

The Literary Geography of Nanjing in Ge Liang's Novel Scarlet Finch

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How to cite this paper: Liu, X. (2025). The Literary Geography of Nanjing in Ge Liang's Novel Scarlet Finch. *Literature, Language and Cultural Studies*, 2(2), 109-120. ISSN Print: 3079-5095; ISSN Online: 3079-5109.

<https://doi.org/10.63313/LLCS.9081>

Published: 2025-09-01

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Abstract

Ge Liang's novel *Scarlet Finch* employs a meticulous narrative style to depict Nanjing's cultural heritage and humanistic spirit, as well as the city's unique character—one that embraces classical traditions while embracing modernity—forged by its distinctive natural geography and profound historical legacy. Taking Ge Liang's novel *Scarlet Finch* as a case study, this paper employs literary geography to analyze the depictions of natural and human geographical environments within the work. It interprets two representative geographical symbols—the Qinhuai River and the Scarlet Finch—to explore the multifaceted connotations of the geographical spaces and imagery presented in *Scarlet Finch*: the historical orientation of urban memory, the folk orientation of the “radish spirit,” and the urban orientation blending old and new.

Keywords

Literary Geography; Ge Liang; *Scarlet Finch*; Nanjing; Novel

1. Introduction

Every writer carries within them a unique city or village, etched into their soul. Through the accumulation of life experiences and cultural insights, they repeatedly refine this space, transforming it into a “magical word” that carries emotions and thoughts, becoming a spiritual anchor for their creative work. Thus, writing about a city often reflects the shared spiritual landscape of a writer and their cultural community. Nanjing, as Ge Liang's hometown where he grew up, is precisely such a deeply symbolic space. Born and raised here, he completed his early education before relocating to Hong Kong. This experience of movement between “two cities” endows his portrayal of Nanjing with a more complex and profound perspective. Interpreting *The Scarlet Finch* through the lens of literary geography helps us delve into Ge Liang's dual creative intentions: on one hand, tracing the historical echoes of Nanjing's past; on the other, contemplating the city's future path amid modernization.

2. Scarlet Finch: The Geographical DNA Written in Nanjing

Ge Liang once candidly stated: “ ‘Nanjing’ represents the intrinsic texture of my writing—it is not merely a subject matter for my works, but also embodies my literary aesthetics, my historical perspective, and how I examine the causes behind historical events, encompassing multiple dimensions.” [1] Deeply influenced by Nanjing's culture, he meticulously sketches vivid portraits of ordinary citizens' lives within the city. While studying in Hong Kong, Ge Liang completed his novel *Scarlet Finch*, channeling profound nostalgia for his hometown Nanjing while examining the city's historical transformations and contemporary development. “Geographical genes are intimately linked to the emergence of literature. They are the explicit or implicit imprint left on a writer by the combined influence of specific natural and cultural environments.” [2] Within every writer's literary world lies a “geographical gene” as deeply ingrained as their own flesh and blood. This imprint, shaped by both natural and cultural landscapes, forms the spiritual starting point of their narrative logic. The portrayal of Nanjing in *Scarlet Finch* is intrinsically tied to the city's unique natural landscapes and cultural traditions. Nanjing's geographical genes have deeply permeated Ge Liang's creative consciousness, enabling him to vividly and effortlessly recreate the city's geographical imagery.

2.1. Nanjing's Natural Environment

Nanjing's unique topography features the Purple Mountain range encircling the city on three sides, forming a scoop-like structure. The mild, humid maritime climate finds no way to penetrate this barrier. Moreover, within this enclosed terrain, moisture from the Yangtze River persistently evaporates, dispersing into the city's air and coalescing into a viscous airflow.”[3] Within Nanjing, mountains, waterways, urban landscapes, and forests intertwine, while rivers, lakes, and springs complement each other. The Yangtze River flows through the city, while the Qinhuai and Jinchuan rivers wind around it. Xuanwu Lake, Mochao Lake, and Baijia Lake dot the landscape. It is famously described as: “In spring, stroll through the misty haze of Niushan; in summer, admire the clear clouds over Zhongfu; in autumn, ascend to the scenic heights of Qixia; in winter, behold the snow-covered Stone City after a storm.”

