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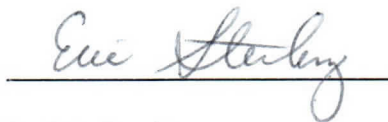
By Jialin Wang

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in partial fulfillment of the  
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Master of Liberal Arts

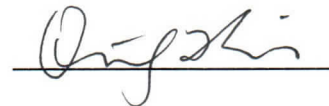
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The Analysis of Tragedy in *A Dream of Red Mansions*

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## Introduction

The art of tragedy with rich and profound passion gives a literary work incomparable artistic appeal and a strong shock force, which can create a unique aesthetic appeal. During the display of suffering and misfortune, tragedy seriously explores the place of men in the world and the most profound questions in life to demonstrate values for people and infinite concern for human destiny. *A Dream of Red Mansions*, as a masterpiece, displays the artistic charm of tragedy in Chinese literature.

*A Dream of Red Mansions* is a great classic novel which combines ideology and art very well. It has rich connotations, and it shows the tragic world on multiple levels. Meanwhile, it is an endless elegy demonstrating the tragedy of human destiny. The author Cao Xueqin not only pays attention to the vicissitudes of life and family, but is also concerned about the fate of the much broader universe.

In *Comments on A Dream of Red Mansions*, the great Chinese scholar Wang Guowei thinks that *A Dream of Red Mansions* breaks the traditional concept of happy endings that Chinese ancient novels and dramas like to have. *A Dream of Red Mansions* ends tragically. It depicts various types of tragedies, such as tragedy of love, marriage, women, family, and culture. These types of tragedies can be classified into different levels. They can be divided into individual tragedy, social tragedy, and ethical tragedy: from shallow to deep. The individual tragedy includes the rebellious tragedy, submissive tragedy and tragedy of Twelve

Beauties of Jinling; the social tragedy includes the tragedy of Jia Mansion and the tragedy of the feudal society; the ethical tragedy covers the tragedies of love and marriage, as well as the destruction of the Grand View Garden and the conflict between emotion and etiquette. These levels show the whole progressive outlook, and slightly connected tragedies, which make the tragic novel complete.

Through the analysis of the tragedy in *A Dream of Red Mansions*, I believe that *A Dream of Red Mansions* inherits the strong tragic thought and spirit in ancient aesthetics. It reveals the aesthetic essence and significance of tragedy.

**Keywords:** *A Dream of Red Mansions*      tragedy      love tragedy

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## The Analysis of Tragedy in *A Dream of Red Mansions*

### Chapter 1 Introduction

#### 1.1 Introduction

*A Dream of Red Mansions* (*Hung-lou meng*) is the pinnacle of ancient Chinese novels. It is not only very appealing, but, more importantly, it also carves a deep impression on the mind, moving and transforming one's thoughts and emotions (Rolston 323). It was first published in 1792. The great scholar Wang Guowei, among the first Chinese to apply Western ideas to a study of Chinese literature, declared unequivocally that *A Dream of Red Mansions* is the only Chinese work of magnitude fully informed with the spirit of tragedy (Hsia 246). It is the first great tragedy in Chinese literature containing an unfulfilled, triangular love story. The author of *A Dream of Red Mansions* has been identified as Cao Xueqin. The Chinese admire this novel so much that a "Redology" has existed for some fifty years, with scholars arguing and advancing theories about the authors, the authorship, the interpretation of the novel, and its significance, etc.

*A Dream of Red Mansions*, in its standard 120-chapter form, was not published until almost thirty years after the author's death. The first 80 of these chapters, under the title of *Shih-t'ou chi* or *The Story of a Stone*, had circulated among Cao Xueqin's friends even when he was still alive, and these chapters were usually transcribed in a form which included a commentary by a close relative of the author (Hsia 249). The last 40 chapters, however, have remained a problem.

Based upon a preface and an introduction written for the revised 1792 edition, as well as upon other scattered references, critics had attributed the authorship of the last 40 chapters to Gao E. This view, however, has been challenged in recent years because of the discovery of new evidence (Hsia 250).

*A Dream of Red Mansions* describes in great detail the life of the eminently rich family *Jia* with its two main branches, their numerous offshoots, and a proliferation of kinsmen, as well as a large retinue of dependents and domestics (Idema 222). The book provides many details about the extended Chinese family: its structure, organization, and ideals. These include clan solidarity and honor, respect for old age, parental authority, filial obedience, sexual relationship, the position of women, and the roles of the concubines, maidservants, and other domestics. One of the main conflicts in the novel is that between the happy life led by the young *Jia Baoyu* and his female cousins of his own age in the Grand View Garden, and the ugly intrigues and machinations going on elsewhere in the huge compound. And from the vast array of male and female characters emerge three principal figures: *Jia Baoyu*, *Lin Daiyu* (Black Jade), and *Xue Baochai* (Precious Clasp), upon whose triangular love pivots the story of the novel.

The novel begins with the arrival of *Lin Daiyu* in Nanking after her mother's death as she goes to live with the *Jia* family, which was at the height of its power and wealth (Lai 334). *Baoyu*, a talented but spoiled child, is the heir of one of the two great branches of the *Jia* clan. Spoiled as he was, his offenses are no more serious than ignoring his many sisters and female cousins, among whom the

loveliest are Lin Daiyu and Xue Baochai. Equally fair and gifted, they represent two prototypes of the Chinese conception of female beauty: the former, with a slender, willow-waisted body in danger of being wafted away by the wind, is poetically inclined, highly susceptible, jealous, and prone to crying; the latter is healthier with a happy disposition and a shapely form, somewhat on the plump side. Lin Daiyu falls in love with Baoyu almost from the moment they meet. Soon Xue Baochai also comes to live with the Jia family. Lin Daiyu regards Precious Claps as her rival and feels very insecure.

