



# Ten Lectures on the Cultural Legacy of *Dream of the Red Chamber*

Edited by  
**Shanghai Library**

Translated by  
**Long Chao**

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## FOREWORD

The forthcoming publication, *Ten Lectures on The Cultural Legacy of Dream of the Red Chamber*, is a collaborative effort by the Shanghai Library featuring esteemed scholars, including luminaries such as Wang Meng, Bai Xianyong, and others. I am deeply honored to have been invited to pen the preface for this noteworthy book. My admiration for the ten distinguished authors—Wang Meng, Bai Xianyong, Sun Xun, Zhan Dan, Luo Yuming, Ma Ruifang, Wan Aizhen, Wang Xiaoying, Lin Xiaofeng, and Ye Sha—stems not only from their individual and extraordinary achievements but also from the fact that some of them are cherished friends and respected mentors of mine. Beyond these personal connections, the true value of this book lies in its exceptional content, rendering it a compelling and enriching read. Upon completing the book, I found myself imbued with a sense of enrichment and insight. While I cannot predict your personal reaction to the material, I am delighted to recommend it wholeheartedly. I encourage you to share this valuable literary contribution with fellow enthusiasts of *Dream of the Red Chamber*.

The essence and merits of this book are found in the approach taken by the ten scholars, who delve into *Dream of the Red Chamber* from ten distinct perspectives, providing nuanced and insightful interpretations. This multifaceted exploration proves immensely beneficial for readers and researchers seeking a deeper understanding of the novel. Wang Meng's inaugural lecture, titled "Idle Talk on the Assorted Cases of *Dream of the Red Chamber*," is a prime example of the comprehensive and engaging

content offered. Wang not only covers a substantial amount of information but also does so with a captivating narrative. The lecture prompts essential questions about the overarching theme of *Dream of the Red Chamber*, the nuanced characterizations of Daiyu and Baochai, and the underlying intentions of the author in shaping these characters. Furthermore, Wang delves into the evaluation of Liu Xinwu's "Qin School" and addresses the pivotal question of whether the last forty chapters serve as a continuation or an integral part of the original work. Wang Meng's astute analysis serves as a wellspring of enlightenment for those grappling with these inquiries.

The title of Bai Xianyong's lecture, "The 'Swan Song' of Chinese Culture," possesses an inherent allure. Right from the outset, he emphatically states, "If I had to select five of the world's greatest novels based on my reading experience, *Dream of the Red Chamber* would unquestionably be among them, perhaps even securing the top spot!" I wholeheartedly concur with his assessment of the novel. *Dream of the Red Chamber* stands not only as the paramount classical masterpiece of the Chinese people but also ranks among the most remarkable and influential works in the annals of world literature. In the vein of literary giants such as Shakespeare and Tolstoy, Cao Xueqin emerges as one of the preeminent writers in the global literary panorama. I ardently maintain that whether one is immersed in the act of reading or engaged in scholarly exploration of *Dream of the Red Chamber*, situating the work within the broader context of world literature and approaching it from a global standpoint enhances our intellectual landscape. This perspective not only broadens our horizons but also aids in cultivating a profound and accurate appreciation of this literary masterpiece.

In Bai Xianyong's lecture, a particularly intriguing aspect involves his comparison of the Gengchen manuscript and the Chengyi manuscript of *Dream of the Red Chamber*, wherein he scrutinizes disparities in certain plot points and character portrayals between the two versions. An illustrative case is the character of You Sanjie: in the Gengchen manuscript, she undergoes a transformation from a promiscuous, flirtatious woman to a strong and principled female. Conversely, in the Chengyi manuscript, You Sanjie maintains her righteousness and chastity throughout. Bai Xianyong contends that the Chengyi portrayal is more coherent. What is your perspective on this matter? In reality, this presents a highly contentious

issue in the realm of *Dream of the Red Chamber* research, delving into the writing process and evaluative ranking of the novel's diverse editions and manuscripts. From my understanding, the majority of experts endorse the Gengchen manuscript's (i.e., early handwritten copies) depiction, deeming it a more authentic and profound portrayal of You Sanjie. Otherwise, Jiao Da's scoldings of Jia Baoyu and Liu Xianglian's assertion, "Aside from those two stone lions, I'm afraid there's not a cat or dog inside your eastern mansion that's chaste," would lack a solid foundation.