The humid climate and abundant waterways have shaped Nanjing's gentle and inclusive urban character, providing Ge Liang with ideal conditions to construct the geographical landscapes in his writing. This environment also lends his prose a soft, expansive, and unhurried quality. Ge Liang's novels often focus on the lives of ordinary people in the city, skillfully revealing broad historical contexts and societal transformations through subtle details, all while maintaining a calm and meticulous narrative tone. The *Scarlet Finch* reflects the elusive relationship between individual fate and grand historical currents: during the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution, Cheng Yunhe and his family lived cautiously, shutting their doors to

guard their own lives and tending to their daily meals. Ge Liang chronicles Cheng Yunhe's domestic routines—such as “inventing a vegetarian stir-fry with fried rice, tofu, and carrots” —reflecting her mindset of treating the small space of home as a barrier between daily life and society. Nanjing's distinctive geographical features, rendered through Ge Liang's delicate brushstrokes, weave into the fabric of the novel. The natural landscapes depicted in the work also carry the author's profound environmental experiences and emotional memories of the city. Ge Liang employs numerous imagery to recreate a tender retrospective of Nanjing life, with natural and geographical motifs occupying a prominent position. Having spent over a decade in Nanjing, Ge Liang possesses an intimate familiarity with the local natural environment. He organically integrates these geographical elements into the textual construction, conveying a unique sense of place through vivid and detailed descriptions, achieving an organic unity of aesthetic experience and geographical imagery.

2.2. Nanjing's Cultural Environment

Nanjing's historical traditions permeate every detail of its cultural landscape: the city boasts numerous magnificent ancient structures, each imbued with profound historical significance. It inherits the refined spirit of Jiangnan culture—the Jiangnan Imperial Examination Hall once served as a pivotal venue for the imperial examination system, while the Kuiguang Pavilion was a gathering place for literati to compose poetry and exchange verses... Every facet of Nanjing exudes a rich classical charm. Strolling through its streets and alleys feels like stepping into the river of history, allowing one to personally experience the city's inherent elegance. Having grown up in Nanjing, Ge Liang knows every brick, stone, blade of grass, and tree here intimately. Consequently, his writing naturally flows with the unique classical sentiment characteristic of Nanjing.

Ge Liang's portrayal of Nanjing's classical elegance is embodied not only in his refined and elegant linguistic style, but also in the traditional virtues embodied by his characters and the graceful spatial atmosphere constructed within the novel. He frequently draws upon classical texts, seamlessly weaving their timeless spirit into the narrative. This approach not only connects the plot threads but also cultivates a uniquely Nanjing-inspired, ancient and refined ambiance. Cheng Nan, a tour guide, recites Li Qingzhao's lyrics to passengers aboard a cruise ship: “Flowers drift away, water flows on. One shared longing, two places of idle sorrow.” It is precisely this tender and poignant Song Dynasty verse that quietly awakens middle-aged man Taylor's affection for Cheng Nan. The cipher system devised by this foreign tourist, Taylor, was inspired by China's ancient seven-tone musical scale: “Seven original codes corresponded to the five fundamental tones and two altered tones of the medieval pentatonic scale, arranged into a cipher set based on the generative ratios of fifths—which also served as musical notation.” [3] Ye Yuzhi's father, Ye Chusheng, embodied the refined elegance of a traditional herbalist. His mentor-disciple bond

with the Japanese writer Akutagawa began and ended over a chessboard. After the outbreak of Japan's invasion of China, Ye Chusheng resolutely chose national duty over personal friendship, refusing to yield even on the chessboard—a metaphor for the unyielding resistance of the Chinese people against the aggressors beyond the game. Ge Liang places Ye Chusheng's actions above personal loyalty, rendering this character rich and profound. The novel also frequently features refined settings like opera stages and teahouses, providing narrative spaces steeped in cultural elegance that further amplify its classical ambiance. It can be said that Ge Liang's profound cultivation in traditional culture directly fosters the classical atmosphere in his work, reflecting his inheritance and continuation of the refined spirit of the Jiangnan literary tradition.

