

The Cross-cultural Comparison of *The Tale of Genji* and *A Dream of Red Mansions*

Mengmeng ZHOU

Department of Chinese Language and Literature, Jinan University, Guangzhou, 510632, China;

Email: zhoumengmeng23@126.com

Abstract:

The Tale of Genji, and *A Dream of Red Mansions* are the classic work of oriental literature. The protagonists Murasaki-no-ue and Daiyu, as the representatives of eastern ideal female images, reflect the similarities and differences between Japanese culture and Chinese culture. It is worthwhile to elaborate and analyze from cross-cultural perspective in four aspects: a) the background of composition; b) the psychological character; c) the cultural aesthetic orientation; and d) value orientation.

Key Words: Murasaki-no-ue; Daiyu; cross-cultural study

1. THE BACKGROUND OF COMPOSITION

The Tale of Genji, is considered to be finished in its present form between about 1000 and 1008 in Heian-era of Japan. The exact time of final copy is still on doubt. The author Murasaki Shikibu was born in a family of minor nobility and a member the northern branch of the Fujiwara clan. It is argued that her given name might have been Fujiwara Takako. She had been a maid of honor in imperial court. As a custom in imperial court, the maid of honor was given an honorific title by her father or her brother's position. "Shikibu" refers to her elder brother's position in the Bureau of Ceremony (*shikibu-shō*). "Murasaki" is her nickname, which is called by the readers, after the character Murasaki-no-ue in *The Tale of Genji*. Based on her delicate psychological insight, in *The Tale of Genji*, the author depicts the disputes existed in Clan Genji that lasted for four generations and exhibits the life scenes of aristocracy in Heian-era. This fiction consists of fifty four chapters, and it refers to a complicated and panoramic work in the length of over one million words. In Heian-era, the common phenomenon existed in Japanese aristocrats is that they believed Buddhism. Hence, it fosters the popularity of Buddhist concepts, such as "cause and effect" and "the cycle of samsara". Extensively affected by the Buddhism, the author reveals the ideology that "nibbida dirt and pursuit for pure land". Concerned with the era background, it is quite acceptable for the author to write it in such way.

Originally, *The Tale of Genji* was written for the entertainment of Queen and concubine in imperial court. Due to this reason, although the author presents the cruel scenes of political

battle, the core content concentrates on the fantasy and pain of love, as well as the exquisite and authentic characters. Given the delicate description, the fiction is endowed with the tone of elegance and sorrow.

A Dream of Red Mansions, which had been entitled as *The Story of the Stone*, was written in Qianlong period of Qing Dynasty. In 1784(the 49th year by the rein of Emperor Qianlong),the edition edited by Master Mengjue(梦觉主人)officially renamed it as *A Dream of Red Mansions*. Cao Xueqin, is the author of *A Dream of Red Mansions*. His given name is Cao Zhan(曹霁)and his courtesy name is Mengruan(梦阮).Qinxi(芹溪) or Qipu(芹圃) is known as his alternative given name. Cao's ancestral home is Fengrun County of Hebei Province. Cao belonged to a Han Chinese clan which became part of the Plain White Branch(正白旗)of the Manchu Banners in the early years of Qing Dynasty. Cao Xueqin, whose birthplace was Nanjing, lived in a noble family that had enjoyed the power and prestige for nearly a century. Cao Xueqin's grandfather, Cao Yin, was a former playmate to the emperor Kangxi, and Cao Yin's own mother was the wet nurse to the infant Kangxi. On account of the intimate relationship with Emperor Kangxi, from his great-grandfather, his clan had held the office of Imperial Textile Commissioner at Jiangning for three generations, as long as 60 years. In his boyhood, Cao Xueqin acquainted with the luxury life of noble family. At that time, he can be described as the extravagant son of the rich wallow in song and women, and had no idea at all what hunger meant. After the ascension of Emperor Yongzheng to the throne, in 1727, his father Cao Fu was arrested by political reasons and the property and power of Cao Clan was completely lost. When Cao Fu was released a year later, the family, totally impoverished, was forced to relocate from one place to another. And since then, he lived a unstable life, sometimes he even had to bear the satire and indignity in order to maintain his survival. Through the experience of life upheaval, not only could he sense the decline of feudal governing class, but also the darkness and evil of feudal society penetratingly as a whole. As a declined aristocrat, he witnessed the fickleness of the world and realized the great crisis hidden in the mask of "Qianlong Prosperity". In *A Dream of Red Mansions*, which exhibits the decadence of four large feudal families, the author offers an elegy on the fall of feudal society, and predicts the doomed fate of feudal society.