The many cousins who live in the garden play games, recite poetry, and indulge in petty quarrels and jealousy, even while the seeds of tragedy are being sown, for voracious members of the elder generation get into trouble with the authorities, bringing tragedy into the family with the deaths of several of the girls, and Baoyu's playfulness ends in the death of his favorite maid. In the interplay of fate and character, Baoyu loses his piece of jade that he was born with, as well as all his senses. The entire household is in turmoil over this, and the grandmother decides to arrange a marriage for the spoiled boy in the hope of cheering him up. Unknown to Lin Daiyu and Baoyu, the family decides that Xue Baochai is the girl for him. A great conspiracy takes place in order to keep the news from Baoyu and Lin Daiyu until the ceremony is actually underway. But Lin Daiyu hears of it and becomes very ill, while Baoyu, under the impression that he is going to marry Lin Daiyu, eagerly awaits the date of his marriage. On the day of his marriage, the elders borrow Lin Daiyu's maid to escort the bride to the ceremonial hall, in an

effort to deceive Baoyu, while Lin Daiyu lies dying in her room. When Baoyu discovers that he has married the wrong girl and Lin Daiyu is already dead, he is torn up with grief and loses his senses completely.

When Baoyu comes to his senses, he figures the family's decline comes very swiftly after this when the imperial concubine dies. Baoyu's uncle is deprived of his rank for oppressing the people in the province and has his property confiscated. Baoyu's father, trying to stop corruption, succeeds only in getting himself impeached for poor administration. Gone is the glory and splendor of old, like a dream. Therefore, he tries to restore honor and good fortune to the family by studying and preparing for the Civil Service examinations. When the examinations are over, he disappears. Baoyu is the seventh on the list of successful candidates; however, he is nowhere to be found. One night, Baoyu's father sees a person who looks like his son in the moonlight, with a shaved head, bare feet, and garb of a monk. Before he can speak, Baoyu is gone, escorted by a Buddhist monk and a Taoist priest. Here ends the story.

The author Cao Xueqin presents faithfully, realistically, and graphically the picture of a typical upper-class Chinese family. His task is made easier because the fictitious Jia family mirrors the Cao family itself, in which Cao Xueqin was brought up. As he had enjoyed the wealth and pomp of the family's heyday, so he witnessed bitterly its decline and ruin. It was caused not so much by the hostility of outward forces, although they had been building up against the family, as by its inner tension and corrosion, signs of which Cao Xueqin must himself have

detected during his younger days. It may even be possible to stretch the comparison further by identifying Baoyu's character with the author and to view Baoyu's youthful escapades and penchants as those of Cao Xueqin. There is dispute among scholars over whether the story is autobiographical or not. However, it should be remembered that *A Dream of Red Mansions* is, after all, a work of fiction, and that to read too much into Cao's life and thoughts or to exaggerate this autobiographical aspect of the novel would be to deny the artistic freedom and imagination of the author.

Taking Jia Baoyu, Lin Daiyu, and Xue Baochai's love triangle as the main line and focusing on the aristocratic society, the writer depicts life in Chinese society during the first half of the eighteenth century with a very real and vivid description. Through the description of the Jia, Shi, Wang, and Xue families, the novel shows a broad social life and a myriad of things about colorful secular humanity, which is considered as the epitome of a mirror of this part of history (Zhou 43). A realistic work, *A Dream of Red Mansions* includes hundreds of impressive characters. Besides the emphasis placed on the triangular love story, which may give a misleading impression that this novel is nothing but a conventional romance with a tragic ending, *A Dream of Red Mansions* is actually distinguished from all other classic Chinese novels for its fascination with character; even characters of minor consequence are presented as real individuals and not as stereotypes. This great work is not only a silhouette of life, but it seems very close to life itself. Variety of things happen in the novel as it does in real life.

There are births, deaths, gathering and dividing. A motley group of characters pass in and out of it as occurs in this life; in it are ranged many kinds of emotions from the joys of love to the pangs of death - emotions that are sometimes intense and heightened, and sometimes distracting and wayward.

Since *A Dream of Red Mansions* is a very complex novel, it would take more than a thesis to completely research and to understand the book. My overall argument is that *A Dream of Red Mansions*, in a form of romance storytelling, actually delivers to the readers more than just the value of love. It shows the beauty of tragedy, as well as a skillful plot and character portrayal. The tragedy is a reflection of the old Chinese society. This thesis will be an analysis of how *A Dream of Red Mansions* represents a romantic tragedy, and how it is composed with tragic elements, focusing on the study of several prominent figures in the novel and how it managed to reach the top of tragic Chinese novels.

## 1.2 Research Background

*A Dream of Red Mansions* is one of the four famous Chinese classical novels that blends advanced ideology and ample artistry in it. The other three works are *Water Margin*, *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, and *Journey to the West*. Despite that all four fictions are representative of Chinese literature; *A Dream of Red Mansions* is the most admired and studied work. The success of the characters and plot in this novel attracts many scholars, experts, and amateurs to savor and research it in China and abroad.