3. The Referential Nature of Typical Geographical Imagery in *Scarlet Finch*

“Geographical spaces are often represented in literary works through imagery” [4], and the study of geographical imagery constitutes one of the key research methods in literary geography. Such geographical imagery enables textual creation and criticism to “return to the scene of literary vitality through three-dimensional coupling,” meaning “the humanistic transformation and literary aesthetics interact, complement, and mutually interpret with geographical elements, thereby grounding spiritual achievements in the earth of human activity” [5]. Within specific narrative contexts, geographical imagery functions as symbolic carriers of profound cultural connotations. It is both shaped by the author's subjective consciousness and contributes to its construction, emerging as the refined product of the author's aesthetic experiences. From a literary geography perspective, geographical imagery can be repeatedly inscribed by writers and continuously interpreted by readers. In this sense, the richness of geographical imagery in a work directly reflects the author's depth of perception and writing attitude toward the region. Even the same geographical image may present entirely different connotations across different texts. Ge Liang excels at conveying complex metaphors through diverse imagery, achieving a high degree of fusion between his subjective emotions and objective objects. In *Scarlet Finch*, two primary images are closely tied to Nanjing's geographical landscape: the Qinhuai River and the Scarlet Finch.

3.1. The Qinhuai River: Undercurrents in Motion

“The depiction of natural landscapes in a literary work—or multiple works—often reveals the author's aesthetic perspective, taste, and attitude. By examining these, one can grasp the writer's creative mindset and aesthetic individuality, thereby further interpreting the work's ideological value and aesthetic significance.” [6] In *Small Rivers and Mountains*, Ge Liang writes: “In truth, Nanjing has another river. Within the city, it meets the people day and night, its waters still and its winds calm.

Because of history, and because of a certain frivolous elegance. This river is actually closer to the people, connected to its everyday life and its gentle, refined spirit.” [7] Compared to the Yangtze River, the Qinhuai River seems more intimate with the people of Nanjing, having become a geographical symbol of the city. It has witnessed the transformations of Nanjing and merged with the cultural character of the city.

The Qinhuai River in Ge Liang’s writing serves not only as a metaphor for the characters’ emotional journeys but also as a witness and reflection of their shifting destinies and emotional anchors. For him, the river embodies the intrinsic spirit of Nanjing, carrying the city’s unique “misty water aura.” In *Scarlet Finch*, the Qinhuai River takes on more concrete connotations, rich with layered meanings. The Qinhuai River motif recurs throughout *Scarlet Finch*, serving as a witness to the characters’ love story. Cheng Nan and Xu Tingmai’s romance began with a chance encounter: after arriving in Nanjing, Xu Tingmai first visited the Qinhuai River. Though he found the scenery less than ideal, he unexpectedly met Cheng Nan after losing track of Xiao Han, the university student he had arranged to meet. The river’s poetic, picturesque atmosphere created an intimate setting for their connection. They celebrated Cheng Nan’s birthday at a renowned teahouse along the riverbank. It was on this very day that Xu Tingmai learned of the deep pain and hidden secrets within Cheng Nan’s family. This shared knowledge drew them closer, intensifying their bond. In truth, long before her romance with Xu Tingmai, Cheng Nan had experienced an emotional interlude with an American named Taylor along the Qinhuai River. During the height of summer, the river carried a faint, musty scent that unsettled the foreign tourists in their tour group. They urged their guide, Cheng Nan, to lift their spirits with song. Cheng Nan softly sang in her imperfect English, her voice soft yet piercing, deeply moving Taylor. He instinctively joined her in harmony, his deep, resonant voice accompanying hers, quietly awakening Cheng Nan’s longing for love. Just as the Qinhuai River appears serene yet harbors turbulent currents beneath, Cheng Nan’s two romantic relationships navigated twists and turns beneath seemingly calm surfaces, ultimately failing to reach a happy ending. The emotional trajectories of the characters seemed to resonate with the fate of the Qinhuai River. While narrating Cheng Nan’s love story, the work also skillfully intertwined the past and present of Nanjing City.

