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Cultural Heterotopias and the Spatial Logic of Guilt and Shame: A Comparative Reading of *The Scarlet Letter* and *The New Year's Sacrifice*

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Abstract

This paper offers a culturally oriented comparative reading of Nathaniel Hawthorne's The Scarlet Letter (1850) and Lu Xun's The New Year's Sacrifice (1924) through Michel Foucault's theory of heterotopia. It explores how central and peripheral spaces encode cultural values and power: the scaffold and the ancestral hall are examined as disciplinary sites through which Puritan and Confucian cultural rituals regulate the body, gender, and moral conduct; the forest and the Earth God Temple are read as counter-sites where Hester and Xianglin's Wife perform resistance that remains culturally conditioned and limited. By juxtaposing the two texts, the paper highlights the contrast between Western guilt culture and Chinese shame culture in their spatial logic of punishment, confession, shame, and social exclusion. It thereby treats heterotopia as a culturally situated concept and asks how far it can be translated across cultural contexts to illuminate non-Western literary spaces without erasing their local meanings.

Keywords

The Scarlet Letter, *The New Year's Sacrifice*, heterotopia, spatial power, comparison

1. Introduction

1.1 Research Background

1.1.1 Introduction to the Works

Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* (1850), a canonical work of American Romanticism, recounts a tragic love story set in 17th-century New England. The protagonist Hester Prynne has an affair with Reverend Arthur Dimmesdale after her husband Roger Chillingworth is presumed lost at sea, and gives birth to their daughter Pearl. As punishment for adultery, she is sentenced by the Puritan community to wear the scarlet letter "A" on her chest for life as a public mark of sin. On the town scaffold, she refuses to name her accomplice, then retreats to live on the margins of the settlement and supports herself and her child through needlework. Dimmesdale, meanwhile, suffers crippling mental torment from concealing his sin, and ultimately dies after making a public confession on the scaffold. Hester, by contrast, gradually wins the community's respect through years of quiet charity and diligent labor.

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Lu Xun's *The New Year's Sacrifice* (1924), a landmark work of modern Chinese literary realism, is set in Lu Town, a small riverside town in early 20th-century Jiangnan. The protagonist, Xianglin's Wife, flees to Lu Town to work as a domestic servant after her first husband's death, only to be abducted by her in-laws and forced into a second marriage. When her second husband dies of illness and her son Amao is killed by a wolf, she is branded an ill-omened woman who "brings ruin to her husbands and children," and is shunned by the entire town. In a desperate bid to redeem her ritual purity, she spends all her savings to donate a threshold to the local Earth God Temple, hoping the threshold will bear her sins as it is trodden by thousands of visitors. Even so, she remains forbidden from participating in ancestral sacrificial rituals. She eventually descends into beggary and freezes to death on the street on New Year's Eve — the very night the town holds its annual "Blessing" ceremony.

1.1.2 Literary Reception

The Scarlet Letter holds a seminal position in American literary history. In *American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman*, F. O. Matthiessen classifies the novel as a core text of the American Renaissance, arguing that it marks the maturation of American literature as an independent tradition distinct from European literary models [1]. D. H. Lawrence, in *Studies in Classic American Literature*, describes *The Scarlet Letter* as "a marvelous allegory. One of the greatest allegories in all literature, I think. *The Scarlet Letter!* Wonderful inwardness! Perfect double meaning!"[2]. Henry James, in his critical monograph *Hawthorne*, calls it "the finest piece of imaginative writing yet put forth in the country" [3].

The New Year's Sacrifice is widely regarded as the pinnacle of Lu Xun's short fiction. In *A History of Modern Chinese Fiction*, C. T. Hsia points out that in the story, "'feudalism' and 'superstition' become flesh and blood, no longer mere slogans of anti-traditional propaganda," and ranks it among the most profound fictional works examining society in modern China [4]. Fredric Jameson's theory of "national allegory," formulated in Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism, provides a pivotal critical framework for interpreting Lu Xun's depiction of the existential plight of subaltern masses in old China. Jameson argues that all third-world literary texts inevitably function as national allegories, a reading he develops at length through Lu Xun's fiction [5].

Writing from the standpoints of Western sinology and Western critical theory respectively, these two scholars have firmly established *The New Year's Sacrifice* as a text of major literary and cultural significance.

1.2 Research Significance

Though produced in vastly different historical and cultural contexts, Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* (1850) and Lu Xun's *The New Year's Sacrifice* (1924) converge in their depiction of how power disciplines individual subjects through spatial ordering, and how marginalized groups negotiate and resist oppression. The two female protagonists share striking parallels: both face moral condemnation for transgressing marital and sexual norms, both are cast out as outsiders from mainstream society, and their children — Pearl and Amao — each play a pivotal role in shaping the narrative and the protagonists' fates. These formal and thematic parallels provide the analytical foundation for this comparative study.

This study carries both theoretical and practical significance. Theoretically, it mobilizes Foucault's theory of heterotopia to re-read the two canonical works through a spatial lens. It examines the feasibility of applying Foucault's framework to a cross-cultural comparison of these two texts, and reveals the divergent cultural logics of power operation and the differing possibilities of resistance embedded in Puritan and Confucian societies.

