

Can Sentimentalism Survive?: Revisiting the Negotiation between *Qing* 情 and Confucian Ideology in *Honglou meng* 紅樓夢*

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Abstract

The 18th-century novel *Honglou meng* 紅樓夢 (*Dream of the Red Chamber*) by Cao Xueqin 曹雪芹 is among the most eloquent voices of the cult of *qing* 情 (a concept that roughly translates to sentiment, love, passion, or feeling) in late imperial China. In their studies of the *Dream*, scholars tend to present *qing* and Confucian orthodoxy in binary opposition to one another. However, I argue that the *Dream* sketches a more complex interplay of *qing* and Confucian ideology. Cao Xueqin, using *qing* as an alternative self-identification scheme to Confucian ritualism, explores the possibility for a sentimental individual to achieve self-differentiation via *qing* and thus to embrace an authentic Confucian tradition rather than rebelling against or being assimilated into the hypocritical Confucian society.

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In this paper, I revisit the supposed dichotomy of *qing* and Confucian orthodoxy by placing it in the historical and cultural context of the late imperial China. The contextualization of the *Dream* in the intellectual transformation shows that the author weaves a reflection on his imagined past into the ongoing debates about *qing* and orthodox Confucianism. In creating a literary “other” to represent his past “self,” the author designs a character that becomes both the subject to perform in the narrative and the object to be observed under the current self’s gaze. In this way, the novel presents Cao’s review of his past life as a way of exploring the sentimental individual’s negotiation for a space of *qing* within a corrupt Confucian society.

My research examines the “stone-jade,” the protagonists, the Prospect Garden, and the Land of Illusion as paradoxical constructs that display how sentiment (*qing*) derives from and strives to co-exist within Confucian orthodoxy. I argue that the novel finally dismisses the possibility of *qing*’s survival and suggests that sentimentalism is doomed to be encroached upon and transformed by the overwhelming power of Confucian orthodoxy. Religion (Buddhism/Taoism), marked by its bipolar capacity both to syncretize with and to renounce Confucian values, offers the last resort for the male protagonist Jia Baoyu 賈寶玉 to uphold his faith in *qing*. Thus, Baoyu’s ultimate conversion to Buddhism functions as his *rite de passage* from reality into the sentimental world after the collapse of the sub-space of *qing*. I illustrate Cao’s reflection on the past dovetails the dynamic transformation of the intelligentsia in late imperial China.

Key words: *Honglou meng* 紅樓夢, *qing* 情, Confucian orthodoxy, self

The 18th-century novel *Honglou meng* 紅樓夢¹ is among the most eloquent voices of the cult of *qing* 情 in late imperial China.² In their studies of the *Dream*, scholars have tended to position *qing* and Confucian norms in binary opposition to one another.³ However, I argue

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- ¹ *Honglou meng* hereafter is referred to as the *Dream*. References to this novel are from Cao Xueqin 曹雪芹 and Gao E 高鶚, *Honglou meng* 紅樓夢 (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1982) (hereafter *HLM*, and followed by chapter and page numbers), and the English translation *The Story of the Stone*, by David Hawkes (vols. 1-3) and John Minford (vols. 4-5) (New York: Penguin, 1973-1986, and hereafter *SS* and followed by chapter and page numbers). Because the translation by Hawkes and Minford omits some lines of the original text, I will use Yang Xianyi 楊憲益 and Dai Naidie's 戴乃迭 translation, *A Dream of Red Mansions* (Beijing: Waiwen chubanshe; Changsha: Hunan renmin chubanshe, 2009) when necessary (hereafter *DRM* and followed by chapter and page numbers). I refer to all characters by the *pinyin* Romanization of their names and remove hyphens for the Romanization of those names.
- ² In this paper, I agree with Zhou Ruchang 周汝昌's definition of *qing* in the *Dream*: to wit, "*qing* refers to a noble relationship between persons and is manifested as caring, sympathy, pity, humanity, and compassion." See Zhou Ruchang, "None *The Red Chamber* Message Hears: Art as Living Philosophy," *Tamkang Review* 淡江評論 36 (2005): 93. I will use sentiment, love, passion, emotion, and feeling interchangeably as *qing*'s English equivalents. For a detailed examination of the conception of *qing* in Chinese culture, see Halvor Eifring, "Introduction: Emotions and the Conceptual History of *Qing*," in *Love and Emotions in Traditional Chinese Literature* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2004), pp. 1-36.
- ³ Many scholars agree that the *Dream* pits *qing* against orthodox Confucianism. See Yu Yingshi 余英時, *Honglou meng de liangge shijie* 紅樓夢的兩個世界 (Shanghai: Shanghai kexueyuan chubanshe, 2006), pp. 34-57. Anthony C. Yu, *Rereading the Stone: Desire and the Making of Fiction in Dream of the Red Chamber* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), pp. 104-109. Maram Epstein, *Competing Discourses: Orthodoxy, Authenticity, and Engendered Meanings in Late Imperial Chinese Fiction* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Asia Center, Harvard University Press, 2001), pp. 150-198. Haiyan Lee, "Love or Lust? The Sentimental Self in *Honglou meng*," *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews* 19(1997): 85-111, and *Revolution of the Heart: A Genealogy of Love in China, 1900-1950* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), pp. 45-50. Waiyee Li, *Enchantment and Disenchantment: Love and Illusion in Chinese Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), pp. 231-256. Angelina C. Yee, "Counterpoise in *Honglou meng*," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 50: 2(1990): 613-650.

that the *Dream* sketches a more complex interplay of *qing* and Confucian ideology. The author Cao Xueqin 曹雪芹 presenting *qing* as an alternative self-identification scheme to Confucian ritualism, explores the possibility for a sentimental individual using *qing* to embrace an authentic Confucian tradition rather than rebelling against or assimilating into the hypocritical Confucian society.⁴ In creating a literary “other” to represent his past “self,” Cao defines Baoyu as both the subject to perform in the narrative and the object to be observed under the current self’s gaze. In this way, the novel presents Cao’s review of his past life as a way of exploring the sentimental individual’s negotiation for a space of *qing* within a corrupt Confucian society.

My research examines several paradoxical constructs — the “stone-jade,” the protagonists, the Prospect Garden, and the Land of Illusion — that display how sentiment (*qing*) derives from and strives to co-exist within Confucian orthodoxy. I argue that the novel finally dismisses the possibility of *qing*’s survival and reveals that sentimentalism is doomed to destruction or mutation by the overwhelming Confucian ideology. In the novel, religion (in the form of Buddhism and Taoism), marked by its bipolar capacity to both syncretize with and renounce Confucian values, is the last resort for the male protagonist Jia Baoyu 賈寶玉 in attempting to uphold his faith in *qing*. Thus, Baoyu’s conversion to Buddhism serves as his *rite de passage* from

Louise Edwards, “Women in *Honglou meng*: Prescriptions of Purity in the Femininity of Qing Dynasty China,” *Modern China* 16: 4(1990): 407-429. Halvor Eifring, “The Psychology of Love in *The Story of the Stone*,” in *Love and Emotions in Traditional Chinese Literature*, p. 76.

⁴ Though the author’s exact identity is disputed, the debate lies beyond the scope of the present paper. Therefore, I refer to Cao Xueqin as the author of the *Dream* according to scholarly convention.

reality to the sentimental world after the sub-space of *qing*, situated in the Confucian world, completely collapses.⁵ My revision of the supposed dichotomy of *qing* and Confucian orthodoxy in the *Dream* also shows that the author's discussion of *qing* dovetails with the intellectual transformation of late imperial China.

The intellectual milieu of late imperial China

Scholars characterize the period that spans the Ming and early Qing Dynasties as remarkable for its individualism: “the individual was probably valued more highly than any other time during the long history of imperial China.”⁶ This period witnessed the rise of the towering philosopher Wang Yangming 王陽明 and the flourishing of his creative and stimulating formulation of the heart-mind (*xinxue* 心學). Deviating from orthodox Confucianism which upholds the ultimate heavenly principle (*tianli* 天理), Wang's school of the heart-mind championed human nature (*renxing* 人性) as the bedrock of human morality. By validating the “potential sagehood of every person on the basis of his or her innate moral knowledge (*liangzhi* 良知),” Wang's *xinxue* subversively

⁵ The following discussion is based on the 120 chapters of the *Dream*. Although different editions exist and multiple authorship remains tenable, I agree with Anthony Yu, Haiyan Lee, and Mei Xinlin 梅新林 that it is sometimes necessary to take the entire 120 chapters as a complete work in order to appreciate the essential unity of the narrative. In this paper, I will sidestep the issue of apocrypha and read the 120 chapters as a whole novel. See Haiyan Lee. “Love or Lust?,” p. 100, note 30. She concurs with Anthony Yu's opinion in her note. Mei Xinlin, *Honglou meng zhexue jingshen* 紅樓夢哲學精神 (Shanghai: Xuelin chubanshe, 1995), p. 2.