Not come singly, but in pairs. Based on the emptiness, *A Dream of Red Mansions* betrays the Buddhist ideology that people should release from the world. Accompanied with the vicissitudes of the four related large and eminent families, namely the Jia, the Shi, the Wang, the Xue, the plots of the fiction are arranged by the core: love tragedy between Jia Baoyu and Lin Daiyu. It reflects the tragic vision and disillusionment of life.

2. THE PSYCHOLOGICAL CHARACTER

Murasaki-no-ue, being educated by Genji's ideal standard since her childhood, depicts as a tender and virtuous lady in *The Tale of Genji*. In Genji's thorough education, Murasaki-no-ue is cultivated to be a lady with talent and acculturation. She is in accordance with the ideal

standard: elegant and upright. In addition, from personality aspect, there is no flaw on her character: she is respectful and cautious without deficiency. Seeing from her behavior, she doesn't refuse any command of Genji and devotes all of strength to him without any complaint. However, the case is quite opposite in the bottom of her heart. The lechery and misconduct of Genji brings her great anxiety. Without confession, Murasaki bears the torture and consequently her grievance converts into jealousy and indignation. On the one part, what bothers her most is that other woman will replace her status in Genji's mind one day; on the other part, there is no method for her to perform catharsis. After the dual agony, she involves in melancholy and reduces to a shadow. Then she intends to become a Buddhist nun for the sake of avoiding the disturbance in reality. When her request is refused by Genji, she pines away in pain and misery.

Her disappointment and sadness has not been identified by others. Murasaki restricts the exposure of true feeling all the while and conceals it in the deepest of her heart. Owing to the heavy burden on her mind, the emotional insecurity couples with Murasaki consistently. She even envies the heroine in the stories, "Every woman always belongs to a man, and then her life is stable. However, my experience is strange. It is quite wandering and restless." It is quite unfair that Genji requires Murasaki understand and tolerate him without any condition. This situation results in the release of her heavy psychological stress impossible, then it aggravates the situation day by day. The consequence of that is to cause her depressive personality disorder. By the means of restraint and silence, she conceals real feelings and exhibits composure and repose. Nevertheless, she is preoccupied with feeling of insecurity, pessimism, depression, including the doubt pervading all aspects of circumstance. Consequently, she pines away in misery after persistent self-torture.

Lin Daiyu, as the heroine in *A Dream of Red Mansions*, is a gifted and proud lady. From her childhood, she lives in her grandmother's house and lacks the emotional security brought from family. And this leads to her skeptical and pessimistic attitude toward surroundings. In this rough situation, the love from Baoyu is the only comfort for her. However, the process of courtship is filled with twists and turns, including suspicion and quarrel. When it concerned with the excellence of Xue Baochai, Lin Daiyu inevitably feels inferior to her. Anyhow, self-esteem, which is deeply rooted in Daiyu's heart, forbids her to accept this point. As a result, mock and satire is utilized as the weapon to guard her dignity. The purpose of her conduct is quite simple, merely to remind others of her existence and status, especially Baoyu. There is no doubt that what she done will not violate the doctrine for noble lady. The strict education has been integrated into her mind, which directs her conduct coherent with the noble standard.