1.3 Research Questions

The foregoing cultural and spatial comparison indicates that both novels organize power through culturally specific central and marginal spaces, yet the meanings and effects of these spaces are not identical. It remains to be seen how disciplinary power operates through the scaffold and the ancestral hall, how resistance functions in the forest and the Earth God Temple, and whether Foucault's heterotopia can serve as a valid framework across Western and Chinese cultural contexts. Accordingly, this study addresses the following questions:

1. How does power exercise disciplinary control over individual subjects through central spatial formations — namely the scaffold in *The Scarlet Letter* and the ancestral hall in *The New Year's Sacrifice*?

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2. What is the actual effect of resistance enacted in marginal spaces (the forest and the Earth God Temple), and what underlying cultural factors account for the divergent outcomes of resistance across the two texts?

3. Is Foucault's theory of heterotopia applicable and valid as a unifying analytical framework for this comparative study?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Spatial Studies of *The Scarlet Letter*

In "*Of Other Spaces*", Foucault observes that beyond real space there exist "heterogeneous" spaces—places that are at once internal to society and yet, in some manner, suspend its everyday order [6]. This notion offers a theoretical coordinate for reading the spatial politics of *The Scarlet Letter*. Textually, Hawthorne's narrative is markedly spatial: the chapter titles "The Prison-Door", "The Market-Place", "The Governor's Hall", and "The Forest" already chart the movement of the story across distinct sites. As Yuan Xiaohua and Yang Jincai put it, "Time and space are like an abacus in Hawthorne's hands, which he shifts and rearranges at will. He breaks the chain of linear time and reassembles spatial images into new configurations" [7]. Since the "spatial turn" entered the purview of literary criticism, scholarship on Hawthorne's spatial forms has grown steadily.

Within narratological studies of spatial structure, Mao Lingying offers a systematic account of the novel's spatial forms and of the narrative effects Hawthorne deliberately achieves through the interplay of physical and psychological space [8]. Fu Xiaodan pursues a similar approach to the novel's spatial environments, showing how Hawthorne deploys a range of representational techniques to construct multi-layered spaces that mirror the inner lives of his characters [9]. Yuan and Yang further argue that Hawthorne uses a device of "temporal-spatial juxtaposition" to bridge the diachronic and the synchronic, thereby forging narrative unity. A second strand of scholarship approaches the novel from an ethical angle: Yu Hang divides the story's settings into several types, including carnivalesque space, and unpacks the intricate relation between these spaces and Hester's evolving ethical self-understanding [10]; Zhang Zhiling, for her part, examines Hester's dual ethical identity as both wife and lover [11].

The scaffold and the forest, the two spaces central to this study, respectively embody social and natural space and thus form an axis of inherent opposition. Scholars have developed a relatively mature interpretive tradition around this binary structure. Mao Lingying systematically maps the novel's spatial imagery and explicitly argues that the public disciplinary space centered on the scaffold and the natural marginal space centered on the forest constitute the most fundamental binary framework of the book: the former carries the punitive and moral-exhibitory functions of Puritan society, while the latter corresponds to the suspension of morality and the release of human nature; together they underwrite the novel's spatial narrative logic[8]. Pringle reads the marketplace pillory as the stage on which the community displays Hester and fixes the meaning of the letter, whereas "A Forest Walk" turns the letter into "her passport into regions where other women dared not tread", setting the ordered town against a peripheral, lawless wilderness—a contrast he reads, with Foucault, as circulating power rather than a fixed center [12]. Levy likewise pairs a sublime mode attached to the Moral Law and the minister's midnight vigil with a picturesque, lawless forest where Hester releases herself by casting off the letter [13].

At the level of individual spaces, Takao argues that Hawthorne reconstructs the civic consciousness of a Puritan town through a topological displacement between the "Custom-House" and Boston, [14]; in my reading, the scaffold serves as the node within this public space where the body of the transgressor is exposed to the collective gaze; the Boston of the novel is no neutral geographic backdrop, for the market-place, the scaffold, and the church together constitute the social space of the Puritan community. Opposed to the town, the forest outside is a counter-space in which moral discipline is provisionally suspended. Liu Guozhi and Zheng Qingqing observe that the recurring imagery of forest and wilderness is endowed with a binary archetypal meaning of good and evil, being at once "a place where love and new life burst forth" and "a symbol of darkness and the demonic" [15]. Postcolonial criticism, however, reminds us that this opposition is not as simple as "social/natural": Doyle notes that the "'wilderness' was inhabited and the blood soaking the soil was more frequently that of Indian Americans" and reads Hester roaming "as freely as the wild Indian in his woods" as the appropriation of indigenous wildness by a white heroine [16].

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Feminist scholarship on *The Scarlet Letter* is abundant, and the rise of spatial forms has injected new lines of inquiry into it. Some critics read the scaffold and the letter A as instruments of spatial persecution directed at Hester. Drawing on figure–ground theory, McCay argues that the letter's punishment works "simply" through display, its force depending on how the community reads the sign, and that Hester's embroidery, a "feminine art," allows her to take partial possession of the letter; the scarlet letter, she notes, even becomes Hester's "passport" into freedoms such as walking alone in the forest [17].