*A Dream of Red Mansions* is an unprecedented, great tragedy novel which may continue to be unmatched in the future. Tragedy, as a dramatic literature and theater art, has a long history whether in western or eastern literary history. Tragedy is formed by tragic consciousness and spiritual elements, but those two elements do not always work together. The tragic consciousness of Chinese culture is no less than that in western culture; on the contrary, almost all of Chinese culture is built on the basis of human tragic consciousness, that is, on the tragic division and confrontation that exists between human beings, the universe, and nature. The first one who used western literary theory to do research on *A Dream of Red Mansions* in the history of Chinese literary criticism was Wang Guowei.

He believes that *A Dream of Red Mansions* belongs to the third kind of tragedy, according to German bourgeois scholar Schopenhauer's theory. The so-called third tragedy means that the tragedy has to happen because of the specially appointed positions and the relationship of characters, which lead ordinary people to become involved with each other under ordinary circumstances. According to Wang Guowei, there are two completely different worlds: the real world and the aesthetic world. The real world is flawed and is full of suffering, while the aesthetic world is filled with bliss and beauty, which is the reality of dreams, and is a world beyond reality. Once one comes into the aesthetic world, one is far from ugly reality, and so the world becomes perfect. In those two worlds, the real world is the essence of tragedy, because life is pain.

Wang Guowei analyzes *A Dream of Red Mansions* in the real environment in which the story happens, and then he points out that *A Dream of Red Mansions* contains various tragic contradictions, which achieves a lot more progress than its predecessors. Zhu Guangqian thinks that tragedy is the highest form of literature, and he thinks that a tragedian who obtains outstanding achievements is the world's greatest genius, and that tragedy is a sign of vitality and power of a nation. A nation must be profound in order to understand the tragic side of life, and it must be strong in order to endure the misfortune. Tragedy is the destruction of valuable things, and a worthless protest or rebellion gives it more profound significance. More precisely, the tragedy is not only the relevant, but also a creation of will-power. The more unconscious of this worthless and meaningless absurdity one is, the more profound the authenticity of the tragedy will be. Tragedy is like a work of art; it is doomed to be broken no matter how careful one is. The more careful a person is, the more painful reality will be. The artistic charm of *A Dream of Red Mansions* is its tragic plots, which are like radiation sources, forming a network structure, linking the fates of characters, appearing all over the book partly visible and partly hidden, so that readers always feel the rich tragic atmosphere. The exquisite tragic art achieves a very refined realm, which can be said to be the reason of its long fame.

The tragedy in *A Dream of Red Mansions* is grand in its plainness. The adversity conceals tragic implications under its beautiful appearance. The fiction is a specific and microcosm of the feudal social tragedy. This great novel, with

rich connotations, shows us the tragic world like a multiple-level-fusion. It is just like a grand symphony, which releases the profound beauty and leaves an endless, sad aftertaste.

### 1.3 Research Objectives

*A Dream of Red Mansions* contains various types of tragedies, and those tragedies are presented from the superficial level to the deep level throughout the entire novel. Wang Guowei in *The Comments About A Dream of Red Mansions* finds these tragic themes in the novel. He affirms that it is a great tragedy work, and he points out that *A Dream of Red Mansions* is the most tragic novel among all the tragic novels (Wang 112). The kinds of tragedies in the book may overlap each other, but those tragedies basically can be divided into four groups, individual tragedy, social tragedy, ethical tragedy, and existence tragedy. The tragedy of rebels, the submissive tragedy, and the tragedy of Twelve Beauties as the representative of the female tragedy may be classified as an individual tragedy. Jia's tragedy and feudal society tragedy can be classified as social tragedy; the love-marriage tragedy and the destruction of the Grand View Garden can be classified as ethical tragedy; the existence tragedy, including the choice of escaping, torture in one's life and so on is the highest level of tragedy, which ultimately boils down to the tragedy of a hard life without a way out. These four layers of tragedies are interrelated and sequential. Previous scholars made many discussions about progressive levels of tragedies from the individual tragedy,

social tragedy, ethical tragedy, and existence tragedy. This thesis attempts to make a comprehensive interpretation of levels of tragedy in *A Dream of Red Mansions*. It summarizes the former studies of these problems and gives some innovations. This thesis aims at finding those tragedies in *A Dream of Red Mansions*, then displaying those tragedies from the superficial level to the deep level. It can present the beauty of tragedy to audiences.

#### 1.3.1 Research Questions:

- 1) Why is *A Dream of Red Mansions* such a classic?
- 2) What kinds of tragedies does *A Dream of Red Mansions* include?
- 3) How are those tragedies displayed in *A Dream of Red Mansions*?
- 4) What do scholars think about the tragedies in *A Dream of Red Mansions*?

#### 1.3.2 Research Objectives:

- 1) To define the levels of tragedies in *A Dream of Red Mansions*
- 2) To display the different levels of tragedies in *A Dream of Red Mansions*
- 3) To review the opinions about the tragedies of *A Dream of Red Mansions*
- 4) To clarify the connotation and tragic spirit in *A Dream of Red Mansions*

#### 1.4 Structure of the Thesis

**Chapter One.** This chapter mainly provides a brief background of *A Dream of Red Mansions*, the research objectives, and thesis structure.

