

"The Tale of Genji" and "A Dream of Red Mansions": An Analysis of the Images of Genji and Jia Baoyu

Dian Jiang

University of Southern California, University Park, Los Angeles, CA, 90089

Abstract: *"The Tale of Genji" and "Dream of Red Mansions" are monuments in Japanese and Chinese literary circles. The two ideal heroes, Genji and Jia Baoyu, portrayed by Lady Murasaki and Cao Xueqin, have become two immortal classic images in the history of Japanese and Chinese literature. This article analyzes the similarities and differences in their personalities to conduct more in-depth research and explore the literary and aesthetic values of the two works.*

Keywords: *"The Tale of Genji"; "A Dream of Red Mansions"; personality analysis; artistic image, comparative literature*

1. Introduction

"The Tale of Genji" was written at the beginning of the 11th century. It is the first full-length realistic novel in Japanese literature and the first of its kind in Japanese Monogatari literature. "A Dream of Red Mansions" was created at the beginning of the 17th century. It is representative of ancient Chinese Zhanghui style novels and the pinnacle of Chinese classical novels recognized worldwide. Readers who have read "The Tale of Genji" and "A Dream of Red Mansions" will marvel at the surprising number of similarities between the two and compare the two to varying degrees. In the current study's view, this kind of textual comparison is self-contained reflection, and it is also a reader's active exploration of deeper literary resonance.

As two independent individuals, Genji and Jia Baoyu display many substantial differences in views of women and politics due to their respective social and historical backgrounds. Nevertheless, readers and researchers can still sense a strong resonance and sameness between the two characters. The reason is that although the two works are products of entirely different eras, the overall artistic images of Genji and Jia Baoyu have reached a remarkable consistency. This indescribable, obscure, and abstract image conceals the underlying differences, arousing similar aesthetic yearning and resonance of literature in the audience.

2. Combination of Good and Evil --The Dual Character of Humanity and Divinity

Genji and Jia Baoyu, as ideal male figures, in a sense, possess both humanity and divinity. Their characters are a mixture of "good and evil essences" proposed by Cao Xueqin. In the second chapter of "Dream of Red Mansions," Jia Yucun first mentioned the concepts of the two kinds of essences: the good embody pure intelligence, whereas the evil embodies cruelty and perversity. People who possess both "fall short of sage or perfect men, but neither are they out-and-out villains." "The pure intelligence with which they are endowed sets them above their myriad fellow creatures, but their perversity and unnatural behavior sink them lower than other men too." Cao subdivided these people into three groups regarding different circumstances. Being the utmost prestigious aristocrats, Genji and Jia Baoyu fall into the group of romantic eccentrics. The evil essence resulted in their romantic and lustful humanity, and the true essence created their generosity and fraternity divinity.

2.1. The romantic and lustful humanity

The romantic temperament of Genji and Jia Baoyu is one of the most significant common ground between the two. For thousands of years, some people have praised it as a graceful manner, while others have scorned and censured it as lechery. The author believes that comparative analysis of the two characters' lustful nature must consider the social-historical factors and recognize that this nature differs

from eroticism in the general sense.

As mentioned above, Genji and Jia Baoyu embody both good and evil essences. They were born with the inherent evil spirit. It is this evil spirit the root of their peculiar habits related to "sex." Both books included texts that directly reveal their quirks of eroticism. For example, in the second volume of "The Tale of Genji," [Broom Wood] wrote: "but in reality, the frivolous, commonplace, straight-ahead amours of his companions did not in the least interest him, and it was a curious trait in his character that when on rare occasions, despite all resistance, love did gain a hold upon him, it was always in the most improbable and hopeless entanglement that he became involved."

There is also a similar description in "Dream of Red Mansions." At his Zhuazhou ritual, which meant to test his disposition by the object he selected, Baoyu did not grab any other objects rather than rouge, powder-boxes, bangles, and hairpins. His father was irritated and swore he would grow up to be a dissolute profligate.