The question of the relationship between the initial eighty chapters and the subsequent forty chapters in *Dream of the Red Chamber* is a matter of ongoing debate. The prevailing belief is that the first eighty chapters constitute Cao Xueqin's original manuscript, with the latter forty chapters being authored by someone else as continuations. For years, Gao E was commonly attributed as the author of the last forty chapters, but recent research has discredited this claim. The identity of the actual continuation author remains uncertain. Bai Xianyong challenges this consensus by asserting that even the last forty chapters were written by Cao Xueqin. He presents two compelling reasons to support his viewpoint. First, he contends that maintaining consistent colloquial tones between characters is the most challenging aspect of novel writing, and the speech patterns in both the first and last eighty chapters are strikingly similar. Second, Bai Xianyong argues that classic novels typically have a single author, not multiple contributors. He suggests that the author of the last forty chapters, laden with grief and lament for the downfall of the Jia family and mourning Daiyu's death, aligns more with Cao Xueqin's sentiments than Gao E's. Do you find Bai Xianyong's analysis and intuition persuasive since he is a renowned writer himself? Interestingly, Eileen Chang, another renowned writer, offers a contrasting perspective. She said: "When reading *Dream of the Red Chamber* as a child, upon finishing the eightieth chapter, the characters all seemed to speak blandly, and their faces became detestable. I only complained about 'why it wasn't good anymore later on.'... It was much later when I first heard the latter forty chapters were a continuation written by Gao E. No wonder!" Do you find yourself aligning more with Eileen Chang's view or Bai Xianyong's analysis?

Mr. Sun Xun stands as a distinguished Redology scholar, and in his lecture titled “The Cultural Zeitgeist of *Dream of the Red Chamber*,” he astutely highlights a crucial distinction. He observes that preceding *Dream of the Red Chamber*, novels predominantly revolved around men, depicting women as mere instruments in men’s political struggles, tools for self-cultivation, and objects of sexual conquest. In a notable departure, *Dream of the Red Chamber* adopts a female-oriented perspective, casting men into supporting roles. The narrative skillfully utilizes male decay and impotence to accentuate the vibrancy and beauty of the female characters. A noteworthy critique Mr. Sun offers is the common flaw in novels preceding *Dream of the Red Chamber*, where women were often subjected to insult and harm. In contrast, Cao Xueqin’s masterpiece elevates women to the noblest and most intimate positions, transcending the limitations of its predecessors. Mr. Sun further develops his argument by drawing a parallel from *The Golden Lotus*’s “sex mentality” to *Dream of the Red Chamber*’s “love ethos.” He contends that while *Dream of the Red Chamber* references *The Golden Lotus* in various ways, it decisively abandons *The Golden Lotus*’s “sex mentality” in favor of a loftier “love ethos.” This shift from “sex mentality” to “love ethos” signifies a profound deepening and sublimation of realism in ancient Chinese fiction, according to Mr. Sun. His insights not only contribute to a more profound understanding of *Dream of the Red Chamber* but also offer valuable inspiration for appreciating the evolution and complexity of ancient Chinese literary realism. Mr. Zhan Dan, a prominent Redology scholar, has garnered notable achievements in recent years through his research on *Dream of the Red Chamber*. In his lecture titled “The Sentiments and Despair of Females in *Dream of the Red Chamber*,” he introduces the intriguing concept of the “‘discovery’ of feminine beauty,” offering a compelling perspective for interpreting the novel. Zhan Dan’s assertion of a “discovery” of feminine “beauty” within *Dream of the Red Chamber* becomes particularly noteworthy when considering the prevailing portrayal of beautiful women in ancient Chinese literary works. Although beauty was a recurring theme, Zhan argues that the distinctive aspect of Cao Xueqin’s work lies in its departure from conventional representations. In many traditional Chinese works, women were often depicted either as tools or objects of possession, lacking a portrayal characterized by pure, respectful, and equal attitudes. Hence, Zhan contends that *Dream of the Red Chamber*’s depiction of feminine allure amounts to a genuine and groundbreaking “discovery.” Ms. Ma Ruifang, an esteemed