⁶ Martin Huang, *Literati and Self-re/presentation: Autobiographical Sensibility in the Eighteenth-century Chinese Novel* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), p. 1.

uprooted the moral authority from *tianli* and Confucian self-cultivation and resituated it in the immanent human character.⁷ This promotion of “innate knowledge” was understood both as the “most radical challenge to authority” of the time and also as a reestablishment of Confucian authority.⁸ These scholars strove to defend an authentic Confucian tradition against a debased official orthodoxy by affirming the value of human nature and individual worth. Their piety to and criticism of Confucian teaching thus helped to “fuel the rise of the cult of sentiment (or affect, *qing*) during the latter half of the sixteenth century.”⁹ Since sentiment was celebrated as the “new common denominator of humanity a medium of self-expression, and the basis for the construction of a radical subjectivity,” the cult of *qing* quickly grew and profoundly influenced the trajectory of philosophy and literature in late imperial China.¹⁰

However, the dynamic movement of *qing* underwent a conservative turn in the Qing dynasty. The revival of Cheng-Zhu 程朱 neo-Confucianism, according to Martin Huang, was concomitant with a “tendency within a large group of early Qing literati thinkers to blame the Wang Yangming School of neo-Confucianism.”¹¹ Huang insightfully diagnoses the cause of this intellectual transformation as “part of some Confucian thinkers’ reaction to the painful reality of a

⁷ Haiyan Lee, “Love or Lust?,” p. 86.

⁸ William Theodore De Bary, “Individualism and Humanitarianism in Late Ming Thought,” in William Theodore De Bary, ed., *Self and Society in Ming Thought* (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1970), pp. 155-156.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Haiyan Lee, “Love or Lust?,” pp. 86-87.

¹¹ Martin Huang, *Literati and Self-re/Presentation*, p. 3.

‘fallen country,’ in addition to being a result of deliberate policies of the new Manchu regime.”¹²

The *Dream* was written in this historical context and entered into the debate about *qing* and Confucian orthodoxy. Anthony Yu holds that the “irreconcilable opposition of *qing* and Confucian ritualism” has a “lengthy and complex history” and thus finds its way into *Honglou meng*.¹³ However, I agree with Zhou Ruchang 周汝昌 that it is a misunderstanding of the “central premise of the novel” to define Cao Xueqin as “anti-Confucian” with his “supposed use of *qing* as a weapon against Confucianism.”¹⁴ Taking this observation as its starting point, the present paper contextualizes the *Dream* in the intellectual transformation of late imperial China and offers a revision of the supposed antagonism between *qing* and orthodox Confucianism in the novel. I argue that the *Dream* is less a display of antagonism than an attempt to use *qing* as an alternative scheme of self-identification to achieve the authentic Confucian ideal and thus redeem the collapsing Confucian order.¹⁵

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Anthony C. Yu, *Rereading the Stone*, p.105. For a detailed response to Yu’s chapter about *qing* and *yu* 欲, see Zhong Caijun 鍾彩鈞, “Yetan rujia de qingyu guan” 也談儒家的情欲觀, *Zhongguo wenzhe yanjiu tongxun* 中國文哲研究通訊 15: 4(2005.12): 13-16. Despite of Zhong’s some reservations about Yu’s arguments, they generally agree on the opposite relationship between *qing* and Confucian ritualism.

¹⁴ Zhou Ruchang, “None *The Red Chamber* Message Hears,” p. 94.

¹⁵ Though I agree with Zhou Ruchang that Cao is not anti-Confucian, I am not convinced by his assertion in “*Honglou meng* yu *Qing* Wenhua,” 《紅樓夢》與「情」文化 in *Honglou meng Xuekan* 紅樓夢學刊 55: 1(1993): 67-78. Zhou considers that Cao Xueqin does not believe in Confucianism (or Buddhism or Daoism) but rather believes in *qing*, for in this article, Zhou does not clearly define the relationship between *qing* and Confucianism, or distinguish *qing* from Confucian concepts, such as *ren* 仁. In “None *The Red Chamber* Message Hears,” in *Tamkang Review* 淡江評論 36:1/2 (2005): 89-103, Zhou similarly argues that Cao Xueqin elevates *qing* to

The “past self” and “current self”

The prologue of the novel immediately confronts us with its author’s regrets and lamentations. The author bemoans the fact that he wasted his time and achieved nothing by capturing memories of his youth in, as Waiyee Li puts it, “a confessional yet nostalgic tone.”¹⁶ To memorialize those remarkable girls who have passed through his life, he expresses his desire to replay his past in the manner of self-examination. However, as the author states, in his retrospection of the past with his “mind’s eyes,” truth is hidden and surfaces are duplicitous (*HLM* 1:1; *SS1*: 20-21). Presented as both true and false, the *Dream* serves as a reminiscent “imagining” of the author’s past life.

As Martin Huang observes, the *Dream* evinces a “deep regret for one’s past life and nostalgia for it, bitter memories of a drastic decline in personal fortunes, the celebration of a unique self, open admiration for eccentricity, a fascination with the reality of dreams, and above all, an acute sense of the multiplicity of self.”¹⁷ Huang’s analysis also hinges on an unqualified identification of Jia Baoyu (the protagonist) with the

a higher status than Confucianism in the *Dream* — “Confucianism, without *qing*, was just empty talk” (p. 94). However, he also contends that Cao “reaches a concise, sincere, sophisticated, and convincing doctrine of Neo-Confucianism” (p. 94). To my mind, the ambiguity embedded in Zhou’s arguments can testify to my argument that the concept of *qing* is inextricably bound up with Confucianism and is difficult to distinguish from Confucian ideology. Thus, I will argue in the following section that Cao Xueqin’s endorsement of *qing* fits with his ambivalent attitude toward Confucianism. Cao believes in an authentic Confucian ideal but criticizes the decadent Confucian society. Thus, in his novel, he interrogates the possibility of using *qing* as an alternative to access the former and redeem the latter.

¹⁶ Waiyee Li, *Enchantment and Disenchantment*, pp. 168-169.

¹⁷ Martin Huang, *Literati and Self-re/Presentation*, pp. 6-7.

author of the novel, suggesting that the *Dream* inherits a long Chinese poetic tradition of creating an “other” to represent the “self.” As Huang does, I interpret Baoyu as the author’s construction of an “other” to relive the “self’s” past. The gap between the author’s current self and past self gives rise to Baoyu’s unqualified identification with the author himself and meanwhile allows the author to observe Baoyu with his “mind’s eye” both apologetically and ironically. The author, on the one hand, makes Baoyu the subject of the past, while on the other hand, he transforms Baoyu into an object of his self-examination. In other words, the author, i.e., the “current self,” acts as the spectator of an illusion in which “the past self” becomes both the subject to perform and the object to be observed. In this way, Cao Xueqin, at a distance from his “past self,” interrogates the possibility of a sentimental individual to reconcile *qing* with Confucian orthodoxy within a depraved Confucian society.

Sentimental self *vis-à-vis* patriarchal self

Many scholars agree that *qing* in the *Dream* signals a revolt against Confucian ritualism. Haiyan Lee asserts, “Baoyu’s self-conscious pursuit of a sentimental existence is accompanied by a resolute rejection of the dual career of public service and private lordship (ruling over an extended, polygamous household). *Qing* is quite unambiguously held up as a countercultural banner, something that cannot be reconciled with orthodoxy.”¹⁸ Lee seems to assume that to reconcile *qing* with Confucian orthodoxy is to assimilate the former into the latter. In the same vein,

¹⁸ Haiyan Lee, *Revolution of the Heart*, p. 46.

Maram Epstein also formulates a pair of competing conceptions as authenticity *vis-a-vis* orthodoxy.¹⁹ In fact, Lee's formulation of the sentimental self against the patriarchal self and Epstein's formulation of authenticity against orthodoxy, both reiterate the dichotomy of *qing* and Confucian ritualism. However, I will argue that the *Dream* is less posing *qing* against the Confucianism than trying to reconcile the two by an ideal co-existence.

Baoyu, the author's past self, is constructed as polyvalent, encompassing both a sentimental and patriarchal self. The stone, Baoyu's mythical self, needs to be analyzed first. It is tempered but abandoned by the Goddess Nüwa 女媧, lying at the foot of Greensickness Peak (*Qinggen feng* 青埂峰), a homophone for "root of sentiment" (*qinggen* 情根). Transformed into a jade, the stone is held in Baoyu's mouth, entering with him into the mundane world.²⁰ Thus, the stone-jade comes to symbolize Baoyu's "root of *qing*" and validates him as a man of sentiment (*youqingren* 有情人). To ensure that the secular world recognizes the stone's value, the author repeatedly has the scabby-head monk and the lame Daoist embellish it both by words and magic. When the stone first encounters the two clerics, the monk changes it into a gorgeous jade by magic and inscribes it with words in order to make sure that it isn't mistaken to be mundane (*HLM* 1).²¹ Consequently, the jade is

¹⁹ See Maram Epstein, *Competing Discourses*, pp. 155-173.