**Chapter Two.** It reviews all the relevant literature on this subject.

**Chapter Three.** It presents the individual tragedy including the rebellious tragedy, submissive tragedy, and tragedy of Twelve Beauties of Jinling.

**Chapter Four.** It depicts the ethical tragedies which cover the tragedy of love, the tragedy of marriage, the tragedy caused by the destruction of the Grand View Garden, and the conflict between emotion and etiquette.

**Chapter Five.** This chapter draws a brief conclusion that finalizes the great significance of the novel.

## Chapter 2 Literature Review

Since the appearance of *A Dream of Red Mansions*, there are many interpretations about tragedy. As a model for Chinese tragedy, *A Dream of Red Mansions* reaches the pinnacle of literature of Chinese novels, which is the embodiment of Chinese traditional tragic consciousness. The elements of tragedies in *A Dream of Red Mansions*, such as tragic spirits and tragic consciousness, have been discussed repeatedly. This chapter will be discussing several scholars' views regarding the expression of this complex novel.

*A Dream of Red Mansions* is a classic novel, which not only combines ideology and art, but also has a rich connotation showing the tragedy of the world on multiple levels (Hong 89). Wang Guowei and Hu Shi make many affirmative analyses about the tragic ending of *A Dream of Red Mansions*. In 1904, Wang Guowei was the first scholar who referred to this issue regarding the category of western tragedy (154). In *Comments On A Dream of Red Mansions*, he put forward three levels of tragedy including the level of philosophy, the level of universe, and the level of literature. Furthermore, he confirmed that *A Dream of Red Mansions* was a breakthrough in Chinese traditional literary optimism for its character setups and tragedy levels (Wang 176). In 1921, Hu Shi published "Research About A Dream of Red Mansions" in *The Evolutionary Concept of Literary and Improvement of Drama*, wherein he emphasized a great family tragedy, which is of great significance to the breakthrough of reunion patterns (78). Hu Shi always appreciates the tragedy, and thinks that what Chinese literature

lacks the most is tragedy; both fiction and drama always have happy reunions. There are one or two exceptions for writers who break the superstition of the reunion, such as *A Dream of Red Mansions* which contains a tragic ending. It is obvious that many writers know that the majority of the world is unsatisfactory, but they always write happy reunion endings for their works. They close their eyes to those tragedies, so this kind of literature is mendacious. Furthermore, the happy reunion of literature makes people feel satisfied, but it never makes people feel deeply touched nor consider and reflect fundamentally (Hu 123). For example, in *A Dream of Red Mansions*, Lin Daiyu dies, and Jia Baoyu becomes a monk. Those unsatisfactory endings can make people sigh sadly and consider the evil of family tyranny, which makes people reflect about the problems of life, the problems of family, and the problems of society. If Jia Baoyu and Lin Daiyu get married and everybody has a happy ending and gets together, then people would not have such a deep impression based on the story. If it would not make people think, then why would Cao Xueqin write this book? What would be the meaning of this book? The author is not satisfied with happy endings. He manages to make people think deeply and reflect on their lives, instead of giving people fairytale-ending.

From the aspect of tragic consciousness of *A Dream of Red Mansions*, Lu Xun published *A Brief History of Chinese Fiction* in 1923. It focused on the deeply tragic experience of Jia Baoyu and the critical consciousness of tragedy, and it tended to elucidate the tragedy of *A Dream of Red Mansions* from the subjective point of view (350). Wu Tiaogong chose the death of Qingwen as a

typical case to make an analysis of Cao Xueqin's tragic vision in "Cao Xueqin's Aesthetics from the Death of Qingwen" (45). Zhou Siyuan in "Tragic Implication of *A Dream of Red Mansions*" discusses the tragic nature of *A Dream of Red Mansions* from the perspective of self-realization. He thinks that *A Dream of Red Mansions* gets rid of the single tragic theme and single linear model, and explores the common form and root of the tragedy from the surface-shallow-deep triple layers structure (18).

In the 1980s, in "Dream and Awakening: Discuss the Tragic Consciousness" Tang Fuling thinks that *A Dream of Red Mansions* has a strong sense of tragedy (45). Zhang Songquan in *The Aesthetic and Artistic Skills of A Dream of Red Mansions* divided the tragedy into four levels: the tragedy of Jia Baoyu's rebellious character, the tragedy of the generation of young women in feudal society, the tragedy of a number of innocent victims in the feudal aristocratic families, and the tragedy of the feudal aristocratic families' decline (156). Jiang Gengyu thinks *A Dream of Red Mansions* contains many forms of tragedies (Chen 78). Ye Lang in *The Implication of A Dream of Red Mansions* points out that *A Dream of Red Mansions* contains three levels: the first level is the reflection on the society of the early Qing Dynasty with hitherto unknown breadth and depth. The second level is the tragedy of *A Dream of Red Mansions*; the third level is Cao Xueqin's philosophical feeling of the whole life, which is permeating everywhere in *A Dream of Red Mansions* (Ye 26).