elder teacher whom I deeply respect, stands as a distinguished writer and Redology scholar. In her work, “Fun Musings on *Dream of the Red Chamber*,” she eloquently delves into the captivating aspects of the novel, asserting that “*Dream of the Red Chamber* is a work brimming with emotional and tasteful fascination.” Ms. Ma communicates in an equally engaging manner, unraveling the “emotional and tasteful” charms of the novel with a style that is bound to enhance your interest in both reading and studying the book. Luo Yuming’s “A Deep Dive into the Characters of *Dream of the Red Chamber*,” Wan Aizhen’s “The Flawed Beauty of *Dream of the Red Chamber*,” Wang Xiaoying’s “Appreciation of Poems and Lyrics in *Dream of the Red Chamber*,” Lin Xiaofeng’s “Langyuan and Xianpa: A Review of the Gardens and Plants of Grand View Garden in *Dream of the Red Chamber*,” and Ye Sha’s “A Close Reading of *Dream of the Red Chamber*” each showcase brilliant writings marked by distinctive emphases, offering numerous fresh insights.

Undoubtedly, *Dream of the Red Chamber* stands as China’s paramount classical literary masterpiece, holding a revered position in the annals of Chinese literary history and exerting a profound influence. As the late Qing poet Huang Zunxian eloquently proclaimed, “*Dream of the Red Chamber* is the first exemplary novel since the genesis of heaven and earth, comparable to the sun and moon in its brilliance, to remain unworn for ages” (*Posthumous Letters to Japanese Friends*). Since its inception, this literary gem has illuminated China with its resplendent radiance, irresistibly captivating generation after generation of readers with its artistic allure. The vividly lifelike characters of Jia Baoyu, Lin Daiyu, Xue Baochai, Wang Xifeng, and others have profoundly attracted peoples’ interest and left an indelible impression. In China, the passion for *Dream of the Red Chamber* transcends mere ardor for a literary work; it has become a cultural phenomenon, giving rise to an extensive discourse and the establishment of a specialized field of scholarship known as Redology. As a monumental cultural presence, *Dream of the Red Chamber* has provided the Chinese people with boundless artistic appreciation, spiritual fulfillment, and insights into the meaning of life.

The paramount challenge confronting the reading and study of *Dream of the Red Chamber* revolves around a fundamental inquiry: How do you perceive *Dream of the Red Chamber*? What classification or genre do you attribute to this literary work? This question holds pivotal significance for both readers and researchers, as it directly influences our foundational comprehension of the novel. An inaccurate response to this question

jeopardizes the trajectory of your reading or research, hindering the development of a nuanced understanding of the material.

Lu Xun's famous quote resonates with enduring relevance: "Many Chinese know of *Dream of the Red Chamber*, at least its title. Setting aside the debate over its authorship and continuations, even its fundamental purpose has been interpreted divergently by different readers: Scholars of the classics see the *Book of Changes*, Taoists see debauchery, literati see entanglements, revolutionaries see anti-Manchu sentiments, and gossipers see secrets of the imperial palace..." Despite our familiarity with Lu Xun's astute observations and his profound critique of misinterpretations in his time, it is regrettable that similar situations persist today. Notably, the allegorical and autobiographical schools of thought continue to wield significant influence. Both the allegorical and autobiographical readings commit a fundamental error by failing to approach *Dream of the Red Chamber* as a literary work. Instead, they treat it as Cao Xueqin's family history or a chronicle of Qing imperial palace secrets. How can such an epic masterpiece be reduced to a mere historical account without recognizing its meticulous artistic conception, design, and fictional elements? *Dream of the Red Chamber* is not an autobiography or family history by Cao Xueqin, nor is it a compilation of "Secrets of the Qing Palace." To truly appreciate and study this literary masterpiece, we must engage with it from a literary and aesthetic perspective, that is, reading, appreciating, and researching it through the lens of literature and aesthetics. This, undoubtedly, is the correct approach for comprehensively understanding and studying *Dream of the Red Chamber*.