²⁰ See *HLM* 2: 33, *HLM* 3: 46, 54 *HLM* 25: 357, *HLM* 33: 453, *HLM* 3: 46, *HLM* 114: 1567.

²¹ Besides the monk's decoration of the stone in chapter 1 (*HLM* 1:3), the two clerics show up to save the bewitched Baoyu 寶玉 and Xifeng 熙鳳 in chapter 25, and again they cast magic over the jade and tell Jia Zheng 賈政 "You do not understand the miraculous powers of that precious jade" (*HLM* 25: 357; *DRM* 25: 705). In chapter 120, after Baoyu bids farewell to his father, Jia Zheng recalls that the two clerics had come to their house to inform them of the jade's value

immediately treasured as an auspicious amulet for Baoyu when he is born.²² The author's painstaking contrivance to beautify the stone-jade guarantees that it will be received favorably by the Jia family and thus plugs Baoyu's sentimental root in a relatively benign patriarchal society at the outset. Moreover, we should bear in mind that Baoyu is born into a noble family in Confucian society and is identified as the sole heir of his familial lineage, so he is by birth status a Confucian patriarchal man. His patriarchal upbringing, resources, and body accommodate and nurture his sentimental leanings. Thus, Baoyu should not be reduced to a rebellious sentimental being. This reading is bolstered by the image of the jade held in Baoyu's mouth: metaphorically, the sentimental root comprises a component of the Confucian body, not an invader from outside of it.

The stone itself, Baoyu's sentimental root, also has mythical yet Confucian origins, which further validates the argument for Baoyu's multidimensionality. In the first chapter, the stone appears as a superfluous block that did not have the opportunity to repair heaven with Goddess Nüwa 女媧. Though having been tempered for the grand enterprise of patching the sky, the stone ends up lying abandoned at the foot of Greensickness Peak. Because of its inutility, "it became filled with shame and resentment and passed its days in sorrow and lamentation" (*HLM* 1:2; *SS* 1:47). Repairing the sky is a perennial trope in Chinese

(*HLM* 120: 1637).

²² For example, in chapter 3, when Baoyu tries to hurl and smash the jade, he says, "Beastly thing! I don't want it." Then, "the maids all seemed terrified and rushed forward to pick it up, while Grandmother Jia 賈母 clung to Baoyu in alarm [and said] 'why go smashing that precious thing that your very life depends on?'" (*HLM* 3: 52; *SS* 3: 104). (I return later to a discussion of Baoyu's refusal of the jade in this episode.) For another example of the jade's status and value, see *HLM* 94: 1333-1339.

literary works for Confucian aspirations to public service.²³ The stone's mythical etiology denotes that the stone obtains its magical power through a molding process linked to Confucian learning; therefore, its attribute of *qing* emerges as a by-product of its frustration with a Confucian ideal. The reading is also tenable when the stone begs the monk and the Daoist to take it into the Red Dust. At that point, it compliments the two divine priests with their “sky-repairing and world-succoring talents” — a Confucian-style flattery.²⁴ Hence, the story of the stone's origin inscribes a Confucian implication into its sentimental attribute, and thus subtly echoes Baoyu's two aspects of self.

In this way, Baoyu's two juxtaposing selves pave the way for his self-differentiation. Haiyan Lee asserts that “In establishing a value system that valorizes the intrinsic, sentimentalism constitutes an alternative basis of identity that challenges the patriarchal prescriptions of personhood.”²⁵ In accordance with Lee's reading, in which *qing* is enthroned as a new authority to valorize the personhood, I argue that

²³ For example, the Song 宋 poet Sushi 蘇軾 writes in his “Mountain Daner” 儋耳山: “please look at the stones on the side of the road, they are all abandoned blocks that didn't get the chance to patch the sky 君看道旁石，均是補天餘” (my translation). See Deng Lixun 鄧立勛, ed., *Su Dongpo quanji* 蘇東坡全集 (Hefei: Huangshan shushe, 1997) juan1, p. 551. In a similar vein, the famous poet Xin Qiji 辛棄疾 writes in his “He Xinlang” 賀新郎 that “if there is an opportunity, you will see my magnificent feat in repairing the sky 看試手，補天裂” (my translation). See Xu Hanming 徐漢明, ed., *Xin qiji quanji* 辛棄疾全集 (Chengdu: Sichuan wenyi chuabnshe, 1994), p. 9. The metaphor that links Nüwa's 女媧 tempering of the stone with Confucian learning can be seen in *ZYZ*, p. 6.

²⁴ Anthony C. Yu, *Rereading the Stone*, p.118. Yu asserts that the stone is offering a “highly ironic appeal” to the clerics. However, I prefer to interpret the moment in the text as a manifestation of the stone's Confucian nature and a subtle suggestion of religion's ability to reconcile with Confucianism, as I elaborate below.

²⁵ Haiyan Lee, “Love or Lust?,” p. 85.

Baoyu's sentimental root and patriarchal body enable him to form a personality that differs from the other Jia male characters, who are often disagreeable.

First, the threesome, Jia Jing 賈敬, Jia She 賈赦, and Jia Zhen 賈珍 furnish a decadent caricature of the corrupt and degenerating Confucian society. Jia Jing, the former patriarch of Jia family with the hereditary title in the *Ning* mansion 寧府, and a graduate scholar (*jinshi* 進士) who, indulges in the pursuit of Daoist immortality, proves totally indifferent to both family and society and finally kills himself with "immortal pills" (*HLM* 63: 901-902). Jia She, the eldest son in the *Rong* mansion 榮府 who also inherits the noble title, is a greedy, narrow-minded, lascivious, and irresponsible scoundrel. He tries to force his mother's maid Yuanyang 鴛鴦 to be his concubine. When refused, he threatens the girl, saying that unless she dies or becomes a nun, he will not spare her after Grandma Jia 賈母 dies (*HLM* 46: 631-644). Also, his adamancy in marrying Yingchun 迎春 to an unworthy man leads to the girl's early death (*HLM* 79: 1143, 109: 1511). He is even willing to ruin a man's life over the possession of some antique fans (*HLM* 48: 662-663). Baoyu's eldest cousin Jia Zhen, the current patriarch of the Jia family, is notorious for his incestuous relationships with his daughter-in-law Qinshi 秦氏 and the You sisters 尤氏姐妹.

Jia Zheng 賈政, Baoyu's father, illustrates the rigidity and impotence of the ritualized Confucian institution. A decent, righteous and respectable scholar-official, Jia Zheng is different from his two brothers. However, he proves incompetent both in managing the family and in handling his official duties (*HLM* 99: 1391-1400). Characterized by his "ineffectual Confucian rigidity," Jia Zheng also fails to evoke a favorable

response from readers.²⁶ One other important male character shares the last name Jia — Jia Yucun 賈雨村 — encapsulates the moral decay of Confucian literati and the loss of control of Confucian teaching. He is not a family member but rather a henchman of the aristocratic Jias. Though he debuts as an ambitious and erudite young scholar, Jia Yucun fails to hold his convictions after entering the officialdom. In exchange for social advancement, he colludes with the Jia family to bend the law when adjudicating cases involving Jia's family members and relatives.²⁷ Consequently, he is convicted of avarice and extortion and dismissed from his official post (*HLM* 120: 1643). Jia Yucun's trajectory is rather typical insofar as it illustrates the tension between attaining knowledge and cultivating virtues, which Yu Yingshi defines as the Confucian polarity between Confucian learning and morality.²⁸ This tension unmistakably corresponds to Ming scholars' critique of the rupture between Confucian teaching and official orthodoxy, and between Confucian discourse and daily practice.

Undoubtedly, these Jia males all stand as possible models of Baoyu's future, while he is supposed to pass the civil examination and shoulder the responsibility of maintaining the family's prosperity. Although it is

²⁶ Maram Epstein, *Competing Discourses*, p. 152.

²⁷ The most famous case is in chapter 4 (*HLM* 4: 57-64), when Jia Yucun 賈雨村 deals with Xue Pan's 薛蟠 murder of Feng Yuan 馮淵, he "not only manages to satisfy the plaintiffs, who have little power and brought the suit only in the hope of obtaining some compensation, but his 'judicious' handling of the case also enables him to curry favor with the Jias, who are related by marriage to the Xues." See Yiqun Zhou, "Temples and Clerics in *Honglou meng*," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 71: 2(2011): 292. For another similar case, see chapter 48, Yucun helps Jia She 賈赦 plunder a man's fans (*HLM* 48: 662-663).