The tranquil surface of the Qinhuai River and the turbulent currents beneath it metaphorically capture Nanjing’s dual nature. “Amidst the city’s grand spectacle, there persists something decaying yet enduring.” [3] This decay cannot see the light of day—like the private gambling dens run by Cheng Nan’s family, or the secret ingredient in the savory salted duck heads: poppy seeds. The Qinhuai River blurs the line between the refined and the vulgar: above the surface lies the city’s bright sunshine, beneath the water lies a dark, hidden current. At fifteen, Cheng Yunhe was sold to a flower boat on the Qinhuai River. Harden by years of hardship, she rose to become the boat’s top courtesan—a status that later subjected her to criticism during the Cultural Revolution. Cheng Yichu, driven by desperation, married Old Wei, the man

who had raped her. Ultimately, Old Wei drowned in the Qinhuai River one rainy night while saving his adopted son. These memories gradually faded beneath the dust of daily life, much like Nanjing's own resilience and tolerance toward its historical scars. Where there is light, shadows inevitably follow. Through the geographical symbol of the Qinhuai River, Ge Liang guides readers deep into the authentic and complex fabric of Nanjing's life. Perhaps the city's truest essence lies precisely in its refusal to conceal those dark corners.

Throughout history, the Qinhuai River and Nanjing have maintained an intertwined relationship, each reflecting the other. The vicissitudes of the Qinhuai River seem to mirror the developmental trajectory of Nanjing City. Once crystal clear and bright, the Qinhuai River inspired longing in many readers of Yu Pingbo and Zhu Ziqing's essay "The Qinhuai River in the Glow of Lanterns and the Sound of Oars." Yet the river in reality often left visitors disappointed. In Ge Liang's depiction, the Qinhuai's waters appear dark and murky, emitting a putrid odor. This prompted Xu Tingmai, who had arrived with high expectations, to bluntly declare, "This is the most polluted river I have ever seen in my life." By juxtaposing the once-clear Qinhuai with its present murky state, Ge Liang reflects profoundly on the environmental degradation accompanying Nanjing's urban development. While tourism's prosperity has fueled economic growth amid the city's relentless modernization, profit-driven economic activities are quietly eroding its cultural foundations. Using the Qinhuai River as a highly symbolic geographical image, the author profoundly conveys his concerns about Nanjing's current state. In Ge Liang's view, the river's "pathological condition" serves as a metaphor for the cultural and ecological crisis facing the city of Nanjing.

3.2. The Mysterious Scarlet Finch

The geographical characteristics of literary works can be represented not only through natural imagery but also through the humanistic imagery depicted by authors. Humanistic imagery refers to "objects in literary works that are related to human creation" [8], primarily materializing in a city as architecture, streets, modes of transportation, and fictional figures born from cultural concepts. Such human-related imagery not only provides cultural context and spatial grounding for character activities but also possesses independent aesthetic value. Readers can discern the author's emotional inclinations and aesthetic pursuits through these elements. Within specific narrative contexts, humanistic imagery often carries deeper symbolic functions, playing an indispensable role in advancing plot development and conveying thematic expressions.

In Ge Liang's literary works, humanistic imagery is rich and diverse, from minute gold bird-shaped ornaments to grand cathedral architecture, each imbued with profound cultural significance. Among these symbols, the "Scarlet Finch" carries the most complex connotations. Originating from ancient Chinese mythology, the Scarlet Finch is revered as the divine beast representing the south. Named for its flame-like