On the whole, since the spatial turn in literary studies, scholarship on *The Scarlet Letter* has attained a relatively mature vein: in terms of internal structure, critics generally take the binary opposition of scaffold and forest as their frame, extending it into such dimensions as public and private, discipline and resistance, society and nature; in terms of theoretical perspective, postcolonial, feminist, and narratological approaches have all been brought to bear. Domestic scholarship, though arriving later, has likewise developed its own strength in the cultural interpretation of spatial imagery. Nevertheless, existing studies largely remain within the novel's own binary structure, and no work has yet invoked Foucault's theory of heterotopia directly—scholars have drawn instead on his "power–discourse" theory, as in Jiang Xianping's examination, within a "power–discourse" frame, of how disciplinary power shapes the individual and how the individual resists it [18]. Power–discourse theory and heterotopia theory, however, are both core components of Foucault's analytics of power and are intrinsically linked; the application of the latter to the spatial study of this text thus remains open.

2.2 Spatial Studies of The New Year's Sacrifice

In contrast to scholarship on *The Scarlet Letter*, which remains largely confined to intratextual interpretation, Chinese-language research on *The New Year's* Sacrifice and Lu Xun's fiction in general began earlier and has accumulated more substantial findings. A multifaceted body of scholarship has emerged around the spatial narrative function of Luzhen, the power mechanisms of ritual-propriety space, and the spatial production of gender order.

Within the spatial-narratological approach, the spatial form of Lu Xun's fiction has long been a central concern. Yu Xinming, in his doctoral dissertation, systematically examines the spatial narrative of *Call to Arms* and *Wandering*, arguing that Luzhen is not a mere narrative backdrop but a core space that carries cultural functions and drives the plot: shifts between streets, alleys, the ancestral hall, and the Earth God Temple not only advance the action but also participate in shaping the characters'living conditions and destinies [19]. Lei Yaping and Yu Xiaozhi further explore the symbolic hierarchy of spatial imagery, analysing how the division between public and private space in Luzhen resonates with the story's ethical concerns [20]. Chen Juan and Zhang Qimeng, focusing instead on the rhythmic control of spatial narrative, discuss how the alternation between enclosed and open spaces shapes the story's atmosphere [21]. Such studies attend primarily to narrative technique and form, laying a foundation for understanding the spatial structure of the text.

In scholarship on gender and spatial discipline, scholars widely regard space as a key medium through which ritual propriety produces gender order. Liu Huiying, writing specifically on *The New Year's Sacrifice*, argues that the ancestral hall—the core space of Confucian clan ethics—excludes women from public ritual through the rule of "the distinction between inner and outer", and that this is essentially a bodily discipline enacted by patriarchal order through space [22]. Dorothy Ko's classic study of seventeenth-century Jiangnan likewise traces how the "inner–outer" spatial order both circumscribed elite women's lives and afforded them a cultural domain of their own, offering a broader historical frame for understanding gendered space in *The New Year's Sacrifice* [23]. Overall, existing research has illuminated the spatial dimensions of The New Year's Sacrifice from narrative form, gender politics, and power mechanisms. No study has yet systematically drawn on Foucault's theory of heterotopia to interpret such emblematic spaces as the ancestral hall and the Earth God Temple, nor has the spatiality of the story been brought into dialogue with structurally comparable spaces in Western literary classics. This gap is precisely where the present study intervenes.

2.3 Comparative Studies of The Scarlet Letter and The New Year's Sacrifice

Direct comparative studies of the two novels remain relatively few and have centred chiefly on female figures and their fates. Zhang Meiying approaches the two texts from the perspective of religious versus ritual-propriety oppression, examining the spiritual predicament and final destiny of each heroine across culturally

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distinct contexts [24]. Such studies generally build on parallels between the two women's experiences, and some tend to overemphasize these commonalities, yielding a somewhat reductive reading. In exploring the causes of the tragedy, Zhao Huanru focuses on the path of self-redemption, comparing the salvific journeys of Hester Prynne and Xianglin's Wife and the cultural differences underlying them [25]. Liu Minjie, working within a framework of self and Other, argues that both heroines embody the "predicament of the self constructed by the Other", thereby reflecting differing Western and Chinese conceptions of the self and of redemption [26].

Taken as a whole, although each novel has received its share of spatial study, comparative work on the two texts remains concentrated on female figures, the causes of tragedy, and modes of redemption, with little attention to space as such. The analytical tools drawn upon are mostly feminist or broadly thematic, and no systematic comparison of disciplinary mechanisms and forms of resistance has yet been undertaken within a unified spatial-theoretical framework. Drawing on Foucault's theory of heterotopia, this study places the scaffold and forest of *The Scarlet Letter* alongside the ancestral hall and the Earth God Temple of *The New Year's Sacrifice*, in an attempt to advance cross-cultural spatial comparison and to illuminate the contrast between shame- and guilt-based disciplinary logics.

3. Theoretical Introduction

3.1 Classification of Heterotopias

Under the principle of the universality of heterotopias, Foucault distinguishes two major historical forms: heterotopias of crisis and heterotopias of deviation.

Heterotopias of crisis existed in primitive societies. The existence of hierarchical systems inevitably produced spatial markers that differentiated groups of people, giving rise to sacred, privileged spaces forbidden to outsiders and marginalized groups. Those dwelling within these "other spaces" are regarded by Foucault as "individuals in a state of crisis"; such spaces serve to contain individuals who stand in a ruptured, crisis-bound relation to their social environment — adolescents, pregnant women, and the like [6].

In modern societies, heterotopias of crisis have largely been replaced by heterotopias of deviation [6]. For Foucault, all aspects of contemporary life are required to conform to established standards and normative models, as exemplified by school timetables and the regulated schedules of hospital care [27]. Nonetheless, there remain individuals whose behavior is deviant and abnormal, and they are accordingly placed within heterotopias of deviation. These spaces, such as psychiatric hospitals and prisons, are designed for the permanent segregation of individuals whose conduct transgresses social norms [6].