Many scholars stick to their arguments about the cause and essence of tragedy

in *A Dream of Red Mansions*. In 1923, Yu Pingbo in “Discussion about the Author’s Attitude of *A Dream of Red Mansions*” said that *A Dream of Red Mansions* was for mourning Jia Baoyu and Lin Daiyu, and he felt sorry about the tragic ending of Lin Daiyu (46). Mou Zongsan has a different tragic view from Wang Guowei’s. He thinks the reason for this tragedy comes from the inconstancy of ups and downs of life (615). Therefore, he thinks that Jia Baoyu becoming a monk is more tragic than the death of Lin Daiyu. He argues that it is not tragic to seek revenge for evil, but it is very tragic to forgive the evil. Furthermore, he thinks the tragedy of *A Dream of Red Mansions* lies in the tragedy of characters instead of ethical tragedy. Mou Zongsan overcomes Wang Guowei’s views on a certain level, and he sees the existence of evanescent and the tragic effect it brings (Mou 624). In 1957, Li Xifan and Lan Ling in *Why the Later Forty Chapters of A Dream of Red Mansions Can Survive* pointed out that the development of the last forty chapters completed the tragic structure of the former eighty chapters, especially the leading clue of the tragedy: the love tragedy between Jia Baoyu and Lin Daiyu (35). The nature of tragedy involves the tragic conflict between the feudal society and anti-feudal society. In 1966, Xia Zhiqing published “Love and Sympathy of *A Dream of Red Mansions*” in *Modern Literature*, and he pointed out the essence of the tragedy laid out on the see-saw war of sympathy, and he also said *A Dream of Red Mansions* was the only novel that could make an effective comparison with western literature (24). In 1974, Meng Yao in *The History of the Chinese Novel* pointed out that *A Dream of Red Mansions* was a great tragedy that

unfolded two kinds of conflicts: the conflict between the environment and characters, and the conflict between animation and inanimation. He discussed the tragic nature of *A Dream of Red Mansions* from the historical consciousness and the duality of existence (Meng 89).

In 1972, Song Qi issued an article “Discussion About the Grand Garden,” which took the sense of disillusionment of Jia Baoyu as the root of the tragedy of the Grand View Garden (64). In 1974, Yu Yingshi in “The Analysis of Two Worlds in *A Dream of Red Mansions*” analyzed the world of the Grand View Garden and the world outside of the Grand View Garden, and he thought that *A Dream of Red Mansions* mainly describes the rise, development, and final disillusionment of the ideal world of Grand View Garden (53).

Despite scholars’ various interpretations of *A Dream of Red Mansions*, there is few negative criticism of this great novel. The criticism has been universally favorable. The author Cao Xueqin depicts a variety of forms of tragedies in his unique way, such as personal tragedy, love tragedy, social tragedy, and so on. Thus let us move on to the analysis of the novel’s main theme.

## Chapter 3 Miserable Individual Tragedy

### 3.1 Tragedy of Rebels

Nietzsche said that the art of tragedy, through the destruction of the hero, brings readers the detachment of pleasure (79). Jia Baoyu and Lin Daiyu's romance in *A Dream of Red Mansions* ends with destruction because they are "disheartened out of society" and they end up with "death in tears," adding strong sadness to the whole novel.

#### 3.1.1 The Only One Who Experiences and Tastes Sad and Dreary Fog

Lu Xun once said that the whole novel *A Dream of Red Mansions* was filled with the fog of sadness, while the only one who breathed and tasted it was Jia Baoyu (219). He is the lineal descendant of Rong Mansion, who was born with a psychic jade in his mouth, and who is bound to be different from others from the moment he was born. He is clever and willful. Even though he does things that are unacceptable in that society, his talent of verse, ditties, odes, and songs is really superb and outstanding among the mass of children of Jia. Jia Baoyu is the heir of Jia Mansion, so he is able to keep long-term intimate relationships with many girls, who are mostly pure young girls. It is his special living environment and atmosphere that makes him harbor deep resentment to the hypocrisy and decadence of the feudal aristocracy as well as mental and moral turpitude. From his point of view, patriarchal power and monarchical power, as well as the fame and fortune gained relying on loyalty and filial piety, have no real valuable

significance. The whole male-chauvinist-centered society is full of disgusting, rancid, and unbearable torment, which Jia Baoyu does not want to touch.

Jia Baoyu detests the extravagant life of feudal aristocracy. He does not enjoy wealthy life and feudal honor. We can see that from his words, such as in chapter seven, when he blames himself and questions why he has to be born into that noble family where beautiful clothing is just what is packaged to him and where admirable food and drinks fed to him are just like food thrown into a mud ditch (Cao and Gao 120). He thinks wealth is poison that can kill the soul of human beings. And in chapter seventy-one, Jia Baoyu indicates that he hates staying at home every day without doing anything freely, and everything about him would be reported at any time. He thinks wealth deprives his freedom (Cao and Gao 203). The dull life of feudal aristocracy brings him nothing but loneliness and sadness, and it stimulates his formation of strong character to get rid of the constraint of the shallow life, as well as leading him have doubts about a series of decadent feudal system doctrines in both thoughts and actions. He hates official stereotyped writing, which he thinks is just the way to fame and money. He cannot memorize or understand the *Four Books and Five Classics* completely in several years. But he is very interested in the *Peony Pavilion* and *The Romance of West Chamber* which are said to be evil novels that are full of obscene plots and words. He refuses to take the common way to an official career, and he likes scolding those who are keen on fame and official careers. His life is full of contradictions. Even though he is wealthy, he pursues freedom which cannot be bought. The restricted

situation brings this character's calamity into a higher level.