²⁸ See Yu Yingshi, "Some Preliminary Observations on the Rise of Ch'ing Confucian Intellectualism," *The Tsing Hua Journal of Chinese Studies* 清華學報 11(1975): 105-136.

not his aim to depict Baoyu as being the same as the other Jias, the author of the *Dream* hints that Baoyu has the potential to replicate the other Jias by weaving occasional descriptions of Baoyu's sexual impulses, violent tendency, and unconcern for his obligations into the narrative.

In the *Dream*, Baoyu's "sexuality is disproportionately downplayed *vis-a-vis* his sentimentality," but he is not entirely innocent.²⁹ There are a few understated details about Baoyu's sexual impulses in the novel (besides the explicit case of his sexual encounter with Xiren 襲人 [HLM 6: 93]). For example, one such elusive innuendo concerns his homosexual foray with Qin Zhong 秦鍾 (HLM 15: 207);³⁰ another occurs when Baoyu banteringly invites his maid Qingwen 晴雯 to take a bath with him, and Qingwen refuses in a very suggestive way, alluding to his former escapade with another maid Bihen 碧痕 in the bath (HLM 31: 434; SS 31: 115). Baoyu's sexual impulses also surface in his "dazed" fascination with Baochai's 寶釵 snow-white arms (HLM 28: 401; SS 28: 66). In addition, when Liu Xianglian 柳湘蓮 asks Baoyu about You Sanjie's 尤三姐 personality, Baoyu mentions that he has fooled around for a month with the You sisters, who are notorious for their lascivious behaviors (HLM 66). It is no wonder that a Qing commentator Erzhi Daoren 二知道人 defines all the Jia males including Baoyu as lustful ghosts 色鬼.³¹ Though all these moments in the text are fleeting and the descriptions are vague, we cannot dismiss the possibility that Baoyu also

²⁹ Haiyan Lee, "Love or Lust?," p. 104.

³⁰ For an implicit suggestion on their possible homosexual behavior, see ZYZ, p. 275.

³¹ See Erzhi Daoren 二知道人, "Honglou meng Shuomeng" 紅樓夢說夢, in Guo Yushi 郭豫適, ed., *Honglou meng yanjiu wenxuan*. 紅樓夢研究文選 (Shanghai: Huadong shifan daxue chubanshe, 1988), p. 40.

possesses the trait of *yin* 淫 like Jia She and Jia Zhen. Some scholars further interpret Baoyu's flirtation with Lady Wang's 王夫人 maid Jinchuan 金釧 (*HLM* 30: 424) as a parallel to Jia She's much-maligned attempt to seduce Yuanyang, suggesting that Baoyu has the potential to evolve into a womanizer.³²

Evidence of further negative tendencies comes when Baoyu violently kicks Xiren in chapter 30 (*HLM* 30: 427). He is also totally indifferent to household management and careless with the clan's future (thus resembling Jia Jing). We learn Baoyu's indifference in household management when Daiyu tells him that, she had been assessing the financial situation and worries that the Jia family is falling on hard times — even though this assessment is not her responsibility. Baoyu unconcernedly replies that even if Daiyu is right, he and Daiyu will not personally be short of money (*HLM* 62: 878). All these details create a vague yet implicative web to suggest the probability that the Jia males' infelicitous and even evil traits might have found their way into Baoyu's personality.

A bifurcated attitude toward Confucianism

However, the author will not allow the potential evil in Baoyu to blossom, as the sentimental root offers a possibility to release Baoyu's patriarchal body from its apparent destiny of following in the Jia seniors' footsteps. This function of the sentimental root echoes that of *qing* in the Ming dynasty: criticism of the rigid Confucian orthodoxy alongside

³² Maram Epstein, *Competing Discourses*, p. 181.

determination to restore a genuine Confucian tradition. As Haiyan Lee insightfully observes, the cult of *qing* is “a renaissance movement” that always tries to recuperate “an undeniable but forgotten place” within the Confucian tradition.³³ Therefore, I argue that the author of the *Dream* is seeking recourse to this unique power of *qing* to counterbalance the depraved trends of Confucian society and interrogating if *qing* can allow the individual to approach to an authentic Confucian ideal. In other words, the author does not pit *qing* against Confucian principles so much as strives to reconcile the sentimental self with the patriarchal self by defining a new selfhood.

First, the author depicts Baoyu’s words and deeds in an inconsistent manner. It is well known that Baoyu detests the pursuit of rank and wealth which enslaves young scholars to their political ambition. He is so wayward that he makes every attempt to evade Confucian learning and the civil examination.³⁴ However, there are striking moments that betray his allegiance to the Confucian canon. In chapter 36, Baoyu burns all his books and only keeps the *Four Books* 四書 (*HLM* 36: 487). This episode is often cited by scholars as one of the most convincing testimonies to Baoyu’s incorrigibility and hatred of Confucian learning. However, it nonetheless subtly accentuates Baoyu’s faith in the *Four*

³³ Haiyan Lee, *Revolution of the Heart*, p. 44.

³⁴ For example, he is once annoyed with Baochai 寶釵 and Xiangyun 湘雲, who both persuade him to focus on the Confucian learning and aspiration. Baoyu says that their words are “stupid rubbish.” (*HLM* 32: 445; *SS* 32: 131). When he sees a painting that encourages young people to study, he finds it “distasteful” and escapes at once (*HLM* 5: 70-1, *SS* 5: 126). He thinks Baochai is the same as those “ghastly crew of thievish, place-hunting career worms 國賊祿鬼” (*HLM* 36: 486; *SS* 36: 195). He also refers to those who are ambitious in Confucian learning as “career worm 祿蠹” (*HLM* 19, 115; *SS* 19: 391, 115: 277).

Books, the Confucian classics. Similarly, at their first meeting, Baoyu offers Daiyu the courtesy name “Frowner 顰顰” which Tanchun 探春 mocks as she thinks it is merely Baoyu’s fabrication. Then Baoyu replies: “There are lots of made-up things in books — apart from the *Four Books*, of course.” (*HLM* 3: 51, *SS* 3: 103) Also, when he is required to return to school in chapter 82, Baoyu first seeks out the *Four Books* to review. A relatively more explicit example appears in Chapter 19: Xiren admonishes Baoyu, “you also say that, apart from that classic on ‘manifesting bright virtue,’ all the rest are trash produced by fools of old who didn’t understand the Sage” (*HLM* 19: 271; *DRM* 19: 529).³⁵ Though in this case Xiren is criticizing Baoyu’s waywardness, her words demonstrate Baoyu’s endorsement of the authentic quality of “the sage’s books;” Baoyu detests not Confucianism as such but rather the so-called Confucian scholars and their misrepresentation of the sage.

In addition to Baoyu’s preservation and affirmation of the classical canon, two examples reveal his distinction between genuine Confucian principles and interpreter’s distortion of them. In Chapter 58, after Fangguan 芳官 explains to him why Ouguan 藕官 burns spirit money in the garden, he exhorts that, “‘Spirit money’ is a superstitious invention of modern times: you’ll find nothing about it in the teachings of Confucius” (*HLM* 58: 828; *SS* 58: 133). In a similar vein, when he is formulating the elegy for Qingwen, he thinks, “Unfortunately, men today are so keen on official advancement that they have completely discarded this classical style, for fear of not conforming to the fashion and

³⁵ The Confucian classic *The Great Learning* 大學, one book of the *Four Books* 四書, says, “The way to great learning is manifesting bright virtue 大學之道，在明明德。” See *DRM*, p. 566, chapter 19, note 1.

damaging their chances of winning merit and fame” (*HLM* 78: 1130; *DRM* 78: 2409). His critique of “today’s” or “modern” people and defense of the ancient tradition further complicate his refractory personality.

Furthermore, Baoyu’s unique understanding of “nature” and “loyalty” can be linked to his emphasis on authenticity and his renunciation of the sophistic or hypocritical. In chapter 17, when Baoyu follows his father on a tour of Sweet-rice Village 稻香村, they have an aesthetic disagreement. As Yiqun Zhou puts it, “Baoyu’s daring criticism of it for being an artificial imposition” stands in sharp contrast to “Jia Zheng’s heartfelt appreciation for the inspiring simplicity and naturalness of a rural setting.”³⁶ In this episode, unlike in the rest of the novel, Baoyu is surprisingly eloquent in front of his father. Similarly, Baoyu expounds on his understanding of loyalty and martyrdom to Xiren, asserting that those who died for the Emperor and the state “were thinking only of their own personal fame and glory” (*HLM* 36: 493; *SS* 36: 206). Baoyu’s idiosyncratic definitions of authentic nature and loyalty unmistakably indicate his appreciation of a genuine Confucian ideal and distaste for people’s misrepresentation of it.