Along the functional dimension, Foucault also formulates the concept of the compensatory heterotopia. He argues that heterotopias can create an alternative, nearly perfect real space — an ideal projection of utopia realized at a remove — that compensates for the disorder and disarray of ordinary real space [6].

3.2 Disciplinary Space

Foucault formulates the concept of disciplinary space in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, arguing that power exercises granular control over individuals by organizing and partitioning spatial environments. This spatial technology of discipline, detailed in the section "The Art of Distributions", operates through core principles: such as enclosure, partitioning, and ranking [27].

Enclosure marks the first spatial strategy. It establishes bounded, insulated territories dedicated to disciplinary operations, drawing clear boundaries to separate non-normative individuals from the broader social fabric. Prisons with their high walls, enclosed military barracks, and gated school compounds all function as enclosed disciplinary spaces that isolate targeted groups from normal society [27].

Partitioning, the second principle, divides enclosed spaces into individual cellular units and assigns each person a fixed, designated position. This segmentation eliminates unregulated movement and enables targeted, individualized supervision. The station-based layout of factory assembly lines and the rowed seating arrangement in classrooms exemplify this logic: each body is anchored to a specific spatial node, making distribution and supervision both systematic and efficient [27].

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Ranking translates hierarchical power relations directly into spatial order. Spatial position functions as a visible marker of status, authority, and normative standing. For instance, the elevated altar in a church occupies the apex of sacred power, while congregational pews occupy subordinate positions along the same spatial hierarchy, visually encoding the authority structure of the religious community [27].

Spatially, these disciplinary formations arrange themselves along a center-periphery axis: positions near the governing core sit at the center of power, while marginalized groups are pushed toward the edges. On this basis, this study distinguishes two spatial types across the four sites under comparison. The scaffold and the ancestral hall operate as spaces of disciplinary capture: they put into practice the enclosure, partitioning, and ranking logic described in Discipline and Punish [27]. The forest and the Earth God Temple, by contrast, function as detached counter-sites where Puritan or ritual discipline is held at a distance. The forest suspends this discipline only temporarily; the Earth God Temple offers what looks like release but ultimately channels the supplicant back into the ritual order. This framework guides the reading in the following chapter.

3.3 Panopticism

Panopticism is a core mechanism of modern disciplinary power, also fully elaborated in Discipline and Punish. It originates from Jeremy Bentham's architectural design for the Panopticon, a model prison; Foucault extends the design beyond penal architecture to frame it as a general metaphor for how disciplinary power functions across modern society [27].

Structurally, the Panopticon is a circular building with a central observation tower at its core, surrounded by a peripheral ring of individual cells. Each cell spans the full width of the ring, with one window facing inward toward the tower and another facing outward to admit cross-lighting. This layout allows guards stationed in the tower to observe every inmate at all times, while inmates can never see into the tower to confirm whether they are actually being watched [27].

The defining political effect of this arrangement is that it produces a state of "conscious and permanent visibility" in the subjected individual, which in turn assures the automatic, self-sustaining functioning of power. Because surveillance is constant in its possibility yet unverifiable in its actual exercise, inmates internalize the authoritative gaze and begin to discipline their own behavior. Through this one-way visibility structure, power permeates society invisibly and pervasively, inducing spontaneous self-regulation among individuals and achieving efficient social control without reliance on constant overt coercion [27].

In his foundational essay *Of Other Spaces*, Michel Foucault conceptualizes heterotopias as tangible "other spaces" embedded within the fabric of society. Functioning as real counter-sites, they both deviate from the dominant normative order and operate to compensate for or challenge that order, simultaneously representing, contesting, and inverting the spatial relations that structure ordinary social life [6].

In *The Scarlet Letter* and *The New Year's Sacrifice*, the scaffold and the ancestral clan hall function as disciplinary heterotopias: they stage public rituals of humiliation that produce docile bodies and entrench the moral authority of the community. The forest and the Earth God Temple, by contrast, operate as compensatory heterotopias, granting Hester Prynne and Xianglin's Wife temporary escape from the omnipresent disciplinary gaze of Puritan and Confucian power respectively. The following section examines how Christian cultures of sin and Confucian ethics of shame are spatially enacted and enforced through these contrasting heterotopian formations.

4. Textual Analysis and Comparison

In his foundational essay "*Of Other Spaces*", Michel Foucault conceptualizes heterotopias as tangible "other spaces" embedded within the fabric of society. Functioning as real counter-sites, they both deviate from the dominant normative order and operate to compensate for or challenge that order, simultaneously representing, contesting, and inverting the spatial relations that structure ordinary social life [26].

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gaze of Puritan and Confucian power respectively. The following section examines how Christian cultures of sin and Confucian ethics of shame are spatially enacted and enforced through these contrasting heterotopian formations.

4.1 Discipline of Central Power Spaces

4.1.1 The Scaffold in *The Scarlet Letter*

The scaffold can be categorized as a contextual variant of heterotopias of crisis in Foucault's spatial taxonomy, with notable functional transformations.