Baoyu's quirk of tasting girls' rouge is well-known in the Grand View Garden. The people around him have worn out their tongues to persuade him to behave well, but nothing changed. From these descriptions, it is clear that the lech of Genji and Jia Baoyu is born, not made. It is also worth noting that both authors have maintained a positive attitude towards the characters' behaviors from the outset. Explanation of the protagonists' absurd temperament at the beginning of the story is to rationalize their perverse behaviors in the following plots, dissolving negative moral meaning and creating conditions for authors' self-conscious projection.

Hegel mentioned two decisive factors of an artistic image in Aesthetics: 1) "general world situation," that is, the general social situation of an era (times-background of the unfolding of the characters' movements and the shaping of their personalities), and 2) "context," the micro-level situation generated and developed by a particular character and a specific plot. As the central part of creative art, character personality closely relates to the specific social-historical backgrounds. Therefore, the discussion of Genji and Jia Baoyu's lecherous personalities should also refer to the ideologies, values, and cultural traditions of the eras to which they belong.

In "Dream of Red Mansions," the word 'lust' has two different connotations. One is "fleshly lust," corresponding to eroticism, and another is Baoyu's "lust of the mind." The latter is explained by Disenchantment in Chapter five: "in your case, you were born with a passionate nature which we call 'lust of the mind.' This can be grasped by the mind but not expressed, apprehended intuitively but not described in words. Whereas this makes you a welcome companion to women, in the eyes of the world, it is bound to make you appear strange and unnatural, an object of mockery and scorn." Differing from the "lust for the flesh" that ends in eroticism, "Lust of the mind" originates from "infatuation." Therefore, Baoyu's lust beyond physical desires, being a purely emotional, almost spiritual love. This dichotomy also emphasizes the opposition of affections and desires (Sex).

Zhiyanzhai, the chief commentator of Dream of the Red Mansions, noted that, according to Baoyu's life-long disposition, the lust of mind is nothing but thoughtfulness and consideration for women. Being considerate also conforms with Lu Xun's comment: "get close (with girls) and show respect, fearing of being offensive." Therefore, Baoyu's lust reflects his benign attitude towards women, which is externalized in various practices of his doctrine of daughter-dignity.

Genji's lust contains deeper historical and cultural origins. The mythology on the genesis of Japan began with the "marriage of gods" in Shinto legends (i.e., the united love and Sex of Izanaki and Izanami). Therefore, Japanese Gods do not have sexual taboos based on religion. Instead, Japanese Shinto culture holds a tolerant attitude toward love and Sex. This open attitude has deeply affected the Japanese ethics of love and Sex as well as Japanese literature's aesthetic value. The eroticism literary trend of modern Japan (also known as the lustful literature trend) treated lust as a beautiful mental interest and a healthy moral feeling. It also regarded the polygamous relationship between men and women as a kind of romantic game. Therefore, based on this cultural background, Genji's lechery not only did not violate the ethical standards but perfectly conformed to the aesthetic trend of the Heian period. It is now understandable that Lady Murasaki never criticized the perverse behaviors of Genji but instead tried her best to beautify them. Unlike Cao Xueqin, Lady Murasaki mainly intended to present and display the mono-no-aware aesthetic view and Japanese aesthetic sense through the creation of Genji. She regarded lust as inherent humanity and natural emotions and presented it truthfully and exquisitely, without making moral judgments of good and evil. In sum, ignoring the literary and socio-historical facts and simply criticizing Genji and Jia Baoyu as lustful and ruthless rakes fail to understand the authors' efforts and good intentions behind the writing.

2.2. *The divinity of generosity and fraternity*

Although Genji and Jia Baoyu have human weaknesses, the flaws cannot belittle the spiritual beauty in their divine nature. The academic circles generally agree that the most significant similarity between Genji and Jia Baoyu lies in their fraternity for women. However, this article believes that their fraternity contains two different meanings: being generous and compassionate with people (both their servants and lovers) and having mercy toward objects.