plumage, it stands alongside the Azure Dragon, White Tiger, and Black Tortoise as one of the Four Divine Beasts. As a significant cultural symbol, the Scarlet Finch shares profound historical ties with Nanjing. Twenty-four floating bridges once spanned the Qinhuai River in Nanjing, the most magnificent being the Scarlet Finch Bridge, whose history traces back to the Eastern Jin Dynasty. During that era, the aristocratic clans of the Wang and Xie families, who had relocated south, resided in Wuyi Alley, making the area around the Scarlet Finch Bridge a hub of opulent prosperity. As time passed, these noble houses gradually declined, echoing Liu Yuxi's lament: "The swallows that once nested in the Wang and Xie mansions now fly into the homes of ordinary folk." Ge Liang's choice of the Scarlet Finch imagery stems both from his reverence for classical culture and his intent to establish a literary narrative anchor for Nanjing, the "home city" to which he belongs. As the ancient capital of six dynasties, Nanjing has endured both golden ages and modern traumas—from the Taiping Rebellion battles in the late Qing dynasty to the Japanese invasion and massacres of the modern era. Layers of historical memory have imbued this city with a profound sense of vicissitude. "The Scarlet Finch symbolizes bygone splendor, yet it has faded—a sentiment that resonates profoundly with Nanjing's classical essence gradually dissolving in modern society." [9] The Scarlet Finch imagery in Ge Liang's work encompasses two distinct objects: the Scarlet Finch Hangar and the gold Scarlet Finch pendant. The latter weaves through the destinies of three generations of women in the Cheng family, reflecting both the tragic historical fate of Nanjing's women and the author's nostalgia for the classical charm of the ancient city of Jinling, now fading from memory. Xu Tingmai, a foreigner of Nanjing descent, arrives to study in the city where he meets and falls in love with Cheng Nan. Through his perspective, the hidden family secrets behind the Scarlet Finch pendant gradually unfold: After Nanjing fell during the War of Resistance, Ye Yuzhi was brutally raped by Japanese invaders while fleeing the safety zone. With her dying strength, she gave birth to a daughter and entrusted her with the golden Scarlet Finch pendant. Ye Yuzhi's daughter was entrusted by Father Cher to be raised by the prostitute Cheng Yunhe, named Cheng Yichu. Cheng Yichu gave the Scarlet Finch pendant as a token of love to her lover Lu Yiwei; Lu Yiwei, an overseas Chinese, was caught up in the Anti-Rightist Movement during his relationship with Cheng Yichu and exiled to the Great Northern Wilderness, taking the Scarlet Finch pendant with him; After Cheng Yichu and Lu Yiwei parted ways, the vermilion phoenix pendant returned to Nanjing. Ultimately, Cheng Nan entrusted it to her boyfriend Xu Tingmai to take to Canada. This small vermilion phoenix ornament bore the tumultuous emotions and destinies of three generations. The three female protagonists, whose lives are inextricably linked to the Scarlet Finch motif, all possess a fierce capacity for both love and hatred. Though entangled by love and sustained by it, they struggled in vain to break free from fate's shackles. Yet they consistently faced life's heavy burdens with courage. Thus, the Scarlet Finch motif not only artistically intertwines the characters' destinies but also

becomes a cultural symbol of their resilient spirit.

4. The Geospatial Orientation of Nanjing in *Scarlet Finch*

Textual space is inherently non-monolithic, possessing a certain degree of complexity. Scholars such as Mei Xinlin and Ge Yonghai contend that geographical space within literary works “refers both to the compounding of spatial attributes—such as the permeation and transformation between political, religious, and secular spaces—and to the interweaving of spatial forms, including the interplay and transcendence of real, historical, and virtual spaces” [10]. Relying on geographical space, *The Scarlet Finch* reflects upon Nanjing's historical culture and traditional spirit, constructing three temporal-spatial dimensions centered around the Anti-Japanese War, the Cultural Revolution era, and the millennium. These three dimensions are presented in an interwoven manner, reflecting Nanjing's profound transformations and endowing its geographical space with threefold connotations: historical orientation, folk orientation, and urban orientation.

4.1. Historical Orientation—The Memory of a City

Every city possesses its unique history, which forms the very foundation of its existence. Nanjing takes particular pride in its profound historical legacy. “This is a city inescapably steeped in history. Wherever you go, you walk in the shadow of the past.” [11] Nearly every sight within Nanjing carries distant historical roots, evoking profound reflections. The grand narrative space constructed by Ge Liang in *Scarlet Finch* is permeated throughout with the imprint of Nanjing's history. The novel's historical retrospective, presented through its geographical setting, primarily focuses on Nanjing's transformations over the past half-century. Centered on the destinies of three generations of women from the Cheng family, the narrative spans from Nanjing during the War of Resistance Against Japan to the dawn of the new millennium, seamlessly linking wartime Nanjing, Nanjing during the Cultural Revolution, and Nanjing in the new century. Nanjing endured immense suffering during the war: “On the twelfth day of the twelfth month, Japanese forces breached Nanjing's city defenses, surging through the southern breach like a tidal wave” [3], followed by the horrific Nanjing Massacre that engulfed the city. During the Cultural Revolution, Nanjing descended into chaos. The Soviet-style architecture Cheng Yichu witnessed en route to the Workers' Cultural Palace starkly marked the historical imprint of that tumultuous era. At that time, Nanjing “had entered late autumn, its landscape bleak and desolate. Posters of all sizes plastered both sides of the wide streets, even covering the roadside sycamore trees. Layer upon layer of posters were stuck on, like patches piled upon patches” [3]. By the turn of the millennium, Nanjing presented a duality of thriving modernity and gradually receding classical culture. Skyscrapers steadily encroached upon traditional architecture, while the tide of commerce gradually submerged the city's historically imbued composure

