman" has reached the ability to distinguish between two feelings: being touched by a man and really falling in love with a man.

The reasons for rejection are twofold: women's motherhood and money. Specifically, Sophia wavers on Weidi's affection, but she is always "genuinely sorry for him" [7] and even wishes she could fall in love with him, which triggers her feelings of guilt and pain. These feelings of Sophia actually have a deep psychological basis, that is, men's desire to be saved and women's motherhood. As in the final line of *Faust*: "the Woman-Soul leadeth us. Upward and on" [10], this collective unconscious desire of men to be saved partially creates the narrative pattern of weak men and strong women in a patriarchal society. At the same time, women's motherhood gives them a natural urge to empathise and pity love-hungry men. For example, Cuiyuan naturally assumes that Zongzhen needs a woman's understanding, as she thinks "every married man in the world seems desperately in need of another woman's understanding" [6]. Therefore, after listening to Zongzhen's complaint, she expresses complete sympathy and is even more convinced that Zongzhen needs "a woman who would comfort and forgive him" [6]. Also, Zongzhen, as a wooer, is seeking maternal warmth from women, so he says, "My wife – she doesn't understand me at all" [6]. Hence, immediately afterwards, Cuiyuan and Zongzhen blush and the ambiguity reaches its

peak because of the man's desire for sympathy and the woman's motherhood. This is also why we can see in *Miss Sophia's Diary* that although Weidi is four years older than Sophia, Ding lets Sophia handle her relationship with Weidi as an elder sister, and when the key word elder sister appears, it is often accompanied by Sophia's self-condemnation and regret. Sophia's rejection and guilt correspond to the two roles of women in love and marriage: being a person who has the right to choose their own life and being a mother who needs to look after younger ones. Sophia's initiative in love, her examination of men, and her rejection of traditional female roles show the novel's critique of the male-dominated hierarchy and male-centric sexuality. Also, it shows the love dilemma of women, as these two roles can be experienced as mutually exclusive. Faced with wooer, women do not actually feel safe enough to fall in love, and they cannot achieve true equality in the gender relationship.

In addition to motherhood, money is another reason. Virginia Woolf attaches great importance to money for women's independence: "A woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction" [4]. This means that women need to have a certain financial base so that they can make their own decisions about what they want to do and what they do not want to do. However, in traditional Chinese society, marriage is not based on love, but on family interests, and is regarded as a bond that maximises the interests of two families. Women's value is firmly tied to marriage as they are considered to be unable to create profitable value through their labour but can only gain possible economic and social wellbeing by marrying a wealthy husband. In the words of proto-feminist Mary Wollstonecraft, "their persons often legally prostituted" [11], which means that women's marriages are often simply the legal sale of their bodies. Thus, in the context of a patriarchal society, money and free love often become contradictory, and this also causes Cuiyuan's love dilemma in *Sealed Off*. In this novel, Lv Zongzhen has a wooer side, for he regards Cuiyuan as a woman who is obedient to him. For example, Zongzhen yearns for a window of emotional release and talks at great lengths about his pent-up feelings in his family and life with Cuiyuan. "He told her all kinds of things: who at the bank was his real friend, and who was just pretending; how his family squabbled; his secret sorrows; his schoolboy dreams..." [6]. And how does Cuiyuan respond to Zongzhen's confession? She blushes and hangs her head shyly. Chang even provides a judgment of the two in the novel: "They were in love" [6]. However, even though this couple has a strong urge to love each other, Cuiyuan is not able to break through the constraints of traditional Chinese values imposed on her. She is not free, and even if she is willing to marry a man who is ten years older than her, her family will not agree on it, as Zongzhen has no money. These real psychological reasons are often overlooked by previous male writers, as women's authentic voices are often suppressed in traditional Chinese society, sometimes even without realising it – after all, "Women have served all these centuries as looking-glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size" [4].

Different from a wooer, love saviour refers to a man who is so attractive to women that he appears out of nowhere, like a dream, and makes women long for their love to be saved by such a man. Chinese and Western traditional cultures have very different attitudes to love saviour. In Chinese culture, heroes are mainly active in the male world; for example, the Four Great Chinese Novels, such as *Heroes of the Marshes* and *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, portray male heroes without a place for women. When it comes to the influence of women on the heroes in these novels, it is mostly negative, as women are defined as dangerous beauty. For instance, Bao Si, a character in Zhou dynasty, is considered to be the chief culprit that destroys Zhou. In Tang dynasty, Yang Yuhuan, the concubine of the Emperor, is blamed for interfering with the Emperor's decisions on government affairs. As for the history of Western literature, beautiful women can be favoured. Cavalier literature in medieval Europe is an example of how a man can express

his divine love and adoration for a woman. Also, there are many stories in fairy tales about girls being rescued by princes. The Prince Charming archetype, which mainly includes “Snow White”, “Sleeping Beauty” and “Cinderella”, for example, tells stories about a prince who rescues and woos a damsel in distress.

However, it is worth mentioning that the traditional Chinese literature has also evolved another model of the hero saving a beautiful woman, that is, talent matching a beautiful lady, which means that a talented scholar, even if he has no money, still has the opportunity to save a beautiful lady. As long as the scholar can achieve fame and social status, he can be regarded as the right person, just like Zhang Sheng in *The Romance of Western Bower* mentioned above. However, all three models are the products from the male perspective, where women have always been the object of rescue, and there is a suspicion of objectification, as these writers only measure women’s beauty, and therefore the independent and complete female personality is not reflected.