With himself being wealthy, Baoyu feels deep sympathy for those who live in the lowest class of feudal society. He treats Qin Zhong, Liu Xianglian and Jiang Yuhua, who belong to poor family and are inferior civilians, as brothers, and he shows much gentle and considerate care to maids. He makes a bold challenge to the feudal concept of women being inferior to men, and he values the pureness of females. These bizarre behaviors are rebellious actions toward the feudal system, which is naturally attacked and guarded by feudal society.

Jia Baoyu, who is the hope of Jia Mansion, is like a pearl held gingerly in the palm of lady Jia. However, with the decline of his family, he also subsequently falls into miserable circumstances. As Aristotle says, a tragic character should change from prosperity to adversity and end with misfortune, during which the tragic effect can be stimulated (47). Baoyu hates politics and royal economics, and many of his behaviors have the characteristics of feudal rebellion. However, his rebellion is not resolute and thorough. He also has many habits of rich kids (Fan, 126). For example, he once became furious because of Qing Wen's contradiction to his words. He also kicked Xiren because she did not open the door on time. Though he abandons the feudal ethics, he cannot put his rich and powerful family aside. He depends on his feudal family, which he also holds a deep-seated hatred against, thus making him fall into a contradiction that cannot be solved. He tries to find a solution to this contradiction, but he fails and he cannot find his way out of the miserable recycle. Baoyu's mind is filled with pain, anxiety, and melancholy,

and he cannot find a way to discharge them. So, he is driven to be a monk in a state of depression and helplessness. However, he is just using one pain to eliminate another pain because there is an inherent conflict between the religious spirit and the living consciousness. He can never gain true liberation. He just wants to obtain a temporary peace of mind through religion. His tragedy is the loss of his spirit. His pain has been beyond the family tragedy and personal pressure. Jia Baoyu realizes that his life is full of irreconcilable contradictions and helplessness. However, he is afraid of loneliness, so he does not want to leave the Grand View Garden where he can stay together with Daiyu and the other girls.

With the pressure from his family's high expectations, the impossibility of obtaining freedom, and the contradiction between the way he wants to live and the way he lives, Jia Baoyu becomes the only person in Grand View Garden to experience and taste dreary fog.

### 3.1.2 Alone and Helpless Lin Daiyu

Lin Daiyu is another typical tragic character who is meticulously shaped by the author. Cao Xueqin combines the environment description and character description, through which he not only demonstrates Lin Daiyu's characteristics' rich inner realm, but also gives this character a sentimental visual. Lin Daiyu is designed by the author as a character who is always in great pain. In the Bamboo Lodge, where lots of emerald bamboo grows, she spends her short and miserable life accompanied by bamboo, poetry, sadness, loneliness, and tears. Bamboo

Lodge, which is described in the book with specific symbolic emotional colors, is really consistent with Lin Daiyu's personality and mood. Scenery description successfully conveys the spiritual world of Lin Daiyu. In Lin Daiyu's short life, she has never forgotten that she is helpless and reliant on others. Her loneliness and helplessness are deeply branded in her mind. In Jia Mansion, she often feels depressed and miserable in her mental world, although she obtains good support in her material life, especially when she and Baoyu's love becomes more and more mature, at which point she feels more helpless. A deep sense of loneliness and homelessness, like a heavy cloud, always hovers in her heart. Wang Meng points out that Lin Daiyu's sorrow is not only due to the helplessness and homelessness caused by losing her parents, but also a kind of transcendental and original tragedy (99).

It is not the great pain that can be called tragedy; the way of treating the pain is more important. Her loneliness and inability to talk to people is not a common feeling among the girls in the feudal era. It is a loneliness of youth, life, and soul. Her isolated and helpless life experience brings her tears, sorrow, and inner loneliness, which also conflicts with her own living environment. She is a strong pursuer of true love who expects innocent love with Baoyu, and also wishes Jia Baoyu loved only her. Both her haughty attitude and her attempt to master her own marriage and fate bring deep contradictions between herself and the feudal nobles to whom she becomes attached. If there is no resistance to disaster, the tragedy will not exist. And what provokes people's thoughts is resistance rather

than disaster (Zhu 87). Daiyu clearly feels that she and Jia Baoyu should be together. With her delicate, sensitive, and vulnerable emotion, she is determined to fight with cruel reality. She unremittingly insists on her bumpy road in pursuit of freedom and love, for which she burns out all her emotion and a lifetime of tears. In the pursuit of freedom and free love, she pays much more than what she gets in return. The bleak and bloody society is like the dark dawn without a light, where people just get devoured. The character of Lin Daiyu is like lightning. However, it disappears immediately, and stimulates those who live in the dark (Li 193). Her luminous tragic character is permanent in people's imagination, provoking people's thoughts.

As the first tragedy in *A Dream of Red Mansions*, there are a lot of aspects about Lin Daiyu that make people recollect and praise her, such as her noble-minded character, frank personality, talent, and so on. She cannot accept her fate, which is determined by others, so she pursues her love and marriage, dares to resist patriarchy and authority, and challenges and criticizes the traditional values and ethical rules. Although she bears a lot, she does always adhere to her own independent ideas and thoughts instead of yielding to fate. She finally withers away with her love and tears. The stubborn and fragile nature of life has been the most centralized expression in this love tragedy. As Jiang Hesen says, it is the death of Dai Yu that illuminates her over-absorption of mind (59).