and elegance. The passage of time has left traces, deep and shallow, across Nanjing's cityscape. By capturing the geographical and spatial information embedded within the text, readers can perceive the historical transformations of this city through the flow of time.

Moreover, certain geographical landmarks and place names in *Scarlet Finch* offer readers clues to trace Nanjing's more profound historical roots. The ancient relics preserved within the city walls and the architecturally named sites rich in classical cultural connotations collectively bear the historical memory embedded within this city's geographical space. The Jiangnan Imperial Examination Hall along the Qinhuai River, once the venue where ancient scholars took the imperial examinations, bears witness to the region's former literary prosperity; The ruins of the Ming Imperial Palace and the surviving steles of the Ming Xiaoling Mausoleum narrate its glorious past as the dynasty's capital; while geographical motifs like the Qinhuai River and the Suzaku Waterway reflect the graceful charm that has enveloped Nanjing since the Six Dynasties period. Though most of these ancient complexes have now lost their original functions and value, they remain indispensable symbols in the fabric of Nanjing's historical narrative.

4.2. Folk Orientation— “The Spirit of the Great Radish”

The *Scarlet Finch* not only constructs spatial settings like ancient architectural complexes imbued with traditional cultural charm but also vividly portrays the bustling, everyday scenes of modern urban life. Ge Liang excels at using everyday narratives to downplay grand historical accounts, guiding readers to understand Nanjing from a grassroots perspective. Critic Wang Dewei once remarked: “Ge Liang seems more interested in evoking a state or mindset called ‘Nanjing.’” [12] Ge Liang seeks to evoke precisely this authentic, enduring essence of Nanjing—a resilient spirit that persists through change. Rather than fixating on the city's constant flux, he traces its enduring constants within that flux. On their way to the gambling den, Cheng Nan leads Xu Tingmai past a garbage dump piled high, exuding an overwhelming stench; Upon entering, Xu Tingmai was startled to find “seven or eight semi-new billiard tables before him, surrounded by a dense crowd of men” [3]. Ge Liang focuses his pen on the everyday scenes of ordinary Nanjing citizens, meticulously sketching the city's visage through the tapestry of mundane life. He does not shy away from depicting the harsh realities born in the city's shadows but incorporates them truthfully into his portrayal of Nanjing. These spaces, brimming with the essence of ordinary life, were precisely where Nanjing's “radish spirit” found its sustenance. Similar depictions appear in *The Seven Voices at Chaotian Palace*—a large, flea-market-like venue bustling with antique dealers, small traders, and street performers beating gongs, drumming, or showcasing monkey tricks.

These spaces provide ordinary people with venues for daily interaction and activities, crystallizing the essence of secular culture. Such spaces form a spatial contrast to the