It might seem peculiar that I emphasize treating *Dream of the Red Chamber* as a literary work for reading: after all, isn't it universally acknowledged as a piece of literature, a novel? While it is indeed common knowledge in China that *Dream of the Red Chamber* is a novel and a significant literary classic, it is worth noting how many individuals in China read it without actually considering it as a novel. For some, it becomes the author's autobiographical account, for others an allegorical "Secrets of the Qing Palace," and for a few, it transforms into a coded text, as if the entire narrative is composed of secret messages. Such readings strip away the vivid characters, erase the beautiful love stories, and diminish the rich depictions of life and profound cultural connotations. Instead, the masterpiece is reduced to a collection of sinister "palace secrets" and "court struggles." Can such interpretations do justice to the greatness of *Dream of the Red Chamber*? Only by approaching and

studying *Dream of the Red Chamber* as a literary work, understanding its artistic qualities, narrative techniques, and poetic ambiance, can one truly savor its enduring aftertaste. Meticulous and careful reading is essential to appreciating the spirit-capturing descriptions, lively language, and lifelike characters in *Dream of the Red Chamber*. It involves savoring distinctive personalities to deepen one's understanding of life, human nature, and the ways of the world, experiencing the marvelous and brilliant artistry within. In essence, entering the artistic realm of *Dream of the Red Chamber* requires a focus on appreciation, aesthetics, and insight. One should fully appreciate its spirit-capturing descriptions, lively language, and lifelike characters, particularly savoring distinctive personalities to deepen one's understanding of life, human nature, and the ways of the world. *Dream of the Red Chamber* is not just a great work of art; it is a textbook on life, an invitation to taste and gain insight into the flavors of life, providing profound insights into human existence. It serves as a profound artistic expression of the national spirit, offering a space where people can indulge in appreciating the beauty of art, understanding the true essence of love, and gaining insight into the complexities of life, thereby pursuing true, virtuous, and beautiful realms of existence.

In conclusion, *Dream of the Red Chamber* intricately weaves the narratives of four prominent families, aristocrats and nobles, the shadows lurking behind officialdom, and the decline of a family. While the novel undeniably encompasses profound political and historical undertones, it should not be narrowly categorized as a political historical novel. Many elements within *Dream of the Red Chamber* are drawn from the author's personal family life and experiences, intricately connected to his life journey. However, categorizing the work as Cao Xueqin's autobiography oversimplifies its richness. Beyond its exploration of an aristocratic family's life and decline, *Dream of the Red Chamber* delves into the intricate tapestry of beautiful and entangled love stories. Yet, it would be an oversimplification to reduce it solely to a love story. So, what does the novel ultimately portray? It primarily unfolds the life and decay of an aristocratic family, intertwined with the tragic unfolding of lives, marriages, and love, particularly through the experiences of young men and women, such as Jia Baoyu, Lin Daiyu, Xue Baochai, and Wang Xifeng. The narrative profoundly captures the vicissitudes of the human world, revealing the harsh realities of society and serving as a canvas for Cao Xueqin's reflections on society, life, and human nature. It serves as a platform for his

critiques of hypocrisy and ugliness, as well as his pursuit of truth, goodness, and beauty. In essence, *Dream of the Red Chamber* holds eternal value for expanding our understanding and appreciation. Within its pages lies the appeal of this great literary classic, offering a profound exploration of the human experience.

Such concludes the foreword!

Huixinbeili, Beijing  
August 2021

Zhang Qingshan  
President of the Chinese  
Association of Redology

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# Idle Talk on the Assorted Cases of *Dream of the Red Chamber*

Wang Meng

The assorted cases of *Dream of the Red Chamber* refer to the various debates surrounding the novel, which have in recent years become a public topic. As a devoted “Redology fan,” I hold personal perspectives on these controversies, albeit being mostly amateur. Therefore, I characterize my insights as “idle talk,” acknowledging that I have not conducted systematic research on these matters, and they are informal discussions.