The pessimism about surroundings and prospect bothers Daiyu's delicate nerve so much that she often involves in sentimentality. As an acute observer of circumstance, Lin Daiyu, realized that she is incompatible with the surrounding. "I am surrounded by the knives of wind and swords of frost." Yet her limited strength cannot fight against the external forces. Thus only can she alert about anyone or anything appeared around her, and prepares to make a counterattack

by her fluent speech. The potential provocateur and rival who want to pose a threat on her will be treated with irony. It is wise for her to sense Baochai's threat on her status in Jia Clan. "Baochai's generous, tactful and accommodating ways contrasted strongly with Daiyu's standoffish reserve and won the hearts of her subordinates, so that nearly all the maids like to chat with her." Nevertheless, the brutal ending strikes her without any warning, leaving her dream come vain. When confronted with the cruel reality, she suffers the fatal tribulation, which disappoints her so great that leads to her departure from madding crowd.

3. AESTHETIC ORIENTATION

A. Gender comparison in aesthetic orientation

As a female writer, Murasaki Shikibu should have different aesthetic orientation, compared with male writer. It is elaborated in fiction that Murasaki-no-ue is endowed with various virtues, such as tender, gentle, straightforward, and wisdom. When the author presents the image of Murasaki-no-ue, she combines all of the elements of ideal woman: beauty, tenderness, talent, sophy. Conforming to the norm of feudal doctrine, she is a perfect lady indeed. All of her emotion and thought is trained to satisfy Genji's requirement, whereas Genji doesn't value it so much and considers it as a matter of course. Murasaki-no-ue obeys the doctrine of feudal ethics and persuades her husband in mild manner, regardless of Genji's misconduct and disloyalty. Despite the fact that Genji is surrounded by omnigenous women, Murasaki-no-ue treats all the women associated with Genji in good manner and never fight for Genji's favors. In the eyes of Genji's concubines, Murasaki-no-ue is a respected and tender de-facto-formal spouse of Hikaru Genji; in the eyes of servants, she is a considerable master; in the eyes of Genji, she is a perfect and outstanding wife. The application of indirect description for Murasaki-no-ue, reflects the author's aesthetic psychology: the most significant quality, or to be exactly, the charm for a ideal lady is determined by tenderness and wisdom rather than physical beauty.

Concerned with male perspective, Cao Xueqin regards Lin Daiyu as the representative of ideal woman in that she possesses talent, innocence, sagacity and effeminacy. She is not the subordinate of Jia Baoyu. Despite her dependency on her grandmother for her living, having nothing to call her own but herself, she refuses to conform blindly to the accepted custom and yields to the Confucian ethnics: ignorant women are virtuous. What impresses readers most lies in her narration of authentic emotion, instead of concealing it. Although she doesn't confess her affection toward Jia Baoyu in public, her behavior reveals her intention explicitly. Under the strict moral standard of feudal society, it is traitorous for her to read *The Romance of West Chamber* with Jia Baoyu, much less comment on this banned fiction. It is no less than a challenge for the Neo-Confucianism of Chengzhu, which is illustrated as "making the order of nature existent and desire of human extinct." As the rebel of feudal ideology, she is emerged as the awakening pioneer in aristocrat. The self-awareness and resistance presents her emancipation of mind. To be a winner of chrysanthemum poem contest, as well as the cheating assistant for Jia Baoyu, she distinguishes herself with the unique and remarkable notion, to be

exactly, the motivated self-presentation. In spite of her frailty in health and life, she seeks for the independent personality and self-esteem. It is known for her that “I am surrounded by the knives of wind and swords of frost. How can the lovely flowers long stay intact; or, once loosed, from their drifting fate draw back? ”However, she still insists on “pure substances the pure earth to enrich, than leave to soak and stink in some foul ditch” In female cousin’s eyes, she can be described as sentimentality and acrimony; in Jia Baoyu’s eyes, she is his confidant in the life. All of these aspects reflect the ideal female image in Cao’s mind: charming appearance, delicate thought, distinctive personality and having her own principle and doctrine.