Firstly, their generosity and compassion are evident in their indiscriminate, classless care for people around them. Even though Genji and Jia Baoyu were upper-class nobles, they never despise, beat, and scold their servants and maids. On the contrary, they both showed respect and demonstrated humanitarian spirit. For example, in the eighteenth chapter of "A Dream of Red Mansions," Baoyu's extraordinary talent was recognized by Jia Zheng in the tablet-naming in the Grand View Garden. The pages asked him for credit and rewards, stripping all his pouches and other pendants. Baoyu neither got angry nor scolded them but let them take all the things. Moreover, in the sixtieth chapter, Chunyan relayed Baoyu's words: he will ask the mistress to send all the girls attending him back to their parents. Both the indulgence toward young servants and the considerations for the maids are an embodiment of Baoyu's easygoing and generous characteristics.

Genji's generosity is evident in how he treated those women who did not maintain a romantic relationship with him but were sheltered and cared for by him out of respect or compassion.

The typical representatives are Hanatirusato and Suetsumuhana. Hanatirusato was the younger sister of Lady Reikeiden and had a fugitive affair with Genji when they were in the palace. After the death of the Emperor, the helpless Hanatirusato was attended by Genji because of serendipity. She later became the hostess of Rokujoin Natsunomachi and the foster mother of Yugiri. According to Lady Murasaki's description, Hanatirusato was homely and unattractive but had a soft temper. She was gentle and understanding, clearly knowing of her position. After entering Natsunomachi, Hanatirusato refused to have sex with Genji because of her decay with age. Since then, she had always played a mother-like role in Genji's life, talking with him and consoling him. Genji regarded her as the closest person and always showed her respect and care, trying his best to serve her without negligence.

At the same time, even though Genji had no love for the ill-looking and stuffy Suetsumuhana, he still determined to protect her out of his pity for her miserable situation. So Genji took her to his former residence Nijoin, and kept her warm and fed for the rest of her life, giving this most jocose character in the whole book a relatively easy and happy ending.

It can be seen that both Genji and Jia Baoyu possess a kind of universal benevolence and sympathy in their dispositions which is similar to Buddha-nature. Their genuine care and love for people related to them are one of the manifestations of divinity.

Secondly, their generosity and compassion are also evident in their indiscriminate love and affection for women. They believe that there are so many women in the world with different styles and characters and that it is a pity they cannot get close to each of them due to their limited life. Therefore, every time they meet a woman by fate, they should treat her with respect, tenderness, and love. Moreover, they think every relationship is genuine and independent: developing and maintaining a new relationship does not indicate betraying others. In other words, their love dogma is not "you are the only one for me in this multifarious world," but "why to pick only one flower when there are thousands," which fails them to be loyal to one person but justifies many of their perverse behaviors.

As a result of being passionate and kind, Genji and Jia Baoyu always get trapped in contradictory situations. Being emotionally generous prevents them from overcoming the human weaknesses to maintain absolute devotion, nor can they go against their kind nature to be heartless and cruel to abandon women. This vague and ambiguous attitude towards women cannot withstand the criticism of secular ethics. However, concerning the socio-historical factors elaborated above, perhaps it is more appropriate to examine their attitude and behaviors from a purely artistic and aesthetic view.

Thirdly, Genji and Jia Baoyu's universal fraternity manifests in their extraordinary empathy ability. According to Zhiyanzhai's criticism, in Cao Xueqin's manuscript, there is a "Disenchantment Character List" in which Baoyu's comment is "(be) emotional for the emotionless." Headnote in the eighth chapter of Jiaxu version interpreted this comment as "(Baoyu)care for all the ignorant and emotionless people or objects out of infatuation." In other words, Baoyu always feels compassion for everything and everyone around him, perceiving the connotative mood and emotion. His sensitivity and sentimentality are noticeable in many plots. For example, in the nineteenth chapter, Jia Zhen invited Baoyu to watch operas and see New Year Latens. While everyone was having fun in the lively entertainment, Baoyu thought, "There is a marvelously lifelike painting of beauty in the small study here. In all this excitement today, she must be lonely. I'd had better go and cheer her up."

Moreover, in the seventieth chapter, others in the Grand View Garden were flying kites for fun, and when the kites drifted away, no one felt sad for that but just laughed. Only Baoyu said: "It's a pity we don't know where it'll land. Let's hope it falls somewhere with people about and gets picked up by some children. If it falls in the wilderness where nobody lives, how lonely it will feel. I'd better send this one after it to keep it company." He then cut the cord of his kite and let it go.