To the best of my knowledge, there exist intriguing debates regarding *Dream of the Red Chamber*. In the Qing dynasty, two elderly individuals passionately championed Xue Baochai and Lin Daiyu, respectively, escalating their disagreement to the point of physical confrontation. Thus, if my “idle talk” inadvertently intersects with the views of a particular school or treads on an epistemic “landmine,” I extend my preemptive apology. I neither endorse nor oppose any school; I am merely expressing my personal viewpoints. If I have unintentionally offended any scholar, I am open to enlightenment; conversely, if I have inadvertently aligned with a certain school, I invite you to conduct a “special investigation.” I categorically assert that I have not imbibed that person’s wine or received any red envelopes, pledging this with my life and fortune.

---

W. Meng (✉)  
China Writers Association, Beijing, China

The most contentious issue surrounding *Dream of the Red Chamber* revolves around its themes. Diverse interpretations abound, and I'll highlight some of my knowledge. One perspective, notably championed by Wang Guowei, characterizes it as a tragedy of desires or a life tragedy through the lens of Schopenhauer's philosophy. According to Wang Guowei, *Dream of the Red Chamber* starkly contrasts with comedy, existing as a pure tragedy. This interpretation draws from Schopenhauer's conceptualization of the "metaphysics of love between men and women." Schopenhauer posits that human life is permeated with insatiable desires, akin to a beggar's ceaseless plea for more.

Some argue that the notion expressed by Schopenhauer is not exclusive to him, as Taoists also share a similar perspective. Laozi, for instance, stated, "The five colors confuse the eyes; the five flavors upset the stomach." Additionally, Laozi remarked, "If everyone recognizes beauty when they see it, then ugliness arises; if everyone acknowledges goodness as they experience it, then evil shows." The concept conveyed is that an increase in possessions or experiences leads to heightened dissatisfaction. Buddhism reinforces the idea that love gives rise to greed, which, in turn, begets anger, ultimately resulting in affliction.

Lin Daiyu's profound love for Jia Baoyu is paradoxically accompanied by intense anger and affliction toward him. This interpretation aligns with the sentiment expressed in the novel's poem, "All Good Things Must End," which poignantly observes, "All men long to be immortal, Yet never cease striving for secular fame and fortune! Where are all the generals and ministers laid? Their graves are but a mass of briars..."

Wang Guowei thus believes that the greatest lesson from *Dream of the Red Chamber* is the liberation of the mind. However, in my opinion, after reading the novel, one might experience a sense of liberation while also becoming more obsessed. On one hand, the novel tells that all "good" things come "undone" in the end. On the other, it shows us two distinct concepts of living "good" and feeling "undone." As a descendant of a fallen aristocratic family, Cao Xueqin wrote joyfully about eating crabs, birthdays, writing poems, and the Imperial concubine Yuan's visit. How is this coming "undone"? What magnificent riches and honors! "...A glory as excessive as the flare-up of spilled cooking oil on a blazing fire, and a posy of fresh flowers pinned to an embroidered dress!" Therefore, logically, the poem "All Good Things Must End" does not convincingly convey a feeling of coming "undone." "Where are all the generals and ministers laid? Their graves are but a mass of briars." Although their

graves are only accompanied by briars after death, those ancient and present ministers and generals were still exalted figures with such titles as ministers and generals when alive. While alive, one should still strive to establish one's own merits and achievements!

*Dream of the Red Chamber* is also called *The Mirror of Romance*. This mirror shows a beautiful figure on one side and a skull on the other, meaning that beauty will eventually become white bones. This is actually unconvincing since the presence of a beautiful person should be undeniably acknowledged as such, "presence" being the timestamp at which we are speaking, so there is no need to consider things in eighty years. In eighty years, we will all become white bones. Therefore, reading *Dream of the Red Chamber* makes one feel quite baffling. The "good" parts are truly "good," while the parts about coming "undone" are not necessarily so.

Some people also interpret the theme of *Dream of the Red Chamber* as a class struggle, the representative of which is Chairman Mao. Chairman Mao reads the novel as history, believing it to be the rise and fall of the four great families of Wang, Xue, Jia, and Shi. This view is completely consistent with Chairman Mao's character. If Chairman Mao had read *Dream of the Red Chamber* and only seen Daiyu's burying flowers and grieving over autumn, that wouldn't have been Chairman Mao. Therefore, Chairman Mao's insights are indeed very unique and enlightening. *Dream of the Red Chamber* does write a lot about class struggles.

