

Affective Realism in Han Bangqing's *Biographies of Shanghai Flowers***Abstract**

Han Bangqing's (1856-1894) novel *Biographies of Shanghai Flowers* (*Haishang hua liezhuan*, 1894) offers a vivid portrayal of the vicissitudes of courtesans and their clients against the backdrop of a modernizing Shanghai. Because of its attention to urban details, scholarly discussions of the novel emphasize its realistic impulse. Yet the "excess" of details undercuts the novel's realistic agenda. Focusing on the novel's representation and perception of space, this paper seeks to rethink the relationship between space and realism. Drawing upon anthropological and phenomenological approaches to space as "embodied," everyday life theory, and affect theory, it shows that space in the novel is a fluid, sensuous dimension that affects and is affected by human experience. Such a conceptualization of space restores the materiality of space and is key to apprehending the plurality of identities and cultural distinctions that characterize the novel's representation of Shanghai. Finally, a reflection on the structure of desire embedded in the complex linguistic and cultural make-up of the novel illuminates the text's construction of an "affective realism" addressing a common sensorium that, borrowing Lauren Berlant's words, can only be "attended to."

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