Formally, it aligns with the defining feature of crisis heterotopias: the temporary isolation of individuals who stand in a ruptured relation to social norms. The sin of adultery committed by Hester Prynne falls into the category of moral deviance, a condition that would otherwise justify placement in a heterotopia of deviation. The critical distinction lies in duration: punishment enacted on the scaffold is temporary and ritualistic, whereas confinement in heterotopias of deviation (such as prisons or asylums) is permanent and spatially exclusionary.

From a Puritan perspective, the very existence of the scaffold exposes an underlying social crisis: the excessive suppression of individual freedom and human nature in Puritan society breeds latent social conflict. The community requires sinners as “negative exemplars” to admonish the public, endowing the scaffold with an explicitly religious and didactic purpose. As Reverend Wilson urges Hester, “Speak out the name! That, and thy repentance, may avail to take the scarlet letter off thy breast” [28]. This line confirms that the scaffold’s isolation of Hester serves an educative function, rather than operating as a mere instrument of brute punishment.

At the same time, the scaffold diverges from Foucault’s original formulation of crisis heterotopia and exhibits unique characteristics. As the novel describes:

Knowing well her part, she ascended a flight of wooden steps, and was thus displayed to the surrounding multitude, at about the height of a man’s shoulders above the street...than the Governor, and several of his counsellors, a judge, a general, and the ministers of the town; all of whom sat or stood in a balcony of the meeting-house, looking down upon the platform.

Power disciplines the individual through spatial ordering and compels compliance with social order. The composite space formed by the scaffold and the overhead balcony operates through a dual mechanism of disciplinary gaze. Unlike the classic panopticon, where the watcher remains invisible to the watched, the Puritan authorities on the balcony are visibly positioned as figures of sovereign authority. Standing on the elevated platform, Hester is simultaneously subjected to the horizontal collective gaze of the townsfolk and the vertical magisterial gaze of the ruling elite. For her, the space is doubly enclosed: she is trapped both physically within the bounds of the scaffold and symbolically within the field of public scrutiny. This spatial hierarchy constructs a dual disciplinary regime: popular surveillance from below and official judgment from above converge to position the condemned in a subordinate position through the power of visibility, manifesting the hierarchical nature of disciplinary space. The tiered spatial arrangement reduces Hester to an object within the Puritan network of power, subjected to the disciplinary gaze of the entire community.

Foucault’s original notion of crisis heterotopia referred to sheltered spaces for vulnerable groups such as adolescents and pregnant women. The scaffold, by virtue of its publicity and punitive violence, transforms this protective function into a performative one. It thus embodies a hybrid nature: it functions as a temporary site of crisis-oriented isolation, and also operates as a theater of power through which Puritan society publicly enforces its moral standards and doctrinal authority. In the Puritan context, sinners undergo a ritual sequence of “public humiliation – confession – limited redemption”; the scaffold serves as the sacred spatial vehicle of purification that anchors this process.

4.1.2 The Ancestral Hall in The New Year’s Sacrifice

Heterotopias of deviation, such as prisons and psychiatric hospitals, are designed for the permanent segregation of deviant individuals. In *The New Year’s Sacrifice*, Xianglin’s Wife is permanently excluded from the ancestral hall and stripped of her right to participate in ritual labor. This permanent, exclusionary judgment of marginalized groups aligns with the defining logic of heterotopias of deviation. The following analysis

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examines the spatial organization of the ancestral hall and its ritual practices to elaborate its heterotopian function.

"只是暗暗告诫四姑说，这种人虽然似乎很可怜，但是败坏风俗的，用她帮忙还可以，祭祀时候可用不着她沾手，一切饭菜，只好自己做，否则，不干不净，祖宗是不吃的……祥林嫂，你放着罢！我来摆。"四婶慌忙的说。她讪讪的缩了手。" [29]

(Translation: "[My aunt] only warned me quietly that pitiful as she might seem, this woman was a bad influence on public morals. It was all very well to have her help with ordinary work, but she must on no account touch anything connected with the sacrifices. We would have to prepare all the food ourselves, otherwise the ancestors would refuse to eat anything so unclean… 'Xianglin's Wife, put that down! Let me do it!' my aunt cried hastily. She [Xianglin's Wife] drew back her hand, abashed.")

Sacrificial rituals are the core ceremonies through which residents of Lu Town affirm their ethical identity. Excluded from preparing offerings and arranging ritual utensils, Xianglin's Wife is reduced to a figure of taboo, artificially separated from the sacred space of the ancestral hall. In effect, the ritual strips her of the status of a "normal person": she is neither a "chaste widow" nor a "worthy mother," but an "unclean being" cast outside the Confucian ritual order. The Confucian ideals of female chastity and the culture of shame permeate every dimension of this ritual space.

Isolation from the ancestral hall is only the first stage. After being branded a taboo figure, Xianglin's Wife is further expelled from the patriarchal space of the clan by the feudal forces represented by Mr. Lu, and pushed into the marginal space of the street. She becomes a beggar carrying a bamboo basket with a broken bowl inside. The function of the ancestral hall is thus to expel anomalous beings and orchestrate communal oppression against them.

"'不早不迟，偏偏要在这时候，——这就可见是一个谬种！'……雪花落在积得厚厚的雪褥上面，听去似乎瑟瑟有声，使人更加感到沉寂。" [29]

(Translation: "'Neither too early nor too late, it had to be just at this very moment—this shows what she was, an ill-omened creature!'"…The snowflakes fell on the thick snow-blanket, seeming to make a soft rustling, which made the stillness all the more profound.)