The third view is somewhat similar to Chairman Mao's, but not as emphatic. It believes the theme of *Dream of the Red Chamber* is anti-feudalism. It argues that the novel depicts the persecution of young women by the great families, such as the fates of Qingwen and Jin Chuan, without any freedom, human rights, or democracy. Objectively, *Dream of the Red Chamber* has profound condemnation of feudal society. This anti-feudalism view has taken a dominant position in today's public discussion. From Mr. Li Xifan to present-day Mr. Feng Qiying, their discussions emphasize the anti-feudal nature of the novel, linking it to the budding of capitalism in late Ming and early Qing China.

I personally believe that anti-feudal sentiments exist in *Dream of the Red Chamber* to some extent because Cao Xueqin wrote about how feudal laws, ideologies, and family values harmed young people. Are these related to the sprouts of capitalism? That remains a question to me. For example, some think Jia Baoyu saying girls are cute and made of water while men are bad and made of mud is a testament to his belief in

women's liberation. I disagree, for this has nothing to do with feminism. Jia Baoyu's liking of girls relates to the male author's "Freudian psychology." Between the ages of 14–22, I also thought girls were cuter than boys, and had a theory that girls were more apt to revolt since they faced deeper oppression in old societies. I think it's fair to call *Dream of the Red Chamber* anti-feudal, but whether that's the main theme is not an easy question in my eyes.

The fourth view considers *Dream of the Red Chamber* as a love tragedy in which star-crossed lovers find it hard to be together. During the Cultural Revolution, such a view was weaponized to make tireless critiques of the flaws of the bourgeoisie class. For this Redology's viewpoint treats the tragic love story between Jia Baoyu and Lin Daiyu as the main narrative of the novel, thus running the foul risk of diverting attention away from class struggles, a typical bourgeoisie tendency. Nonetheless, calling *Dream of the Red Chamber* a love tragedy is objectively correct. The main plotline is the tragedy of Jia Baoyu and Lin Daiyu's love also accords with the facts. There are other storylines in the novel that are also well-written but fail to amount to such prominence.

The above discussion concludes the first case of controversy for *Dream of the Red Chamber*. Let me comment on it briefly. I feel one shouldn't try to define the themes of *Dream of the Red Chamber* using a simple proposition or subject-predicate structure. *Dream of the Red Chamber* is a well-rounded work, containing elements of metal, wood, water, fire, and earth, and extending to matters of joy, anger, sorrow, delight, birth, death, parting, and reunion. Therefore, any research and exposition of its themes should be all-encompassing in nature and refuse to result in a reductive mode of summarization using only one sentence.

The second case of controversy for *Dream of the Red Chamber* is about Xue Baochai and Lin Daiyu. The novel handles the characters of Xue Baochai and Lin Daiyu in different ways. In the Illusory Realm of the Great Void, the judgments on Xue Baochai and Lin Daiyu are written together. "Lamentable is virtue in domesticity, pitiable is talent in poetry! The jade hairpin hangs in the forest, the golden hairpin is buried in the snow." "Virtue in domesticity" refers to Xue Baochai. She is very virtuous, and her conduct aligns with feudal moral standards. The lines "Pitiable is talent in poetry" and "the jade hairpin hangs in the forest" refer to Lin Daiyu, while "the golden hairpin is buried in the snow" refers to Jia Baoyu. "All are saying it's a perfect match of gold and jade, but I only remember the former pledge of wood and stone. Empty-hearted,

I face the pure snow of the mountain recluse; whole-hearted, I never forget the goddess in her lonely forest. Sighing at the imperfections in this mortal world, I only now understand its cruelty: though perfectly matched, the heart is filled with regrets.” “The perfect match of gold and jade” refers to Jia Baoyu and Xue Baochai. “The former pledge of wood and stone” refers to Jia Baoyu and Lin Daiyu. “Empty-hearted, I face the pure snow of the mountain recluse” refers to Xue Baochai. From Cao Xueqin’s perspective, he did not think Xue Baochai was bad, but Jia Baoyu has always been in love with Lin Daiyu. This causes the most poignant question regarding *Dream of the Red Chamber*. Since the Qing Dynasty, debates have raged over this issue.