Compared to the author’s vehement promotion of Baoyu’s emotion and feelings, the moments of Baoyu’s endorsement of Confucian ideal are few and far between in the lengthy text. However, they are sufficient to challenge the view that simply defines Baoyu as a rebel against or a misfit in Confucian society, a view that overlooks Cao Xueqin’s elaborate

³⁶ Yiqun Zhou. “*Honglou meng* and Agrarian Values,” *Late Imperial China* 34: 1(2013): 47.

design of Baoyu's complicated personality and his dual self.³⁷

The question then becomes, *why* does Cao complicate Baoyu's personality with those contradictions? On the one hand he plays up Baoyu's abhorrence of Confucian learning and public service, while on the other hand he covertly suggests that Baoyu believes in the authentic Confucian ideal. Inspired by Yiqun Zhou's assertion that the *Dream* presents a bifurcated stance toward religion, at once attracted to religious theology and repulsed by its institution, I argue that the author's attitude toward Confucianism, works according to similar logic.³⁸ In paradoxically making the apparent anti-Confucian — Baoyu — repeatedly affirm the authentic Confucian tradition and classic texts, the author distinguishes the routinized Confucian ritualism from a genuine core value. In other words, the author explicitly criticizes the rigid and decaying Confucian society and its unfavorable spokesmen while implicitly articulating his nostalgia for the authentic Confucian tradition. This bifurcation closely aligns with the endeavors of Wang Yangming's

³⁷ Admittedly, one may offer an alternative understanding of Baoyu's preservation of the *Four Books*: it might be the author's gesture to avoid political and cultural castigation under the cruel literary inquisition in late imperial China. I would like to point out that Cao Xueqin is a sophisticated writer, and the *Dream* is famous for its great care of details and their hidden meanings. If these details are merely submissive gestures, they might be too explicit when compared to the general subtle style of this novel. Thus, I prefer to believe these details are deliberate and have far-reaching implications. Mark Ferrara also points out that Baoyu's preservation of the *Four Books* "drives home his tacit acknowledgement of the core value of Confucianism." See Mark Ferrara, "Emptying Emptiness: Kongkong Daoren in *Honglou meng*," *Tamkang Review* 36: 1/2(2005): 108. Ou Lijuan 歐麗娟 also expresses a similar opinion in her open course on *Honglou meng*. See National Taiwan University Open Course Ware: *Honglou meng* (<http://ocw.aca.ntu.edu.tw/ntu-ocw/index.php/ocw/cou/101S120>) (June.05.2014 visited).

³⁸ For a detailed analysis of the anticlericalism in the *Dream*, see Yiqun Zhou, "Temples and Clerics in *Honglou meng*," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 71: 2(2011): 263-309.

school of the heart-mind in both attacking and re-establishing Confucianism.

Two enlightenments

Through the occasional display of Baoyu's belief in the authentic Confucian tradition, the author affirms Baoyu's potential to become a better social being and to harmonize *qing* with his patriarchal body. The author gives Baoyu at least two chances to take the right track and achieve his potential, but Baoyu, as the author's past self, inevitably repeats the past and fails to discern his opportunity.

Let us first take a look at Baoyu's initial enlightenment in the idyllic world of *qing* — the Land of Illusion 太虛幻境. Baoyu's "sentimental root" — the jade — serves as an emblem of the space for *qing* in his body. This space of *qing* is then projected by his dream, in which Baoyu takes his first tour of the Land of Illusion. Governed by the fairy Disenchantment 警幻仙子, this divine world categorizes people using emotional criteria rather than Confucian moral norms.³⁹ Among the diverse emotional departments such as "Fond Infatuation," "Cruel Rejection," "Early Morning Weeping," "Late Night Sobbing," "Spring

³⁹ Though the Land of Illusion seems to establish a new social order and resist being shaped by Confucian moral values, its classificatory scheme still intertwines with social hierarchies and distinctions. For example, all the girls are divided not only according to emotional principles but also according to their social status. The three registers (Main register, Supplementary register No. 1 and No. 2) that Baoyu reads are labeled by hierarchy. My understanding is that: even the ideal world of *qing*, to a certain extent, must face the normalization of the Confucian value system, not to mention the sentimental individuals and the secular Prospect Garden. Thus, again, in the *Dream*, *qing* is not supposed to revolt against the social order but to carve out an inner space within the Confucian society.

Fever,” and “Autumn Grief,” Baoyu enters “The Ill-fated Fair,” where he reads the foreshowing registers for the main female characters in the *Dream* (*HLM* 5: 75-81; *SS* 5: 131-135). The names of the departments remind one of the categories of stories in Feng Menglong’s 馮夢龍 *Qingshi* 情史 (*A History of Love*). Worshipping *qing* with a fervor that verges on religious, Feng in his *Qingshi* propagates “a religion of *qing*.”⁴⁰ In this sense, the Land of Illusion imagines a divine instantiation of the “religion of *qing*.”

While she guides Baoyu, Disenchantment explains that “sentiment is the divine essence ‘implanted’ in only a selected group of individuals.”⁴¹ As a goddess who governs *qing* and human beings endowed with sentiment, she knows that Baoyu belongs to this group and that Baoyu’s meeting with her is divinely fated. However, when the other goddesses show up, Disenchantment explains to them that she, while on her way to fetch the Crimson Pearl, came across the Duke of Ning Guo 寧國 and his brother the Duke of Rong Guo 榮國, who “laid a solemn charge” on her. They think Baoyu who “inherited a perverse, intractable nature and is eccentric and emotionally unstable,” is the only candidate to carry on the Jia line. Therefore, they charge Disenchantment to give Baoyu “proper guidance and to start him off along the right lines.” (*HLM* 5: 82; *SS* 5: 136-137)

Disenchantment’s words are rich in meaning. First, they reveal Disenchantment’s inconsistency. Her real purpose in guiding Baoyu into

⁴⁰ Haiyan Lee, *Revolution of the Heart*, p. 39. In *Qingshi*, the majority of its tales focus on the male-female relationship. All the stories are grouped into 24 chapters, and each bears a distinctive title with the character of *qing*.

⁴¹ Haiyan Lee, “Love or Lust?,” p. 89.

the divine world proves ambiguous. The two ancestors' comment on Baoyu is similarly contradictory, as they believe Baoyu to be an offspring who is "intractable, eccentric and emotionally unstable" but also believe that he is the only hope to save the whole family from decline. In addition, they entrust Disenchantment to enlighten Baoyu and steer him to a "right line." Since Disenchantment is a goddess of *qing*, why do the two ancestors entrust her to give Baoyu a seemingly Confucian enlightenment? If they think Baoyu is intractable and eccentric, why do they pin their hopes on him? Do they really mean a Confucian enlightenment?

In fact, based on the author's bifurcated attitudes towards a genuine Confucian ideal and its ritualized system in reality, it is not irrational to presume that the author might employ the two ancestors to suggest that *qing* might be able to foster a superior heir (unlike those Jia males we have discussed previously). According to the author's ideal, this eccentric offspring can rely on his sentimental root and patriarchal identity to resist assimilating into the decadent Confucian society while simultaneously pursuing a Confucian ideal. Thus, Baoyu, as a *youqingren*, becomes the exclusive candidate. Moreover, no one could be more qualified than Disenchantment, a goddess of *qing*, to help Baoyu achieve enlightenment through *qing*. Hence, Disenchantment enlightens Baoyu according to the two ancestors' recommendations. She follows the process of initiating Baoyu "in the pleasure of the flesh as to shock the silliness out of him," which might help Baoyu escape "some of the traps that people fall into and devote himself single-mindedly to the serious things of life" (*HLM* 5: 82; *SS* 5: 137).

To better understand Disenchantment's strategy of enlightenment, it is necessary to step back and take a look at the distinction between *qing*

and *yu* 慾 (desire, or lust) in the Ming dynasty. Haiyan Lee epitomizes the Ming intellectuals' reconceptualization of *qing* in separating it from *yu*: "sentiment, rather than the manifestation of instinctual desire, was the original nature from which desire was only a deviation toward excess. In other words, it was not that sentiment was the sublimation of desire, but that desire was the perversion of sentiment."⁴² With this distinction of *qing* and *yu*, the two ancestors and Disenchantment's strategy to enlighten Baoyu becomes more understandable. Though *qing* might help the sentimental individual grow into a different social being, it gives rise to desire when used in excess, thus posing trap for the individual of sentiment.