Guo Moruo points out: the value of tragic drama is not simply to make readers feel sad, but to stimulate people to change extreme anger into power so as

to support life (194). The love between Jia Baoyu and Lin Daiyu is based on their common ideal of revolting against feudal society, as well as the fact that they both despise the high official positions and are against the feudal orthodox ideas. They support the imperial examination system, ethics of feudal ideas, and moral ideas. Therefore, their love must be killed by feudal parents finally, and their tragic results are an inevitable outcome. Jia Baoyu and Lin Daiyu -- in the Grand View Garden -- are special people, who deviate from others in values and ideas, and their pure and noble characteristics signify and represent new ideas, new force, and new lifestyles.

*A Dream of Red Mansions* is the very tragedy that describes valuable things being destroyed. It is not only a representation of personal tragedy, but also of family tragedy, as well as social tragedy. Those who pursue the freedom and better life in *A Dream of Red Mansions*, such as Qing Wen, Si Qi, You Sanjie, and Liu Xianglian, are consciously or unconsciously rebels against feudal society.

### 3.2 The Tragedy of Submissive Xue Baochai

Confucianism is a kind of ethical thought in essence, in which the outstanding point is to use “benevolences” as a moral belief and behavior criterion of each individual. It emphasizes the obedience principle for individuals in the society, so it is necessary to sacrifice personal interests. Cao Xueqin, through a series of vivid characters, boldly puts forward questions to Confucianism, which takes “benevolences” as the core and advocate that individuals comply with the whole

society. Confucianism's failure often appears among the noble descendants, and some young women's unfortunate fates are often caused by Confucianism's moral principles. For example, Xue Baochai is the winner in the battle for marriage against Lin Daiyu; however, she is a loser in life and love. As a good fair maiden by the standards of feudal moral culture, she just suppresses her individuality to obey social requests and family interests.

Xue Baochai is a typical great girl by the standards of feudal society, and her core feature is the loyal belief of feudal society and conscious implementation of it. She seems to be a perfect member of that society who has smooth skin, a beautiful face, brilliant eyes, red lips, clear eyebrows, and an agreeable manner. In Grand View Garden, she is really a beauty. She is educated, gentle, and considerate without aristocratic domineering characteristics. Everyone in Jia Mansion likes her. Xue Baochai is the most perfect representative of traditional Chinese women. She is intelligent, erudite, and compatible at the same time. A rich culture and family environment, coupled with her intelligence, bring her profound artistic accomplishments and extensive knowledge of literature, art, history, medicine, and Buddhist Classics. In the Grand View Garden, she is the only one who can compete with Lin Daiyu.

In *A Dream of Red Mansions*, Xue Baochai is a typical good girl under the feudal ethical moral education. She has been careful in every regard since she was a little girl. She speaks and acts very appropriately, and also stays pretty in appearance. So, she gains love and a good reputation from the elders in Rong

Mansion. Lin Daiyu and Xue Baochai are both outstanding but totally opposite. Since Xue arrives at Rong Mansion, comparative descriptions are used to present different characteristics between those two girls. Xue Baochai is described as plump looking, honest, demure, refined, courteous, and obedient, and many people think she is better than Daiyu. All her own words and deeds abide by the feudal moral norms, and she is strict to achieve “see no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil and do no evil.” Her virtue is in line with the feudal society. She upholds the feudal ethics, and she is sometimes considered to be a hypocrite. Meanwhile, to some extent, she is also buried by feudal social ethical norms, which leads to her tragedy (Zeng, 122).

In this love tragedy, she is also one of the victims, along with Jia Baoyu and Lin Daiyu. Both the latter two people dare to pursue their love. On the contrary, she even doesn't dare to talk about her own love. Living in the Grand View Garden, she knows crystal clear about Baoyu and Daiyu's devotion to each other. Nevertheless, the education she receives from childhood gives her no choice but to listen to what she is told. She is obedient -- so much so that she has to accept the marriage with Jia Baoyu, even though he becomes delirious and uncertain. The only thing she can do is to cry under the table. In her wedding ceremony, she pretends to be Lin Daiyu covered with a veil. In order to deceive Baoyu, she has to take Lin Daiyu's servant girl with her to finish the wedding ceremony. That action is intolerable for any self-respecting girl living in the modern society, but she accepts it. It is the feudal ethical code and the Three Obedience and Four

Virtues, which have been growing as a part of her, that make her accept it. After Baoyu runs away from home, leaving her alone, her tragedy reaches its climax.

Almost each character in *A Dream of Red Mansions* ends up in tragedy.

Readers might sigh or shed tears after reading the book. Xue Baochai is a special tragic character; her tragedy is more miserable. She gets everything and loses everything. The dramatic ups and downs of her life make readers lose expression and become shocked. Xue Baochai's tragedy is generally considered a social tragedy. As a devout, submissive character, she is not accepted by what she pursues. The feudal culture requires that each individual do the things that get social praise instead of meeting his or her own desire. Xue Baochai is the very one who seeks this kind of living standard, consciously or unconsciously. She can't pursue what she really loves, nor can she break with what she doesn't like. She lives in a chaotic and dead atmosphere, which makes her prematurely withered. From the destruction of Xue Baochai, people can find how the deep consciousness of feudal culture erodes and kills souls. Her tragedy comes from her always obeying certain fixed norms of life which run counter to her own desire (Niu, 2005). The thoughts of Cao Xueqin on the history and literature are really a kind of awakening of national spirit.