Baoyu believes that everything has thoughts and emotions. So, he would believe that the withered Begonia flowers signify Qingwen's death, feeling deep sorrow. The people around him always felt ridiculous about his behaviors and words, saying that Baoyu was silly and impractical. However, these reactions are the natural manifestation of his generous nature.

In "The Tale of Genji," the counterpart of Jia Baoyu's "emotions for emotionless" is Genji's "Mono no aware." As the master of Japanese substance sadness, "The Tale of Genji" exactly takes "Mono no aware" as the core of its aesthetic ideal. According to Motoori Norinaga, the so-called "Mono no aware" is understanding everything, the emotions (e.g., sorrow, excitement, delight) you feel through their moods. "Mono no aware" discussed in this article specifically refers to the third layer of "the multi-layer theory of Mono no aware," namely: emotions aroused by nature, especially the sense of impermanence brought by the seasons.

In the book, there are many descriptions of Genji's spiritual sustenance of the feeling of objects. Examples are:

The eleventh chapter [The Village of Falling Flowers]: A cuckoo was suddenly heard in the garden outside, perhaps the very same that had sung when he was waiting at the gate of the little house; its note at any rare seemed strangely similar. Had it followed him? Pleased with this idea, he sang softly to himself the old song, 'Knows the cuckoo when he sings?' Presently he handed to her this poem: "It is the scent of orange-trees that draws the cuckoo to the village of falling flowers."

The twelfth chapter [Exile at Suma]: "Till now there had not been the least ripple on the face of the sea. Genji, wondering what would in the end become of him, began to review the whole course of his past life and the chances of better fortune in the future. He gazed on the quiet aspects of both sky and sea. 'The Gods at least, the myriad Gods look kindly on my face, knowing that sinful though I be, no penalty have I deserved as I suffer in this desolate place.' "

These descriptions all revealed Genji's deep feelings of grief. Jia Baoyu demonstrates a kind of humanistic care when he observes the world, while Genji focuses more on expressing his inner emotions when his heart was touched. Although the emphasis of the two characters is not identical, it is undeniable that they both have a sensitive heart that can feel and resonate with the outside world. Borrowing the words of Motoori Norinaga, Baoyu's "emotions for emotionless" and Genji's "Mono no aware" are both a natural emotion that comes from the heart, and an aesthetic interest that transcends right and wrong, good and evil.

3. Androgynous Image —Combination of masculine and feminine characteristics

As mentioned above, Genji and Jia Baoyu have some similar aesthetic characteristics, which is the androgynous phenomenon in the sense of literary and artistic creation. While both are males in the physiological sense, their characteristics combine masculine and feminine features in a blended and ambiguous form.

The androgyny first reflects in the appearance. In the second chapter of "The Tale of Genji," Genji commented on the women with To no Chujo and others on a rainy night. Lady Murasaki wrote, "He was dressed in a suit of soft white silk, with a rough cloak carelessly slung over his shoulders, with belt and fastening united. In the light of the lamp against which he was leaning, he looked so lovely that one might have wished he were a girl; and they thought that even Uma no Kami's perfect woman, whom he had placed in a category of her own, would not be worthy of such a prince as Genji." Thus, it is noticeable that Genji's appearance does have certain feminine qualities. So, people often use words such as beautiful, elegant, and radiant to describe his beauty and grace.

The description of Jia Baoyu's appearance is even more straightforward: "His face was as radiant as the mid-autumn moon, his complexion fresh as spring flowers at dawn. The hair above his temples was as sharply outlined as if cut with a knife. His eyebrows were as black as if painted with ink, his cheeks as red as peach-blossom, his eyes bright as autumn ripples." Such a description without prominent gender characteristics seems to fit both men and women, proving that what the author intends to portray is a gender-ambiguous image. In the current eighty-chapter version, Jia Baoyu stays at the age of eighteen, and his image is a beautiful boy in his youth.