The first viewpoint is about “supporting Lin and renouncing Xue,” believing that Lin Daiyu is sincere and innocent, and values emotions, while Xue Baochai is a schemer. They hold the opinion that from the day Xue enters the Rong Mansion, her every action is aimed at becoming Jia Baoyu’s wife.

The second viewpoint considers Xue Baochai good: Xue Baochai is generous-minded, Lin Daiyu narrow-minded; Xue Baochai is physically and mentally healthy, Lin Daiyu somewhat sickly; Xue Baochai makes people happy, while Lin Daiyu adds troubles; Xue Baochai can be a virtuous wife and good mother, but Lin Daiyu cannot. I remember saying in Chongqing that, if I could gain Lin Daiyu’s affection, that would be a very worthwhile thing; but I would likely be driven to suicide after marrying Lin Daiyu. Yet even if I jumped into a well, it would be worthwhile, to die without regret.

The third viewpoint assumes a “Baochai vs. Daiyu” binary perspective. In the novel, one may like Lin Daiyu, but in real life, one would prefer Xue Baochai. One’s love interest could be Lin Daiyu, but his wife should be Xue Baochai.

The fourth viewpoint attempts a unified “Baochai-Daiyu” angle, represented by scholar Yu Pingbo. He believes Xue Baochai and Lin Daiyu are “twin peaks, two merging streams.” They each represent different aspects of life. Lin Daiyu represents temperament, while Xue Baochai represents reason; Lin Daiyu is frail, while Xue Baochai is healthy; Lin Daiyu is not good at socializing, while Xue Baochai is skilled at it.

Xue Baochai represents a specific brand of civility, but such civility comes off as fake to others in the same way Lu Xun criticized Liu Bei, feeling he was too righteous, so people felt Liu Bei was hypocritical. Actually, readers cannot discern Cao Xueqin portraying Xue Baochai as a

hypocrite. Why did the author always put these two characters side by side in the storyline? Xue Baochai and Lin Daiyu indeed have very different personalities, posing a dilemma for readers.

These two personality types appear not only in Chinese books but also in foreign ones. Anna Karenina leans more toward emotion, while her husband prioritizes reason. Thus, we should look from different angles. All characters come from the author's hand, representing the author's ideas. Cao Xueqin believes that human nature faces its dilemma in choosing between civility and temperament, reason and emotion, sincerity and courtesy. From this perspective, *Dream of the Red Chamber* raises very interesting questions.

The third case of controversy is the division and moral judgment of factions in *Dream of the Red Chamber*. The “new Redology” after 1949 grew used to dividing the characters in *Dream of the Red Chamber* into two camps. One camp composes defenders of feudalism, the feudal system, and feudal ideology, including Grandmother Jia, Jia Zheng, Wang Xifeng, Qingwen, Tanchun, etc.

Scholar Wang Kunlun proposed early on that Qingwen is a spy Grandmother Jia and Madam Wang have placed by Jia Baoyu's side. The famous aesthetics scholar Wang Chaowen wrote a 300,000-word book entitled *Critique of Xifeng*, with a chapter especially dedicated to criticizing Tanchun, feeling that her morals conform with the feudal rulers, and always come to defend the interests of feudal monopoly, so her intelligence could only reflect her sinister side.

Jia Baoyu, Lin Daiyu, and Qingwen are rebels against feudal rule, especially Qingwen. This division into two camps makes sense. I think it can help us understand the kaleidoscopic value systems exhibited by the characters in *Dream of the Red Chamber*. However, this division is also imprecise, perhaps oversimplifying matters. I especially don't agree with completely denying Tanchun's merit. Tanchun carries out the policy of “distributing land to households” in the Grand View Garden, which the masses strongly support. During the raid on the Garden, anti-feudal symbols like Jia Baoyu and Lin Daiyu fail to even make a peep while only Tanchun sharply criticizes the raid on principle. So simply dividing the characters in the novel into two camps in this way is not comprehensive.

The fourth case concerns whether *Dream of the Red Chamber* is autobiographical, meaning there is “another story.” Aside from the *Dream of the Red Chamber* we read today, did Cao Xueqin really have such an experience at the time? Cao Xueqin was from Nanjing, and his family