When the goddess marries her sister "Two in one" 兼美 to Baoyu and initiates him "in the pleasure of the flesh," we can easily link the girl "Two in one" to a perfect combination of Daiyu and Baochai. Since Daiyu and Baochai represent the values of *qing* and an ideal Confucian personality respectively, Disenchantment might hope that through this initiation Baoyu will learn to deal with desire as he negotiates between *qing* and Confucian ritualism. Only when he strikes a balance between the two can he safely rely on his sentimental root to unfurl a new future. If not, he will fall prey to *qing*'s perversion.⁴³

⁴² Haiyan Lee, "Love or Lust?," p. 87. For a detailed study on *qing* and *yu*, see Anthony Yu, *Rereading the Stone*, pp. 53-109; also see Martin Huang, "Sentiments of Desire: Thoughts on the Cult of *Qing* in Ming-Qing Literature," *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews* 20 (1998): 153-184.

⁴³ Andrew Plaks asserts that the author of the novel sometimes indicates that excessive *qing* will turn into *yin*, but the author is not suggesting to eliminate *yu*; what he suggests is to strike a balance between *qing* and *yu*. See Andrew Plaks 浦安迪, *Zhongguo xueshi xue* 中國敘事學 (Beijing: Beijing Daxue chubanshe, 1996), p. 165.

In addition to documenting Baoyu's enlightenment, the *Dream* carefully explores two possibilities that result from perverted desire. The first is Qin Zhong's 秦鍾 anecdote. Qin Zhong's name puns on the expression *qingzhong* 情種 (sentimental seed), and thus he shares Baoyu's sentimental trait of *youqingren*. However, when he trysts with a nun, his transgressive behavior brings upon him a cruel beating from his father, finally leading to his premature death (*HLM* 16: 211). Similarly, Jia Rui 賈瑞, one of Baoyu's distant cousins, indulges in his lust for Wang Xifeng 王熙鳳 and loses his life in the hallucinatory sexual encounter with Xifeng (*HLM* 12: 170-172). In Jia Rui's case, he receives a magic mirror made by Disenchantment. Failing to follow the Daoist's cautionary advice, he turns a blind eye to the lifesaving side of the mirror and immerses himself in the alluring but fatal side. Both Qin Zhong's and Jia Rui's episodes can be read as illustrations of the necessity of the principle that both the ancestors and Disenchantment attempt to instill in Baoyu: improper *qing* (desire) not only incurs ruthless punishment by the ritualized patriarchal power but can also kill directly.

No wonder Qin Zhong, on his death bed, advises Baoyu, "When you and I first met, we thought ourselves above the common herd. Now I know how wrong we were. You should set your mind on making a name through the examinations, on winning distinction, in future..." (*HLM* 16: 222; *DRM* 16: 137) The audience may find it surprising for Qin Zhong to talk in such a Confucian way as he dies. I argue that, here, the author might offer Qin Zhong's last words as a second chance to enlighten Baoyu (or to warn his past self): *qing* is intended to help him rid himself of corrupt Confucian reality and adhere to an authentic Confucian ideal. If he clings only to *qing* and fails to understand how to reconcile it with

Confucian orthodoxy, he will regret it when it is too late.⁴⁴ With the deliberate enlightenment of Disenchantment and the earnest caution from Qin Zhong, the author takes pains to guide Baoyu, but Baoyu fails to discern this message and repeats the mistakes that the author may hope he had never made himself.

The ironic and rueful smile to the past self

Though the author endows Baoyu with the potential to develop a better personality, Baoyu does not pursue the enlightenment that the author arranges for him. He stays in his world of *qing* to his own detriment and disappoints his author. Occasionally, we can feel the author gaze at Baoyu with an ironic and rueful smile, a smile that might reveal the author's deep regret about his own past. For example, in chapter 37, Baoyu's maid Qiuwen 秋紋 tells the other maids that she unexpectedly reaps the benefits from Baoyu's "sudden rush" of filial feelings. It is ironic that she prefaces her tale with the warning, "you will laugh if I tell you" (*HLM* 37: 508; *SS* 37: 227). In the novel, the author includes almost no evidence of Baoyu's filial devotion to his parents, and yet this exceptional episode spotlighting Baoyu's filial behavior, is introduced as a joke. Poking fun at Baoyu's occasional filiality, the author shows how far Baoyu is from the authentic Confucian ideal, and how hard it remains to transform him into an ideal figure. Undoubtedly, the author's ironic smile upon Baoyu also reflects on his past self.

⁴⁴ The red inkstone also expresses a similar opinion in chapter 16 that "when I read [Qin Zhong's last] words, I am finally aware that they divulge the author's regrets for not discerning the gist earlier." See *ZYZ*, p. 302.

The meticulous representation of Daiyu also showcases the author's ironic and remorseful observation of his past self. As we know, Daiyu is “the character who most fully personifies the values associated with *qing*.”⁴⁵ It is noteworthy that Daiyu's name puns on the word “carrying a jade,” which implicitly identifies her as *youqingren*.⁴⁶ With mutual understanding and love, she proves the perfect sentimental partner to Baoyu. However, it is this most sentimental character that nevertheless is disproportionately depicted in terms of her Confucian personality and transformation in comparison to Baoyu.

First of all, when Daiyu is first introduced, she is described as a filial model. As a six-year old girl, Daiyu “helped with the nursing throughout her mother's last illness and mourned for her bitterly after her death” (*HLM* 2: 24; *SS* 2: 70). Also, when Jia Yucun recalls his time as Daiyu's tutor, he praises her for her observation of the filial principle by avoiding pronouncing or writing the character in her mother's name (*HLM* 2: 33; *SS* 2: 82). Second, Daiyu loves reading and is immensely erudite. Her residence is so full of books that Grannie Liu 劉姥姥 once mistakes it for a young master's study (*HLM* 40: 547). By contrast, in the following chapter, the same Grannie Liu again mistakes Baoyu's residence for a noble girl's boudoir (*HLM* 41: 574). Liu's funny mistakes subtly identify the two individuals with opposite sexes and opposite attitudes toward

⁴⁵ Maram Epstein, *Competing Discourses*, p. 158.

⁴⁶ Though it is widely known that Wang Guowei 王國維 (1877-1927) glosses *yu* 玉 (jade) as *yu* 慾 (desire), I would rather understand Daiyu's 黛玉's name as “carrying a jade,” which indicates she also possesses a sentimental root like Baoyu. Hence, Baoyu's refusal of the jade in chapter 3 might show that he can't accept the truth that his soul mate doesn't have the sentimental root. In this light, Grandmother Jia's 賈母's white lie to Baoyu in turn symbolically confirms the existence of Daiyu's jade — the sentimental root.

Confucian learning. Third, though living as a female outsider, Daiyu is deeply concerned for the Jia family's economic hardship, while Baoyu, in sharp contrast, pays no attention to it at all (see above, *HLM* 62: 878). Meanwhile, Daiyu is as capable as Baochai in managing the household. Xifeng in chapter 55, straightforwardly puts Daiyu on a par with Baochai as a competent helper, while appraising others such as Baoyu, Li Wan 李纨, and Ying Chun as inferior to them (*HLM* 55: 780).

Fourth, Ou Lijuan 歐麗娟 regards Baochai's admonition of Daiyu and their sincere conversation in chapter 42 as a crucial crossroad in Daiyu's changing personality. Ou convincingly points out that Daiyu, after this *rite de passage*, gradually develops a favorable Confucian personality in many ways. For example, before the conversation, Daiyu's sharp tongue lends her an "air of lofty self-sufficiency and total obliviousness to all who did not move on the same exalted level as herself" (*HLM* 5: 69; *SS* 5: 124). Nannie Li comments that Daiyu's words are sharper than knives (*HLM* 8: 129); Xiangyun 湘雲 also says Daiyu always finds fault and mocks (*HLM* 20: 286); and the maid Hongyu 紅玉 mentions that Daiyu "is so critical and so intolerant" (*HLM* 27: 376; *SS* 27: 28). However, chapter 45, describes in detail Daiyu's hospitable conversation with an old servant as well as her proper and polite treatment of the latter (*HLM* 45: 629); similarly, we are showed her psychological development as she now feels sorry for unwittingly hurting Caiyun's 彩雲 feeling when kidding Baoyu (*HLM* 62: 875).