B. The comparison on physical beauty

The beauty of Murasaki-no-ue is unparallel in all aspects, especially excellent in stature, feature, disposition and attraction. From her childhood, she has been kidnapped by Genji on account of her beauty. In one part, her close resemblance to the lady Fujitsubo attracts Genji’s attention. In the other part, she is blessed with peerless beauty and genius. In *The Tale of Genji*, the author has praised Murasaki’s unsurpassed beauty for more than once, in the form of genji’s utterance. In addition, the author provides other’s comments on the beauty of Murasaki-no-ue as evidence in order to intensify the impact of art. When Yugiri encounters Murasaki-no-ue, he can’t help marveling at her beauty, “How could such a beauty exist in the world!” Employed by this tool of depiction, Murasaki-no-ue establishes a perfect portrait in the horizon of readers. The fiction does not, however, simply offer a flat representation of outward beauty in such way. Not only enable readers to appreciate it from various eulogistic discourses, but also the incorporation of delicate depiction, such as “a head of thick hair”, “attractive and lovely”, which elaborates the portrait of an elegant and poised high dame.

With regard to the beauty of Lin Daiyu, it belongs to morbid beauty. Indeed, when she is first introduced, a couplet describes her “with a heart like Bigan’s, yet even more intelligent; and with an illness like Xi Zi, yet even more beautiful.” To some extent, Lin Daiyu presents the beauty of temperament and disposition rather than physical beauty. In terms of appearance alone, she is inferior to Xue Baochai, let alone Xue Baoqin. However, her effeminacy reinforces the charms of her disposition, just as the couplet quoted, “with an illness like Xi Zi, yet even more beautiful.” In *A Dream of Red Mansions*, Lin Daiyu is eulogized by Baoyu, with the compliment as follow: “Goddess-like sister”. And from perspective of Wang Xifeng, she is also appreciated, “How can such a dainty girl exist in the world!” As a technique in literature work, the author does not exhibit Lin Daiyu’s beauty with fine brush. Instead, the imaginary beauty, which is created by author’s art, can highlight “ethereal beauty” of Lin Daiyu more effectively.

4. VALUE ORIENTATION

A. The comparison between gender-oriented systems

Murasaki Shikibu, as a lady in feudal era, inevitably is affected by the impact of mainstream culture. Triggered by the subconscious impulse, she enters Feminine Stage of Women's writing, which can be interpreted as the writer imitates the symbolic domination in mainstream culture, and internalizes it as her own artistic criterion. Therefore, her world outlook revealed in book is oriented in androcentrism, which is in line with feudal ethnics system. The female character emerged as the subordinate status in man's world. By making Genji her primary focus, Murasaki-no-ue is subject to a variety of irrational requirement with her consistent unreserved devotion, which embodies the feudal ethnics: inviolability of marriage and absolute submission of the wife to the husband(夫为妻纲). Despite suffering from fickle love and dissipation of Genji, being a virtuous wife, Murasaki-no-ue still chooses to endure his misconduct and forgives his frequent disloyalty. She keeps calm and obedient outwardly while the distress tortures her inner world greatly. It is true that the changing nature of her husband in daily life casts doubt on the continuing consistency of her status in family. But she has nothing to do but bear all of his discreet behavior because she relies on her husband for living. There is no independent economic status to affirm Murasaki-no-ue to continue her life if her husband abandons her or causes his aversion. Hence, her existence is merely dominated by the female ethnical standard, which is imposed by the male-supremacy social culture.

On the other hand, when Cao Xueqin creates the work oriented in gynaeocentric theory, he inevitably arranges the character by the impact of women-centered ideological system. It can be seen in this fiction that the author experiences Female Stage of Women's writing. The term "Female Stage of Women's writing" can be interpreted as the author mimics female tone to complete the process of reconstruction for culture system, which denies the rationality of traditional ideology, after the search of self-discovery and gender identity. The author has the new perception over women; hence, based on the direct contradiction to feudal ethnics, Lin Daiyu turns up as a brand new image in Cao's depiction. She does not attach much importance to state politics and policy, nor the fame and wealth that is worshipped by common people. Instead, Lin Daiyu shows great interest in anti-traditional culture, for instance, the banned book like *The Romance in West Chamber*. As an aloof, oversensitive, and talented girl, she does not exhibit the traditional characters that can be seen in common aristocratic girl, such as tenderness and cordiality. The apparent evidence to this, and the indication of the deficiency on Lin Daiyu's character, is her caprice. If Jia Baoyu's conduct causes her anxiety, she will not treat it with calmness, or turns a blind eye to it. In many situations, she chooses to quarrel with Jia Baoyu or lose temper. What characterizes her is her self-consciousness, which supplies the rebellion and resistance against her own class.