"我给那些因为在近旁而极响的爆竹声惊醒，看见豆一般大的黄色的灯火光，接着又听得毕毕剥剥的鞭炮，是四叔家正在'祝福'了。" [29]

(Translation: "I was woken by the firecrackers, deafeningly loud because they were so close; I caught the yellow glow of a lamp no bigger than a bean, and then came the crackle of firecrackers again—Fourth Uncle's household was performing the "Blessing".")

Xianglin's Wife's death in the snow bears an implicit structural relation to the ancestral hall: the desolation of her lonely death on the street stands in stark contrast to the festive ritual celebration inside the hall. From the perspective of spatial power, her death is socially inevitable. She and her corpse are dismissed as a "bad omen" by the people of Lu Town, utterly erased from the ethical order sustained by the ancestral hall. Her death marks the final step of spatial disciplinary power: it consolidates the "purity" of the system by eliminating the non-normative body.

The foregoing analysis shows that the ancestral hall differs from Western heterotopias of deviation such as prisons. It does not enforce discipline through formal law, but operates through kinship and ethical bonds; the two cannot be equated. Building on the deviant nature of this heterotopian formation, this study refines the earlier claim that the ancestral hall constitutes a heterotopia of deviation. It adopts the concept of Confucian ritual heterotopia, defined as a clan-centered spatial formation that excludes "anomalous" individuals through ritual practices while sustaining communal imagination through kinship ethics.

4.1.3 Comparison of Disciplinary Mechanisms

Faced with two transgressors judged as morally deviant, Puritan society adopts the punishment of public trial on the scaffold, and Hester Prynne is sentenced to wear the scarlet letter "A" on her chest as a permanent visible marker of her sin.

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"'In my opinion', muttered the most iron-visaged of the old dames… 'The youngest of them whispered, 'Don't let her hear! …' The grim jailer waved his staff. 'I have promised you', cried he, 'that Hester Prynne shall be placed where all men may see her…" [28]

"'It were well', muttered the most iron-visaged of the old dames, 'if we stripped Madam Hester's rich gown off her dainty shoulders; and as for the red letter, which she hath stitched so curiously, I'll bestow a rag of mine own rheumatic flannel, to make a fitter one...Do not let her hear you! Not a stitch in that embroidered letter, but she has felt it in her heart...Open a passage; and, I promise ye, Mistress Prynne shall be set where man, woman, and child may have a fair sight of her brave apparel, from this time till an hour past meridian." [28]

"镇上的人们也仍然叫她祥林嫂，但音调和先前很不同；也还和她讲话，但笑容却冷冷的了。"[30]

(Translation: "The townspeople still called her Xianglin's Wife, but their tone was quite different from before; they still spoke to her, but their smiles were cold.")

These passages capture how the public responds to Hester Prynne and Xianglin's Wife respectively. In the Puritan town, people openly discuss and denounce the sinner in the public space of the scaffold. In Lu Town, by contrast, people maintain a superficially calm demeanor while harboring contempt in private. The punishment of Confucian shame culture is not staged as a public spectacle; instead, it operates in private, unspoken and implicit. For instance, when Mr. Lu warns his wife not to let Xianglin's Wife touch ritual objects, he does so quietly and discreetly. The stigmatization of Xianglin's Wife requires no external marker equivalent to the scarlet letter "A". It operates invisibly, accomplished through spatial exclusion and the covert linguistic violence of communal gossip.

Moreover, the disciplinary measure is not limited to temporary isolation, but extends to permanent expulsion. Hester eventually returns to the town and reintegrates into communal life on her own terms. Xianglin's Wife, by contrast, undergoes a continuous trajectory of marginalization: from exclusion at the ancestral hall, to vagrancy on the streets, and eventually to her death in the snow. The punishment imposed by the disciplinary space of Lu Town is permanent and irreversible.

The two societies also differ in the source of their disciplinary authority. In *The Scarlet Letter*, power is rooted in the Puritan conception of God and original sin; moral legitimacy is derived from religious doctrine. In *The New Year's Sacrifice*, the legitimacy of social status is determined by kinship relations. Xianglin's Wife's worth is entirely contingent on her roles as a wife and mother; once she loses her husband and son, she loses all existential foundation in the clan-based social order.

4.2 Resistance in Marginal Spaces

4.2.1 The Forest in *The Scarlet Letter*

Read through Foucault's heterotopia framework, the forest is a detached counter-space set against the ordered town. It does not build a perfected alternative order; rather, it suspends Puritan discipline for a time, allowing Hester to speak and act as she cannot on the public square. In this sense it belongs on the side of compensation that Foucault describes: an other real space that briefly offsets the constraints of the social order. Yet it is a limited compensation—a temporary refuge rather than the purified, permanent utopia that Foucault associates with the Puritan colonies of North America [6].

"And, mother, the old dame said that this scarlet letter was the Black

Man's mark on thee, and that it glows like a red flame when thou meetest him at midnight, here in the dark wood." [28]

"So speaking, she undid the clasp that fastened the scarlet letter, and, taking it from her bosom, threw it to a distance among the withered leaves." [28]

The forest stands in binary opposition to the Puritan town. As a natural space untouched by civilized ordering, it is closely associated with desire and transgression, the dwelling place of the "Black Man" and the witch Mistress Hibbins. In contrast to the deliberately planned architecture and artificially maintained "purity" of the Puritan settlement, the forest possesses a primal, wild character. Here, spatial enclosure dissolves and social hierarchies collapse, allowing characters to shed the religiously imposed identities and reveal their

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authentic human selves. In this vast, unsurveilled space, Hester and Dimmesdale temporarily escape their social roles as "sinner" and "minister," and meet as equals in the intimate bond of lovers. Hester reclaims her identities as mother and lover, while Dimmesdale briefly resumes the role of father.