By the same token, when the imperial consort Yuanchun 元春 returns to visit her family, Daiyu has her mind set on "deploying her talents to the full and amazing everyone with her genius" (*HLM* 18: 253; *SS* 18: 367). Instead, we see her praise Xiangyun's poem with a modest

self-remark: “It’s good. Both charming and original. But I am not able to achieve this level.” (*HLM* 70; *SS* 70: 385).⁴⁷ Similarly, she applauds Miaoyu’s 妙玉 poem by saying that her own poems are “of little value,” but they “will gain distinction by being associated with [Miaoyu’s]” (*HLM* 76: 1094; *SS* 76: 524).⁴⁸

All these examples suggest that what the author expects for Baoyu happens to Daiyu instead. As Daiyu grows increasingly mature, moderate, and even worldly-wise, Baoyu languishes in his comfortable *qing* space without much progress or self-consciousness. The traits that should belong to Baoyu, the male heir of a noble clan, are acquired instead by a female outsider to this aristocratic family. The mismatch of the two sentimental partners and their personalities foreshadows the final collapse of the sentimental niche in a hostile patriarchal society. Through this ironic reversal, the author satires Baoyu and by extension himself, and exposes his powerlessness to rewrite the past.

The Prospect Garden

The author’s powerlessness in changing his past and Baoyu’s life trajectory is also apparent in the decay of the secular space of *qing* — the Prospect Garden. As is commonly noted, the *Dream* uses the Prospect Garden to envision a realistic world of *qing*, unlike its precursor *The Peony Pavilion* 《牡丹亭》, a play that confines *qing*’s world to the realm

⁴⁷ “But I am not able to achieve this level.” is my translation, for Hawkes omits this sentence in his translation.

⁴⁸ For more examples of Daiyu’s changing personality, see Ou Lijuan, “Lin Daiyu Liti Lun” 林黛玉立體論, *Hanxue Yanjiu* 漢學研究 20: 1(2002): 221-252.

of phantasmagoria.⁴⁹ Yu Yingshi 余英時 and other scholars have already discussed the “intimate links” between the Land of Illusion and the Prospect Garden.⁵⁰ If the Land of Illusion is a celestial utopia of *qing*, then the Prospect Garden serves as the secular projection of its ethereal counterpart.⁵¹ As I will show, the novel employs the paradoxes embedded in the garden to envision the negotiation between *qing* and Confucian norms in daily life, exploring how men and women of sentiment struggle to preserve *qing* when exposed to the normalizing and assimilating power of Confucian society.

The garden is built for Yuanchun, the imperial consort who symbolizes the sovereign power of the patriarchal society. However, she is also the one that validates the world of *qing*, decreeing that a select group (which includes Baoyu) can move into the garden (*HLM* 23: 319). Similarly, though Baoyu, the man of sentiment, declares himself the master of the garden — a “lord of flowers in Crimson Caves” 絳洞花主 (*HLM* 37: 501), it is Jia Zhen 賈珍, the head of the Jia family, who is in charge of the construction of the garden. In chapter 17, Jia Zhen leads a tour of the Garden. He not only adeptly leads the tourists out of the labyrinthine place, but also informs them about the buildings and the landscaping of the garden (*HLM* 17: 239). When Xichun needs to consult

⁴⁹ Though there is a garden that offers the site for the emergence and development of *qing*, *The Peony Pavilion* 牡丹亭 essentially encloses its delineation of *qing* into the protagonists’ dream and ghostly behaviors rather than reality. For more information and analysis of *qing* and *The Peony Pavilion*, see Li Waiyee, *Enchantment and Disenchantment*, pp. 50-63.

⁵⁰ Waiyee Li, *Enchantment and Disenchantment*, p. 192.

⁵¹ See Yu Yingshi, *Honglou meng de liangge shijie*, pp. 34-57; Waiyee Li, *Enchantment and Disenchantment*, p. 192; Wang Hui 王慧, *Daguanyuan Yanjiu* 大觀園研究 (Beijing: Zhongguo shehuikexue chubanshe, 2008), pp. 187-215.

the blueprints of the garden in order to paint, Xifeng tells her the blueprints are in Jia Zhen's hands (*HLM* 45: 619). All the evidence subtly reveals that patriarchal power serves not only as the garden's foundation but also ultimately controls the world of *qing*.

Though the garden is regarded as a private and pure space, which denies entry to males, Jia Zheng and Jia Zhen along with a gang of males take the first tour of the newly completed garden (*HLM* 17: 224-240). Relatedly, whenever there are significant events and festivals, the pure and private garden opens to all family members. For example, when Baoyu and Xifeng are bewitched by Ma Daopo 馬道婆, all of the family members enter the garden to visit them (*HLM* 25: 354); also, the whole family, including all the males, come into the garden to celebrate the Mid-Autumn's day (*HLM* 75: 1075).⁵² In addition, the garden is open to Jia Yun 賈芸 who is responsible for planting trees, which scholars interpret as a symbolic process of introducing outside order into the utopic garden.⁵³ In short, the space of *qing* is not independent of the Confucian order; it is always subject to outside powers' control, inspection, and interruption.

Admittedly, the poetry club seems to offset the overwhelming power of the ritualized Confucian order at a certain level. The poetry club serves as a legitimized arena for sentimental beings to express their feelings in the repressive society. Through the club, the author endows the residents with a chance to connect *qing* to art: art, as Epstein points out, "is the most legitimate aspect of *qing* a talented artist is able to transform

⁵² For more examples, see Wang Hui, *Daguanyuan Yanjiu*, p. 202.

⁵³ See Ou Lijuan, *Honglou meng*. National Taiwan University Open Courseware: *Honglou meng* (<http://ocw.aca.ntu.edu.tw/ntu-ocw/index.php/ocw/cou/101S120>) (June.05.2014 visited).

the raw and frequently transgressive passions of *qing* into culturally acceptable forms of artistic production.”⁵⁴ No wonder Baoyu and Daiyu, the two sentimental individuals at the top of the roster of *qing*,⁵⁵ are also the two who write most poetry in the *Dream*.⁵⁶ Epstein further asserts that “the orthodox social structures are progressively deconstructed” in the poetry club.⁵⁷ She contends that the members of the club each adopt a *nom de plume* which reduces their relationship to a simple and mutual friendship.⁵⁸ In this way, boundaries of hierarchy and the residents’ social identities are gradually dissolved by *qing*’s rebellion against ritualism.

While I admit that there is indeed a different order of being in the garden, as represented by the poetry club, I want to point out that the garden is by no means only defined by *qing*. Confucian order and the order of *qing* coexist with each other. Though hierarchical boundaries and social identities are sometimes dissolved, the transgressive democratization is only temporarily achieved. The gathering of the club is more like a carnival in which attendees provisionally dismantle the social

⁵⁴ Maram Epstein, *Competing Discourses*, p. 159.

⁵⁵ According to the red inkstone’s commentary, Disenchantment has a roster of *qing*, Baoyu and Daiyu is believed in the first two places. See ZYZ, p. 331, 367. For a detailed analysis of the roster, see Wang Hui, *Daguanyuan Yanjiu*, pp. 216-240.

⁵⁶ Daiyu and Baoyu are the only two characters in the *Dream* who write poems spontaneously and privately to express their feelings. For example, Daiyu writes the famous “Song of Flower-Burial” 葬花吟 and “Autumn Window: A Night of Wind and Rain” 秋窗風雨夕, while Baoyu composes some poems after he reads *Zhuangzi* 莊子, and the elegy for Qingwen. Other sister cousins seldom write poems outside of the club. For example, Baochai, who is as good as Daiyu in composing poems, is only shown as writing poems during the club time or other public occasions.

⁵⁷ Maram Epstein, *Competing Discourses*, p. 156.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 168-169.

boundaries and enjoy the game of dethroning the noble and enthroning the profane. These carnivalesque occasions do not supplant the ritualized daily life of the garden. Furthermore, the joyful gathering is sponsored by the Jia Family (its fund is provided by Wang Xifeng) and organized by Li Wan, a chaste widow leading an exemplary Confucian life. Again, though the club offers a more pure space for *qing* than does the garden writ large, it exists within the framework of the Confucian construct and never exits its Confucian womb.

Because the author cannot change this state of affairs, he can only try his best to validate an inner space for *qing* and give Baoyu enough time to struggle for a satisfying way to preserve it. Hence the author strategically slows the passage of time in the garden. Martin Huang discusses the anachronism in Baoyu's age and asserts that the "persistent dwelling on the age of thirteen is a deliberate attempt to search for an imaginary escape from harsh reality."⁵⁹ To me, this anachronism is less escapism than a strategy to expand the time span for Baoyu to struggle for a sentimental space and develop a better personality in the corrupt Confucian society. Because of the slower time passage, all the sentimental individuals' initiations into the adult world are postponed. They delay marriage and the assumption of social roles, which would require them to leave the *qing*'s world and get normalized by the Confucian society.