By the forty-first chapter [The Gossamer-Fly], the book tells the story of Genji from birth to his mid-

fiftieth. In the twenty-eighth chapter [The Typhoon], Yugiri went to Nokujointo to visit Genji. Seeing his graceful posture in the dialogue with Akasa, he could not help but sighed: "This man is not like his father. He is young and beautiful, like a man in his prime." At that time, Genji was thirty-six years old, and he was no longer a young man. Thus, it can be seen that, despite the significant age gap between Genji and Jia Baoyu, the authors intentionally de-emphasized the physiological changes with age when shaping the two characters, positioning them as gender-ambiguous teenagers without prominent male features.

This androgynous trait also reflects in the figures' reference for color. In the book "The Character of Color," Eva Heller mentioned that red represents men in all cultures (for example, in Egyptian murals, women are painted with yellow skin, while men with red skin). However, red is mainly the representative color of women in the public's color perception. Therefore, reading through "The Tale of Genji" and "A Dream of Red Mansions," it is surprising to find that the images of Genji and Jia Baoyu are both related to red.

In "The Tale of Genji," there are three descriptions of Genji wearing "cherry-colored" (collocation of outer white and red inner) Nousi, respectively at his twenty, thirty-two, and thirty-seven:

The eighth [The Flower Feast]: "He was dressed in a cloak of thin Chinese fabric white outside but lined with yellow. His robe was of a deep wine-red colour with a very long train."

Nineteenth [A Wreath of Cloud]: "So soon as the New Year celebrations both at his own house and in the Palace were drawing to a close, he determined to pay her another visit, and with this object in view, he put on his finest clothes, wearing under his cherry-colored cloak a matchless vesture of deep saffron hue, steeped in the perfumes of the scented box where it had lain."

The twenty-ninth chapter [The Royal Visit]: Genji changed into a plain cherry-colored cloak of Chinese silk thrown about him with just that touch of negligence which is proper to a great lord on a small occasion.

Lady Murasaki's comment of Genji in cherry-colored costumes gives a glimpse of his elegant demeanor: "the flowers lose their color, and the fragrance dissipates." White and red is originally color collocation of clothing for the young man. However, it has become one of the most representative images in Genji's life, indicating the feminine attributes in his personality.

Zhou Ruchang proposed three guiding principles of understanding "Red Mansions" Culture: principles of jade, red, and love. The features of Jia Baoyu, from his name and clothing to his residence and character, are related to red, embodying the red principle. For example, Baoyu's residence in the Grand View Garden is called Yihong Yuan (Happy Red Court), corresponding to his nickname "Princess Yihong." In the courtyard, "the rockery in the centre of the courtyard was flanked on one side by plantains, on the other by a red multipetalled crab-apple tree, its branches trained in the shape of an umbrella, with green trailing tendrils and petals red as cinnabar." The crab-apple tree is also named 'Maiden Apple,' which is interpreted by Baoyu as "red as rouged cheeks and frail as a delicate girl." Naming the residence with 'red' (Hong means red in Chinese) and decorating the courtyard with a red and girlish flower, Baoyu's feminine property is well-established. As for clothing, among numerous descriptions of his appearance, the most impressive one remains the description of his first appearance in the book: "red archer's jacket embroidered with golden butterflies and flowers." In another scene of the same chapter, Baoyu was still in red: "short hair in small plaits tied with red silk," "coat of a flower pattern on a bright red ground," thick-soled scarlet shoes." In addition, there are many other descriptions of Baoyu's red outfits in the book. All these have played an essential role in shaping Baoyu's "red" image. The red of Baoyu and the cherry color of Genji are inseparable components in their attributes. The choice of the two colors transcends the constraints of gender, age, and stereotypes about color, being another external form of their unique androgynous temperament.

Lady Murasaki and Cao Xueqin intentionally blurred the gender boundaries when creating Genji and Jia Baoyu, broking the shackles of conventional expectations of both sexes imposed by secular norms. It is noticeable that the dim juvenile images portrayed by the authors are complex combinations of various features: lustful, considerate, heroic, feminine, handsome, and charming. As a result, Genji and Jia Baoyu, as two male characters, present no aggressiveness of adult men nor strong sexual connotations. On the contrary, the infinite plasticity and possibility in their characteristics provide readers with ample space for secondary creation and associations to a certain extent.