> "'Down with it, then!' said Hester. 'Take it off! All shall go for nothing, as if it had never been!' As she spoke, she undid the clasp that fastened the scarlet letter, took it from her bosom, and threw it far among the withered leaves."[28]

In the forest, as they confess their feelings to each other and imagine building a new life together in England, Hester tears off the scarlet letter, the mark of shame. In this moment, the longing for freedom overwhelms the weight of atonement. The two protagonists reveal their true, rebellious selves in the forest: by discarding the religious symbol of the "A", they challenge the moral authority of Puritan doctrine and resist its rigid constraints on love and human happiness. The vivid vitality of this marginal space stands in stark, tense contrast to the suffocating oppression of the central disciplinary space.

> "It straggled onward into the mystery of the primeval forest. This hemmed it in so narrowly, and stood so black and dense on either side, and disclosed such imperfect glimpses of the sky above, that, to Hester's mind, it imaged not amiss the moral wilderness in which she had so long been wandering... This flitting cheerfulness was always at the farther extremity of some long vista through the forest. " [28]

Yet the freedom of the forest is fleeting and illusory, and the characters must ultimately return to the social order. This confirms Foucault's observation that heterotopias simultaneously compensate for and invert the real order. Dimmesdale, deeply shaped by Puritan religious training, ultimately rejects the proposal to elope with Hester. Pearl also reacts with distress at her mother's removal of the scarlet letter, forcing Hester to retrieve it from the riverbank and put it back on. The scarlet letter thus functions as a reminder that even in the freest of spaces, religious constraints remain inescapable. This reveals that marginal spaces embody not only freedom and resistance, but also darkness and compromise. The environmental description in the passage carries symbolic weight, suggesting that Hester's fantasy of a happy family life for the three of them is ultimately utopian. The compensatory heterotopia breaks down: Dimmesdale chooses to atone for his sin through death, and Hester cannot realize her dream of building a life with the man she loves.

The conversation between Hester and Dimmesdale in the forest also reflects Hester's conception of redemption. She urges her lover to atone for his sin through good deeds and charitable ministry, a path she herself has long followed: she has sought atonement through her own acts of kindness, her needlework, and her quiet service to the town's people.

The scarlet letter "A" she wears represents another mode of redemption, but it functions more as a warning marker of an inviolable Puritan moral line. At the beginning of the novel, the "A" stands first and foremost as a symbol of displayed sin. This form of redemption is coerced, and its moral weight is far less moving than the gradual, daily goodness she accumulates over the years.

What makes Hester's arc most compelling, however, is that through this lifelong practice of good works, she succeeds in reconstructing the meaning of the "A". It shifts from signifying adultery to signifying "able", marking a quiet but profound redefinition of the symbol. This symbolic reconfiguration can be read as an invisible form of resistance enacted within the compensatory heterotopian space of the forest.

4.2.2 The Earth God Temple in *The New Year's Sacrifice*

The spatial significance of the Earth God Temple unfolds primarily around Xianglin's Wife's attempt to donate a threshold to the temple. This act constitutes a spatial practice through which she seeks to move from the marginal heterotopian space of the temple into the central disciplinary space of the ancestral hall.

According to Mrs. Lu, if Xianglin's Wife spends twelve thousand copper coins to donate a threshold—so that the threshold may be trodden by thousands of people in her place, bearing the burden of her sins—she will be able to redeem her "unclean" status and regain ritual acceptance. From this perspective, the Earth God Temple appears to her as a utopian site of redemption. Yet this redemptive promise is inherently false and ultimately unattainable. This dual character of the space—offering compensatory hope while entrenching disciplinary control—cannot be neatly fitted into any single category of Foucault's heterotopian taxonomy.

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"早饭之后，她便到镇的西头的土地庙里去求捐门槛。庙祝起初执意不允许，直到她急得流泪，才勉强答应了。价目是大钱十二千。" [29]

(Translation: "After breakfast she went to the Earth God Temple at the west end of the town to beg to be allowed to donate a threshold. The temple priest at first flatly refused, and only gave a reluctant consent when she was reduced to tears of anxiety. The price was twelve thousand copper coins.")

This episode exposes the hypocrisy embedded in Confucian folk religion. The temple priest exploits feudal superstition for personal profit, yet assumes a sanctimonious demeanor before Xianglin's Wife, claiming moral superiority while inflating the price of the threshold. Xianglin's Wife, for her part, pins her hope of redemption on a spatial object—the threshold itself. Her mode of redemption is to submit to being symbolically trodden underfoot, which in effect amounts to a tacit acceptance of her supposed guilt. The Earth God Temple, invoking the standard of female chastity, compels Xianglin's Wife to actively practice self-discipline in a posture of abjection, thereby silently reinforcing the rule of Confucian ritual power.