However, the author is not able to entirely stop time. In the end, Baoyu's sentimental root fails to steer him onto the right track as the two ancestors, Disenchantment, and the author all had hoped. The author's

⁵⁹ Martin Huang, *Literati and Self-re/Presentation*, pp. 101-102.

endeavor to extend the liminal stage of Baoyu and prolong the existence of the garden fails to change Baoyu's (i.e. the author's past self) trajectory and rewrite the past. Overwhelmed by the power of Confucian society time and again, the decay of the world of *qing* accelerates. "The entropic collapse" of the Prospect Garden is marked by a rapid accumulation of "sexual aggression, sickness, death, and ghostly appearances until the garden is reduced to a threatening wilderness."⁶⁰ The appearance of the erotic token and the ensuing raid of the garden is the prelude to this entropic collapse (*HLM* 73-74). Daiyu dies in the garden while the other golden girls are married off or leave the garden one by one. Baoyu is required to return to school and prepare for the civil examination (*HLM* 81: 1172). He even expounds upon the models of virtuous women for Qiaojie 巧姐 (*HLM* 92: 1303-1305). His assimilation into the patriarchal society culminates in the loss of his sentimental root, the jade (*HLM* 94: 1333). Without the jade, he is less intelligent and comes to resemble the other Jia males more explicitly. For instance, Baoyu is aroused by Baochai and Xiangyun who are in mourning dress at Grandma Jia's funeral (*HLM* 110: 1524), which parallels Jia Zhen and Jia Rong's 賈蓉 lascivious behavior during Jia Jing's funeral. Similarly, Baoyu rushes to join a social activity with Jia She in high spirits (*HLM* 93: 1316). In the end, he passes the civil examination and leaves an offspring before becoming a monk. Also, he comes to meet his father and kowtows to him before he disappears with the monk and the Daoist (*HLM* 120: 1636).⁶¹ His transformation is so

⁶⁰ Maram Epstein, *Competing Discourses*, p. 167.

⁶¹ For similar examples, see Yu Pingbo 俞平伯, *Yu Pingbo Shuo Honglou meng* 俞平伯說紅樓夢 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1998), pp. 38-62.

drastic that in his dream the Land of Illusion, the sacred world of *qing* is replaced by “the Paradise of Truth 真如福地,” where the principle of *qing* is supplanted by the Confucian/Buddhist notion of “Blessing for the Virtuous; Misfortune for the Wicked” (*HLM* 116: 1581-1582; *SS* 116: 285).⁶²

Until now, the author dismisses all possibility for a sentimental self to preserve a space of *qing* and thereby arrive at a Confucian ideal. Even Baoyu, the man on the top of the roster of *qing*, is irresistibly transformed and normalized; and the celestial world of *qing* is also assimilated into the Confucian value system. The author evinces his pessimism about *qing*'s survival, which dovetails with the conservative turn of the intellectual atmosphere and the tendency to blame the movement of *qing* and Wang Yangming school in early Qing.

Religion as the last resort

At this desperate moment, religion (Buddhism/Daoism), distinct in its bipolar capacity of both assimilating into and renouncing Confucian values, offers the last resort for Baoyu to uphold his faith in *qing*.⁶³ On the one hand, late imperial China witnessed a syncretism of Confucianism and Buddhism; while on the other hand, the sweeping Buddhist negation of all the values and meanings became an effective

⁶² Epstein points out that although most of the negative signs of garden's decay occur after chapter 80, “the process is set in motion in chapter 71.” From chapter 71 to 114, almost every chapter has such signs. See Maram Epstein, *Competing Discourses*, p. 167, note 47.

⁶³ “It is widely recognized that in *Honglou meng* casual references are often made to Buddhist and Daoist teachings, clergies, and liturgies as though they were indistinguishable”. See Yiqun Zhou, “Temples and Clerics in *Honglou meng*,” p. 264, note 3.

way to resist the overwhelming power of Confucian orthodoxy. In the *Dream*, the scabby-head monk and the lame Daoist play the role of envoys between the Land of Illusion and the Red Dust. They elicit the stone's desire and bring it to the mundane world but also deliver miserable people out the Red Dust.⁶⁴ They mediate between the world of *qing* and reality, and thus vividly reiterate religion's capacity to carve out a liminal space between Confucian society and the world of *qing*.⁶⁵

In a similar vein, at the edge of the Land of illusion lies a "Ford of Error:" "No boat can ever cross it; only a raft manned by a lay-brother called Numb 木居士 and an acolyte called Dumb 灰侍者 They won't ferry anyone across for money, but only take who are fated to cross over" (*HLM* 5: 91; *SS* 5: 147). Numb and Dumb, which pun on "withered tree and dead ashes 槁木死灰" reference the religious state of seeing through the vanity of the Red Dust. They function, like the monk and the Daoist, to bridge the two worlds of *qing* and Confucian society.⁶⁶

Though in the end of the novel there may no longer be room for *qing* in Confucian society, the author is not resigned to wiping *qing* out of his narrative. By retreating to religious anchorage, Baoyu finally uproots himself from the Confucian world in order to reinstate the ideal of *qing*.

⁶⁴ For an analysis of the two clerics' role in evoking the stone's "worldly mind" by taking the stone into the mundane world and bringing it back, see Anthony Yu, *Rereading the Stone*, pp. 115-119.

⁶⁵ For a detailed analysis of the two clerics's role as mediators between the Land of Illusion and the mundane. see Mei Xinlin, *Honglou meng zhexue jingshen*, pp. 34-42.

⁶⁶ Here it is necessary to clarify that both Li Wan 李纨 and Jia Xichun 賈惜春 are in a similar state of "withered tree and dead ashes," though there is little to imply their connection to the world of *qing* (besides, both of them are on the register of the Land of Illusion). In fact, since Numb and Dumb "only take who are fated to cross over," we can see only a chosen group who simultaneously have *qing* and see through the vanity of the Red Dust can finally embark on the raft and enter the world of *qing*.

In this sense, Baoyu's conversion to Buddhism is less a religious enlightenment than a *rite de passage* from reality to the sentimental world after he fails to reconcile the two discourses by becoming an ideal Confucian-cum-sentimental figure. This can also explain the contradiction that Baoyu, marked by a habit of "calumniating Buddhist and Daoist clerics and their religions" (*huiseng bangdao* 毀僧謗道 *HLM* 19: 272) surprisingly becomes a Buddhist monk at the end of the novel.⁶⁷

The color symbolism in the novel's denouement drives home the point that Baoyu resorts to religion to restore and perpetuate the world of *qing*. Baoyu wears a red cape against the background of snow in his final appearance, which showcases "the contrast between white, the color of liberating nothingness, and red, the color of passion, desire, attachment If anything, the color red is not obliterated by the enshrouding whiteness; it is, rather, intensified by the contrast."⁶⁸ In this way, Cao Xueqin's regretful retrospection of his past concludes with a final attempt to preserve *qing* through religious anchorage. He doesn't gesture to emptiness. He gestures to emotions in memory.

(責任校對：趙家琦)

⁶⁷ I use Yiqun Zhou's translation of "*huiseng bangdao* 毀僧謗道," see Yiqun Zhou, "Temples and Clerics in *Honglou meng*," p. 273.

⁶⁸ Qiancheng Li, *Fictions of Enlightenment: Journey to the West, Tower of Myriad Mirrors and Dream of the Red Chamber* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2004), pp. 163-164.

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《紅樓夢》中「情」與儒教觀的博弈

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摘要

學者大多認為《紅樓夢》中的「情」與儒家正統規範是二元對立的關係。本文提出「情」作為一種新的身份定義機制，與儒家正統規範構建了一種較二元對立更為複雜的互動關係。本文將對《紅樓夢》的解讀納入明清時期的文化思潮轉型的歷史背景中，着重分析曹雪芹在幻想式的懷舊過程中探討「有情人」在腐敗墮落的儒家社會中構建並保留「情」之空間的可能性。曹雪芹通過文學創作虛構出一個「文學的他者」來重演「過去的自我」，從而將現時之「自我」與過去之「自我」進行間離。因此，現時之「自我」可以通過對過去之「自我」的觀察，探討其能否抑制腐敗墮落的儒家禮教的同化，並藉助「情」重新定義自我，最終回歸傳統的儒家本真。

本文指出曹雪芹最終否認了「情」在腐朽的儒家社會中構建新秩序的可能性。這時，宗教（佛教／道教），以其與儒家正統的融合能力同時又否定一切塵世價值的出世思想，成為連接「情」與儒家社會的唯一通道。唯有藉助宗教，小說主人公寶玉才能從能夠腐蝕一切的現實社會中全身而退並最終回歸「情」的理想世界。因此，寶玉最終的「懸崖撒手」與其說是皈依佛門不如說是在「情」的空間崩塌後逃離現實社會的儀式化姿態。本文指出曹雪芹在小說中的回眸與反思也是對明清時期文化流變和思潮轉型的契合與折射。

關鍵詞：《紅樓夢》、情、儒家正統、自我

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