4. Summary

Through the eyes of Genji and Jia Baoyu, readers are temporarily set free from their real identities and moral principles so that they can experience the taboo, fierce, vivid, and rare emotional experiences

that they can never experience in real life. Thus, readers' curiosity and longing for hidden and taboo emotions are contented through reading, accompanied by great literary enjoyment and spiritual satisfaction. At the same time, since the gender identity of the two characters is indefinite, the spearhead of moral criticism cannot be directed to a specific gender, relieving readers' psychological and moral burdens and making immersion reading possible.

This article regards Genji and Jia Baoyu as the spiritual sustenance and incarnation of the ideals of the authors. Lady Murasaki created the perfect image of Genji to project her self-consciousness. The emotions that transcend secular ethics presented in the book do not conform to moral standards but satisfy people's sensuality and emotions, arousing strong resonance among readers worldwide at all times. In addition to depicting and presenting the true face of aristocratic life during the Heian period, the book is more about displaying Japanese "sorrow" aesthetics, and its profound aesthetic value is no less than literary value. Cao Xueqin, on the other side, used Jia Baoyu's deviant behaviors, shocking words, and the pursuit of freedom of the children in the Grand View Garden to criticize the imprisonments of feudal society and express his praise and longing for the beauty brought about by youth. Therefore, "A Dream of Red Mansions" is more a hymn of youth and love than a history of a family tragedy. The two enduring figures in literary history, Genji and Jia Baoyu, have brought the readers endless artistic enjoyment and inspire us to think and explore more.

References

- [1] Cao, Xueqin. *A Red Dream of Red Mansions* (Yang, Xianyi., & Dai, Naidie, Trans.). Beijing: Foreign Languages Press & Changsha: Hunan People's Publishing House Co., Ltd., 1999.
- [2] Cao, Xueqin. *Zhiyanzhai Re-evaluate The Story of the Stone*. Zhengzhou: Zhongzhou Ancient Books Publishing House, 2010.
- [3] Cao, Xueqin. & Gao, E. *A Dream of Red Mansion*. Beijing: People's Literature Publishing House, 2005.
- [4] Hegel. *Aesthetics* (Zhu, Guangqian, Trans.). Beijing: Commercial Press, 2011.
- [5] Heller, Eva. *Wie Farben Wirke* (Wu, Tong, Trans.). Beijing: Central Compilation & Translation Press, 2008.
- [6] Lou, Fei. *Discussion on Jia Baoyu's View of Women*, *Journal of A Dream of Red Mansions*, 1995, 3:p205-227.
- [7] Rao, Daoqing. *Comparison of the Lust of The Tale of Genji and A Dream of Red Mansions: The Impacts of Japanese and Chinese Ancient Culture's view of Lust*. *Literature Study*, 2004, 6.
- [8] Shikibu, Murasaki. *The Tale of Genji* (Feng, Zikai, Trans.). Beijing: People's Literature Publishing House, 1980.
- [9] Shikibu, Murasaki. *The Tale of Genji* (Waley, Arthur. Trans.). Tuttle Publishing, 2010.
- [10] Shikibu, Murasaki. *The Tale of Genji* (Lin, Wenyue, Trans.). Nanjing: Yilin Press, 2011.
- [11] Wang, Fupeng. *A Special Character Type: Androgyny of Jia Baoyu's characteristics*. *Journal of A Dream of Red Mansions*, 1999.
- [12] Yao, Jizhong. *The Love Aesthetics and Dialectics of The Tale of Genji: Analysis of Genji's Characteristics*. *Foreign Literature*, 2004, 5.
- [13] Ye, Weiqu. *The history of Japanese Literary Thought*. Beijing: Economy Daily Press, 1997.
- [14] Zhang, Peiheng., & Luo, Yuming. *History of Chinese Literature (volume two)*. Shanghai: Fudan University Press, 1996.
- [15] Zhou, Ruchang. *Hong Lou Shi Er Ceng* (Zhou, Lunling., Edited.). Taiyuan: Shuhai Press, 2005.