B. The comparison between Chinese culture and Japanese culture

The Japanese culture represents itself as the concentric and alloy culture. In essence, its ideology is inscribed by the trend of irrationality and sentimentalism. Thus the rational restriction proves to be the objective demand. Murasaki-no-ue embodies this requirement above reproach. The author's real achievement is to make such requirement of Japanese culture,

which is powerful force to Japanese's psychology, concentrating on an ideal lady that exists in a poetic era recorded in history. She limits her conduct in the existed aberration and all of her response conforms to Genji's psychological expectancy. At the expense of suppressing nature, she disciplines herself as the embodiment of dame in feudal society, fulfilling all the symbolic demands.

Regarding to Chinese culture, governed by sense, it is the representative of rational culture and contains strict Confucian doctrine. As rational culture, the emphasis on "rite"(礼)entails the release of passion in order to access to emotional balance. Lin Daiyu can be seen as the incarnation of passion. From *A Dream of Red Mansions*, Lin Daiyu's emotional tirades make sense in the context of supernatural. It is strongly suggested that Lin Dayu is a reincarnated Crimson Pearl Flower that through good care by a spirit in the heaven(the reincarnation of which is apparently implied Jia Baoyu)was imbued with life. In exchange for this gift, the Vermilion Pearl vowed to be reincarnated as a human, and pays back her caregiver in the form of as many tears as a girl may weep in a lifetime. Associated with passion, she never suppresses her emotion. Regardless the secular vision, she perceives Jia Baoyu as her confidant in her life; regardless the external pressure, she devotes all her strength to seek for the sincere love. Lin's life journey of paying debt, in short, unveils her dependence on passion and emphasis on the expression of human nature.

C. Love orientation

Although Murasaki-no-ue and Lin Daiyu is end up with love tragedy, in essence, there is a distinction between their love criterions.

By a straightforward reckoning, the love of Murasaki-no-ue is based on the tolerance and devotion. Owing to various love affairs of Genji, he is surrounded by many women all the time. As the de-facto-formal spouse of Genji, not only can she bear the discreet behavior of her husband, but accept the inconvenience of encountering with his numerous concubines. Despite having no her own descendants, she fosters the daughter of Akashi and Genji with patience and circumspection. Under her management and coordination, the disputes among Genji's concubines can solve smoothly. Nay, the most significant point to address is her consideration. When Genji confronts with setback, Murasaki-no-ue always encourages him with solicitude and consolation, appearing as Genji's spiritual pillar. As a consequence, her disinterested devotion and tolerance wins the approval from public. However, all of her contributions prove to be at the expense of her health, together with consistent self-repression. By the end of this fiction, her soul is twisted by sustained inner torment, and she finishes her miserable and dolorous life journey with deep malice.

From Lin Daiyu's perspective, love is set up in the foundation of mutual reliance and fidelity. In the conviction of their love, stemming from mutual appreciation and aspiration, Lin Daiyu acquires the recognition that both of them embrace the rebellious spirit against the reality. As the acute observers of their society, they detect the decadence and evil of feudal society and

prompt to revolt it. At the same time, Jia Baoyu, as a lineal decent of the Jia Family, can be influenced by aristocratic vice inevitably. Lin Daiyu is usually bothered by philandering temptation of Jia Baoyu. Thus, by the means of utterance detection, especially pun, Lin Daiyu reminds Jia Baoyu of perservance and loyalty on love. Nevertheless, in this respect, “the gold and jade connection” is approved by Jia Family, “the match of jade and wood” merely proves to be regret.

From above analysis, there are two reasons contributing to the failure of Murasaki-no-ue and Lin Daiyu on love. In one part, it is the inevitable consequence of social circumstance; in the other part, their love standard indicates the deficiency of practical feasibility. Therefore, their tragedy is predicted as historical inevitability, which suggests “a conflict between the Orthodox and Progressive Camps is inevitable.” From ancient times to the present, the readers bemoan their tragedy in lamentation. In the world scale, they emerge as the representative heroines of oriental literature works.

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