It should be noted that during the May Fourth Movement, when Western culture was introduced into China, the Prince Charming style of “the hero saving a beauty” often appeared in the works of female writers, showing a reflection of the authenticity of the love saviour. For instance, in *Sealed Off*, the relationship between saving and being saved is exemplified by Cuiyuan’s psychological transformation of Lv Zongzhen, and although Chang does not deliberately portray this in the novel, we can detect hints of it in the text. For example, as soon as the two begin to talk, Cuiyuan notices Zongzhen’s yellow hand resting on a newspaper, and for a moment she feels “flushed and happy” [6], because the person sitting next to her is a real person. But soon Cuiyuan is plunged into endless anguish, for Zongzhen has a family, but no money, and he is an extremely ordinary bank clerk; also, for she is unfree and ordinary. Thus, Cuiyuan ends up crying. Cuiyuan’s quest for freedom and love is, perhaps, like the possible drops of sweat smothering her palms in the tramcar, tickling her palms, like electricity reaching her heart, but without the energy to explode into more intense light. Cuiyuan represents the image of a more ordinary, unassuming woman who hesitates to reach out and touch the slightly opened door of feminism.

A more typical love saviour is Ling Jishi in *Miss Sophia’s Diary*, the beautiful, newly educated man from Singapore and Sophia’s dramatic change of attitude towards him in the novel symbolises an awakening of female consciousness. Initially attracted by his appearance, Sophia soon realises that Ling’s gorgeous exterior hides a vulgar heart. Sophia then lashes out at him in her diary: “All he wants is money. Money. A young wife to entertain his business associates in the living room, and several fat, fair-skinned, well-dressed little sons” [7]. From the development of Sophia’s relationship with Ling Jishi, we can summarise her psychological trajectory: yearning for an ideal lover (longing to be saved) – obsession with Ling – disillusionment – confusion and frustration – leaving home. Compared with Cuiyuan, the image of Sophia seems more pioneering and combative. However, it is clear from both novels’ endings that neither woman is redeemed, as Cuiyuan simply regards Zongzhen as someone she will never see again, Sophia decides to leave home alone, which raises the question: do women really need to be saved by a man?

At first, love saviours are not believed to have the capability of redeeming women. Therefore, the authenticity of this image is questionable. While traditional literature portrays the saviour as a weak scholar, often with a happy ending, the Prince Charming’ style of love saviour becomes idealised or even nihilistic in the writings of May Fourth women writers. On the other hand, however, the narrative model of men saving women is itself a product of patriarchal culture, in which women need to be dependent on men in order to have the possibility of rebirth. But, thankfully, these two works of fiction blur the boundaries between “object” and “subject” and between “subordinate” and “autonomous” roles that are often explicitly differentiated when it comes to gender relations.

In more depth, *Miss Sophia's Diary* and *Sealed Off* discover not only women but also "people", an important issue in Chinese modern literature. In the past, when female figures were stereotyped, male figures were also stereotyped, just like the traditional male figures we have already mentioned above. Thus, when women do not need to be saved, the status of male saviours also ceases to exist, and both groups of them become ordinary but real people in the world, who are equal to each other. This thus gives rich connotations to these two novels, which convey the view that true gender equality requires a fundamental change in the structure of society. Ibsen, talking about social reform in Europe, said, "The reshaping of social conditions which is now under way out there in Europe is concerned chiefly with the future position of the workingman and woman" [12] and the same is true of the May Fourth Movement in China. Female writers who created the "new woman" during the May Fourth Movement not only contributed a new image to literary history, but also contributed, consciously or unconsciously, to the feminist movement and to social reform, which also implies that social causes, women's causes and human causes should be considered altogether as a whole.

5 Conclusions

In conclusion, the new woman of the May Fourth Movement in China is, in a sense, pioneering, but not yet fully matured. The attitudes of the two female protagonists towards the men categorised as wooer and love saviour in this paper reflect the new women's daring pursuit of the self, their desire for love, and their decision to give up when love comes, laying bare the independent women characterised by mortification and repression in early 20th century Chinese society on one hand and a very realistic dilemma on the other: the contradictions among individual independence, dignity and gender inequality. The juxtaposition or fusion of physical-space and subjective-space in the two novels allows us to perceive the feminist world of the heroine from two different dimensions: physical and subjective. Through the physical-space, we find that the two texts represent the double metaphors associated with a new women's birth, and also demonstrate the writers' response to modernity in the context of China. With the subjective-space, it can be concluded that *Sealed Off* and *Miss Sophia's Diary* depart from the stereotypes of male and female figures in traditional Chinese literature, waving the banner of the woman and the real human being. The two spaces complement each other in the narrative and in the representation of the novel's themes; the setting of the physical space ferments the protagonists' mental activities, while their aspirations and desires simultaneously struggle against these small physical spaces. For the two female writers, Ding and Chang can be regarded as pioneers of feminist thought in early 20th century China, and in their works they convey the hope that women can escape social domestication and emancipate themselves. Focusing on the exploration of individuality, the two writers portrays women's quest for self and independence from imagining love to deconstructing love, using women's material desires as an undercurrent. The new image of women who confront a patriarchal society is significant and this female consciousness is both a brand of the times and a testament to the development of feminist thought in modern Chinese literature.

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