Here, the marginal space does not stand in resistance to the central power structure; instead, it operates as its tacit accomplice, functioning as a host for Confucian ideology. This reveals the instrumentalization of marginal spaces within the Confucian system. The Earth God Temple thus operates as a pseudo-compensatory heterotopia: it seemingly offers a path to redemption, but in reality functions as a parasitic extension of the power system, a site where the temple priest profits from popular superstition. This study therefore defines it as a pseudo-compensatory heterotopia on account of its parasitic dependence on the central disciplinary order.

4.2.3 Comparison of Resistance

Xianglin's Wife's attempt at redemption does not challenge the structure of feudal power in the slightest; instead, it becomes nourishment for the self-reproduction of the feudal system, rendering her resistance entirely ineffective. By contrast, Hester Prynne transforms the scarlet letter from a mark of shame into a symbol of positive moral worth through her years of needlework and charitable deeds. Although she remains constrained by the framework of Puritan society, her struggle demonstrates the possibility for marginalized women to reclaim agency and redefine their identity, achieving a limited but meaningful form of resistance.

This divergence calls attention to the limited applicability of Western spatial theory when applied to the Chinese context, and it also highlights the value of cross-cultural comparison. In the Puritan system, marginal space and central space form a binary opposition, and the former can, to a certain extent, question and challenge the Puritan ethical order. In the Confucian system, by contrast, marginal spaces cannot genuinely challenge the center; instead, they feed into its operation and sustain its reproduction.

5. Conclusion

5.1 Major Findings

5.1.1 Theoretical Revisions and Contributions

In response to the first research question, this study systematically analyzes the disciplinary mechanisms through which central spaces of power regulate individuals, and reveals that power also penetrates and reshapes seemingly free marginal spaces. In answer to the third research question, Foucault's heterotopia proves applicable and valid for this comparison, yet only as a productive but culturally situated framework: it can illuminate Chinese literary spaces only if revised through concepts such as the Confucian ritual heterotopia and the pseudo-compensatory heterotopia proposed below, rather than applied unchanged from its Western context.

The study finds that the ancestral hall in *The New Year's Sacrifice* cannot be simply categorized as a heterotopia of deviation, but should be redefined as a Confucian ritual heterotopia. The Earth God Temple is not a purely resistant heterotopia, but a pseudo-compensatory heterotopia infiltrated by ritual power. The scaffold in *The Scarlet Letter,* though classifiable as a heterotopia of crisis, presents the unique feature of punitive spectacle. The revised classification of heterotopic types for each space is summarized in the table below.

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Table 1: Classification of heterotopic types

Space	Heterotopic Type	Core Function	Cultural Logic
The Scaffold	Heterotopia of crisis	Isolating and educating sinners; upholding religious authority	Puritan culture of sin: public and performative discipline
The Ancestral Hall	Confucian ritual heterotopia	Expelling the "unclean"; safeguarding clan ethics	Confucian culture of shame: diffuse and implicit exclusion
The Forest	Compensatory heterotopia	Envisioning ideal freedom; harboring dark compromise	Puritan ethos of redemption
The Earth God Temple	Pseudo-compensatory heterotopia	Delivering false redemption; reinforcing invisible discipline	Confucian fatalism and ritual instrumentalization

The above classification revisions expand the cross-cultural applicability of heterotopia theory, and provide a more adaptive analytical framework for spatial criticism of Chinese literary texts.

5.1.2 Cultural Roots of Resistance Disparities

In response to the second research question concerning the resistant effect of marginal spaces, the study concludes that the effectiveness of resistance is conditioned by underlying cultural logics. The different outcomes of the two heroines' resistance stem from the fundamental divergence between the Puritan culture of sin and the Confucian culture of shame. In the Puritan context, "sin" is a definable, repentable and redeemable behavioral fault, leaving room for individuals to rebuild their identity through confession and good deeds. In the Confucian context, by contrast, "shame" constitutes a holistic, lifelong stigmatization of identity that can hardly be erased once imposed.

In terms of punitive modes, the two societies form a stark contrast between public didactic punishment and covert expulsion. Unlike the open, tangible discipline of Puritan society, the discipline enacted by the Confucian ancestral hall is highly concealed: it does not rely on external markers of shame, but inflicts "social death" on individuals through identity deprivation.

Spatially, marginal spaces and central spaces in Puritan society form a binary oppositional structure, within which individuals can reconstruct symbolic meaning through their own efforts and achieve limited resistance. In Confucian society, by contrast, marginal spaces stand in a collusive and dependent relation to the center, and are incorporated as a supporting component of the central power system. Resistance within such a social structure ultimately reduces to illusion. Foucault's heterotopia, then, is a productive but culturally situated framework: it illuminates Chinese literary space only when revised through the Confucian ritual heterotopia and the pseudo-compensatory heterotopia.

5.2 Limitations and Future Research

This study has several limitations. First, in terms of textual coverage, due to the richness of spatial imagery in both works, this paper only selects the most representative core scenes for close reading, and fails to provide a panoramic analysis of all spatial forms, leaving room for further expansion.

Second, in terms of analytical approach, the study focuses on the symbolic interpretation of space, and insufficiently explores the interactive relationship between narrative form and spatial construction; the depth of close textual analysis can still be enhanced.

Third, regarding theoretical revision, there are currently very few studies applying Foucault's theory to Lu Xun's works. Given the limited accumulation of prior research, the indigenized revision of heterotopic classification in this paper inevitably carries a certain degree of subjectivity.

Finally, this cross-cultural comparison is drawn from only two single works. The generalizability of the conclusions remains to be further tested against more contemporary texts of similar themes.

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