

## 2023 Dec

- **Time:** 12th Dec 2023, 18:30-22:30
- **Place:** Common Research Room
- **Participants:** Xiwen, Nuonuo, Jaeyoung, Ziwei, Hafizh, Chaehyun
- **Books:** <The Painted Veil (1925)> by *William Somerset Maugham*; <Istanbul: Memories and the City (2005)> by *Orhan Pamuk*

### Part 1 - Host Presentation

Two hosts both gave a 20-min presentation about each book.

#### <The Painted Veil> [handout](#)

First, Xiwen shared Walter's statement about the reasons why he chose to marry Kitty, which is so popular among Chinese people that even has become a kind of 'textbook' (in "about marriage" of [Notification from Walter to go to the Meitan-Fu]). But Xiwen felt really hard to agree.

Next, Xiwen gave a brief introduction of the author Maugham. Maugham himself had very rich experiences, including writing plays, volunteering as the spy in the war (because he was good at performing), and supporting the warzone as drivers (with other famous writers at that time). And this book was written in 1920s, the time in between two world wars. The setting of story is also some time between 1900s to 1920s.

Then, Xiwen gave a clear introduction of main characters (Kitty, Walter, Charles), main places (Hongkong and Meitan-fu), and the whole storyline. In short, this story begins with the Kitty's cheating with Charles, which was soon found by her husband Walter, and then followed by the memories of their encounters and the aftermath of the affair.

#### <Istanbul: Memories and the City> [handout](#)

First, Nuonuo introduced some background information of Istanbul, including its location (at the strait connecting Europe and Asia) and glorious past (once the capital of Roman, Byzantine, and Ottoman). But with a string of military defeats from middle 19c, and especially after the Turkish War of Independence in 1923, Istanbul experienced a long decline. The author was born in 1950s and lived in Istanbul for his whole life.

Next is a general introduction of this book. Nuonuo introduced the meaning of "Hüzün", the most important concept in this book. This book, intertwined with both personal experiences and multi-perspective resources, talks about everything related to Istanbul.

Then Nuonuo shared some impressive parts. First is westernization, which, as a primary trend of the whole country, also permeated households such as in the form of personal museums of rich families. Besides, the gaze from western people also changed a lot how indigenous residents thought of their hometown. Second is Bosphorus, a place bearing the most happiness and comfort for Istanbul people, from the past to now. Another interesting thing is that Istanbul people were used to counting boats passing through Bosphorus, initially as an entertainment, but then triggered by fear of new disasters. Third is black-and-white photos and fourth is ruins and relics (visible everywhere), which both represents and built up the personality of this city and its people.

Finally, Nuonuo came back to the discussion of "Hüzün", which is not merely an individual feeling, but

a collective one.

## Part 2 - Discussion

### [Istanbul]

- Some discussions about Istanbul this city, especially its current situations. Compared to the times described in the book, today's Istanbul has got some recovery and development. The important religious and cultural relics have been preserved now.
- Istanbul is famous for its nice market.
- Some books introducing Istanbul as a beautiful city may also from the foreigner sight.

### [Where does the personality of a city come from? Any other examples?]

The personality of Southeast Asian countries is quite unique and special.

Jakarta (the capital and biggest city in Indonesia):

- the city center and rural areas are quite different. People in rural area are more relaxed. It is quite a competing and mixed city.
- The personality in western and eastern part is also different. This may because of with religious or not, or geographic reason (the eastern part is more educated and has religion).
- Also, Chinese people in different parts are not the same, like the northern Chinese are though to be too noisy by Chinese in other areas.
- You can find everyone and large gap in capital city.

Korea:

- The Chaoxian-zu (minority group) in northwest part of China (yanbian), are originally the same with Korean people. But when they come to South Korea for work, they may face some bias from other Koreans. The country-difference may cause different feelings of belonging.

Kyoto:

- The personality of a city may different from the personality of people here. But the people here do not merely refer to the local people who born and raised up here, also including people moving to and living here (the latter can also have an influence).
- The personality of a city and that of people may mutually influence each other.

Bangkok (the capital of Thailand)□

- Feel it has no soul, no identity, no characteristics
- only tall buildings; not interesting; no vide; dead
- Organized, not chaotic

Shinjuku:

- Only represents the basic function of a city, no other unique or special features
- City design?

Chengdu:

- Marketing of the personality of a city
- The information problem: if a city has no specific slogan/brand, it will feel chaotic and no feature, and hard to feel the beauty

## [The Painted Veil]

In the cheating, first Kitty didn't feel anything. She thinks it is true love. This is also because she didn't feel love from her husband or her mother (family).

Why Kitty married a person she dislikes?

Walter:

- Self-centered, arrogant, and low self-esteem. Doesn't know how to love others
- When proposing, Walter created an environment full of pressure to Kitty, who knew nothing about the proposal. This atmosphere continues in their couple life.
- Walter was stuck within his imagination of Kitty. So when his expectation ruined, he felt so desperate. He loves a person only in imagination, and never opens his eye to see what Kitty truly wants.
- He just treats Kitty as a goddess, as a doll. They are not in equal positions. He thinks "you should appreciate it" that I love you.
- Walter loves Kitty for her good characteristics, but he loves her as an imaginary Kitty. Treat Kitty like gentlemen.
- This kind of people should accept themselves first, and then open them to others.

Another real-life example: FDR and Eleanor. Get married but no longer in love with each other. But still respect each other.

Kitty grew a lot through her experiences in Meitan-fu, learned and thought a lot about macro topics like life, love, death...

She thought about any efforts to mend their relationship, and do something to save her husband.

Kitty's words when Walter was dying "Beg you to forgive."

- But Walter's last word "The dog is that died." This is also from another poem. This poem for one thing talked about the dramatic twist and for another refers to the fact that the man was the worse one, the more toxic one (who in this case is Kitty).
- This sentence also shows that Walter couldn't forgive Kitty and himself in the end.

The personalities of characters may be influenced by cultural context at that time, which was also a global thing.

- Men are reserved.
- Kitty rushed to marriage after her sister's marriage.

Kitty:

- Kitty is really poor. Left over by everyone.
- Kitty's life was shaped by destiny. Not so many choices.
- In the end, Kitty has a new start, with her baby (to be free and brave).
- All the characters are Maugham himself (maybe not Charlie...).
- Sentences from characters are like writer's suggestions.

### Cheating:

- Because Kitty was never admitted by others, so she thought that is true love. (Little story in Meitan-fu: with the orphan)
- The cheating from Charlie's and Kitty's perspective is different. Charlie wants to have fun from cheating (more experienced). Kitty does not cheat deliberately. She was forced and pushed to do so.

### Social barrier of women's situation

Family background and social status influence children's job -> now we have more choices

Their love is inexperienced; Kitty is inexperienced. They do not have chance to know about love before marriage.

### Different roles:

- We have to play different roles in our life. But what's important is to be yourself when you play different roles, in different situations. This is the symbol of accepting yourself.
- Nowadays we just know people as functional roles in the society, but we don't have so many chances to know people in-depth, as individuals.

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