modern, bustling metropolis depicted by Ge Liang, pointing to Nanjing's folk culture—particularly its “radish spirit,” characterized by its down-to-earth, unpretentious nature that embraces all walks of life. Nanjing's “radish spirit” embodies the city's down-to-earth, hardworking, contented, and life-affirming ethos—a metaphor for its residents' daily grind of rice, oil, salt, and firewood. From a narrative perspective, *Scarlet Finch* stands as a literary chronicle of Nanjing's local character—the Confucius Temple, West Market, Jiangnan Imperial Examination Hall, Shengqi Tower, Kuiguang Pavilion... These landmarks steeped in historical memory have long permeated the daily lives of Nanjing residents. Salted duck, plum blossom cakes, the Eight Delicacies of Qinhuai... these quintessentially Nanjing culinary symbols infuse their associated spaces with a rich sense of life and belonging. As a vital component of secular life, Ge Liang meticulously portrays Nanjing's culinary customs and their spatial contexts, revealing the cultural psyche and spiritual pursuits of its citizens while showcasing their careful cultivation of domestic life. “Old Nanjingers place great importance on the Winter Solstice. ‘Winter Solstice is as grand as New Year, for it marks the peak of darkness when yang energy begins to rise. Tofu, consumed for its ‘golden energy,’ counteracts the lingering yin. As the saying goes, ‘Vegetables and tofu ensure peace and safety.’ In past years, Yunhe would buy paper money to burn according to tradition—one for the deceased Colonel Chen, the other for Chu Chu's own mother.”[3] Nanjing residents live with a calm, unhurried demeanor, maintaining stable, orderly lives where even mundane tasks are meticulously arranged. Ge Liang's vivid portrayal of these everyday details infuses the work with authentic, moving vitality. This serves not only as a decoding of civic culture and spirit but also as a profound understanding and preservation of Nanjing's folk traditions.

4.3. Urban Orientation: The Fusion of New and Old

Industrial mass production significantly accelerated urbanization, while the vigorous development of modern commerce further intensified the era's pursuit of urbanization. As a product of consumer society, modern urban spaces offer people more convenient living conditions and environments. The continuous emergence of new entertainment venues in cities has inspired writers to express bodily sensations and desires more directly, resulting in works that exhibit distinct tendencies toward consumer culture and entertainment. Ge Liang offers a unique perspective and profound insights into Nanjing's urban development and transformation. The Nanjing depicted in his writing is propelled forward by consumer culture and commercial culture, presenting a blend of the new and the old.

Nanjing's urban character, a blend of old and new, is most evident in its ancient architectural complexes. The ancient architectural complexes depicted in *Scarlet Finch* are cloaked in a false hue: “The walls, covered in blue tiles, should have exuded profound antiquity, yet they appeared freshly renovated, painted snow-white and

delicate” [3]. The stark contrast between the mottled blue tiles and the pristine white walls reflects modern society's cognitive biases and aesthetic misconceptions in the preservation of ancient structures. How to ensure classical architecture survives and gains respect within modern cities has become a pressing issue in Nanjing's urban development. The Chaotian Palace area, as Nanjing's largest ancient architectural complex, forms the Qinhuai Scenic Belt alongside the Qinhuai River and Confucius Temple—a geographical zone rich in historical and cultural heritage. Yet under the relentless pressure of consumerist culture, the ancient buildings in this area undergo constant renovation and transformation. The Confucius Temple has transformed into a bustling hub. While its exterior retains the smoky-hued walls and mud-white brick joints, its interior has evolved into Nanjing's new consumer landmark, hosting numerous dining, entertainment, and shopping venues. Facing the expansion of modern urban consumer culture, some of Nanjing's time-honored establishments, unable to meet the ever-changing demands of the masses, have been forced to quietly exit the stage of history.

Beyond the seclusion of old buildings, new landmarks are emerging in Nanjing. In Zhuque's portrayal of the city, the iconic modern space is the gallery: “One wall displays scroll paintings, another features oil paintings, while a third holds a freely adjustable display rack showcasing small sculptures and enamelware” [3]. Scrolls and enamelware embody the essence of traditional Chinese culture, while oil paintings and sculptures represent the introduction of Western art. Named “Moshang” (a homophone for ‘Monet’ and “Cézanne”), the gallery's very title suggests a dialogue and fusion of Chinese and Western cultures. These symbols, emerging from Nanjing's collision of old and new ideas, allow readers to perceive the complexity of urban spaces where traditional cultural elements intertwine with modern consumer logic. They also prompt deeper reflection on how Nanjing, as a modern metropolis, should integrate Eastern and Western cultures and establish its own cultural identity within urban development.

Acknowledgements

This work was supported in part by a grant from JIANGSU EDUCATION DEPARTMENT. Funding: Postgraduate Research & Practice Innovation Program of Jiangsu Province, Project Number: KYCX25_1534.

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