In *A Dream of Red Mansions*, after the characters find no way out, there is a kind of negative feeling filled with strong tragic consciousness. When a society develops in a certain stage, inevitable decline occurs. Xue Baochai reaches almost all the traditional requirements for women of Chinese feudal culture; however, it

is time for this cultural system to collapse. As she is a member of that society, her tragedy is unavoidable, while she is destined to fail in getting the happiness she wants. Her tragedy also reflects the inevitable decline of feudal culture. She never enjoys true love, and no one really cares about her. Her life is full of inflexibility, ignorance, and numb emotion. But her pain is no less than Daiyu's. She has no home for her to return to and nobody she can talk to so as to pour out her pain. All she can do is to restrain herself. Daiyu at least has a sincere love of her own life though she dies. Despite all the most perfect virtues within her, she still fails to obtain happiness. Along with all the girls in the Grand View Garden, Xue Baochai cannot escape from her destiny, though she does her best to follow the feudal ethical code (Li and Li 205).

Even though Baochai insists on her feudal cultural norms and tries to be a good wife, she never has happy and comfortable days after she marries Baoyu. Starting a family with the one she loves, she still lives in the cold and empty house alone. As a believer and follower of traditional feudal ethics, she abandons the pursuit of freedom and tries to suppress her inner feelings, which results in her continuous contradiction and pain. She is trying to strive for a happy life, but eventually becomes a sacrificial object of the feudal moral code. In addition, there are many other submissive ones in the novel whose lives end in tragedy, such as Yingchun and Li Zong, and so on.

### 3.3 Tragic Reality and Destiny of Life

The overall framework of *A Dream of Red Mansions* can be considered as in accordance with China's tragic literary tradition. *A Dream of Red Mansions* is a great elegy that creates sympathy for women. The author, in the book, sheds tears of regret and mercy for those women's inability to grasp their own destiny. Their characteristics, marriage, love, and life tragedy shows how the secular society destroys their beautiful feelings and life. In fact, their tragic fate is the result of the feudal legal society. Cao Xueqin emphasizes feelings, so he carefully builds an ideal environment for those females - the Grand View Garden. He hopes the Grand View Garden will last forever, yet he has no choice but to destroy it because of a clear understanding of the objective reality. Glorifying fine emotion and ideals, he lashes out at the feudal ethics. Tragedy involves praising beauty and belittling ugly things that destroy beauty. The purpose of it is to provoke people with sadness to pursue beauty. It can make people achieve rational sublimation and improve the mental condition by huge fluctuations of emotion coming from grief (Zhu 85).

Cao describes numerous females in the Grand View Garden as easy-going and vigorous. He creates images of ladies and gentlewomen in the feudal upper class, and the humble girls, slaves, maid-servants, and wenches, who all have high degrees of representation. As flowers are the essence of nature, the females in the Grand View Garden are the essence of women all over the world. *A Dream of Red Mansions* generalizes the whole life process as the lifetime of flowers from its opening to falling (Ye 23). Jia Baoyu spends a good time with a group of girls

who belong to various statuses and classes. Nevertheless, the stories of those girls Baoyu cherishes undoubtedly end in tragedy.

Represented by “Twelve Beauties of Jinling,” many nice and fine girls can’t avoid miserable endings in *A Red Dream of Mansions*. Each girl’s ending seems to be occasional and accidental, but from the trend of the whole novel, their destructions are universal and inevitable. Cao Xueqin endows those beauties with a variety of good qualities and gives them happy and comfortable lives. But under the guidance of the author’s tragic aesthetics, those girls’ lives tend to be full of tragedy and are bound to be destroyed. Their pure spiritual world attracts readers and also aggrieves readers because of the destruction of their pursuits. Tragedy is when people are unable to break through the net of fate, so it brings sadness, and at the same time it shows the fates of the rebels with sympathy and admiration, as well as passionate praise. This is especially true of the ancient tragic writers, who depict characters fighting with fate and eventually being destroyed by fate. It always involves a kind of puzzled and troubled emotion along with persistent pursuit through the tragedy (Zhang 96). That is the real tragic spirit.

In fact, pain and boredom are the only two parts of life. The characters of *A Dream of Red Mansions* have a happy time in the Grand View Garden; however, they are always struggling and in pain. Even though Cao Xueqin only finished the first eighty chapters, which has been confirmed by academic circles, as a result of Cao Xueqin’s prediction in the fifth chapter, Gao E was able to finish the later forty chapters according to Cao’s original intention. The whole novel has an

element of fatalism, more or less. All of the characters are designed according to the author's intentions, which are all under the shadows of the tragic atmosphere.

## Chapter 4 Ethical Tragedy

### 4.1 Love Tragedy

The tragic romance of Jia Baoyu and Lin Daiyu is the main plot thread throughout the book. This book describes family tragedy and life tragedy around this main thread. Tragedy, like any story, cannot be without conflict. The solemn pledge between Jia Baoyu and Lin Daiyu conflicts with the golden fate God has bestowed between Jia Baoyu and Xue Baochai, and this kind of conflict creates the tragedies of Jia Baoyu, Lin Daiyu, and Xue Baochai. Just as “A Life Misspent” says,

Well matched, all say, the gold and the jade: I alone recall  
the pledge between plant and stone. Vainly facing the hermit  
in sparkling snow-clad hills. I forget not the fairy in lone  
woods beyond the world. I sigh, learning that no man's  
happiness is complete: even a pair thought well matched,  
may find disappointment. (Cao and Gao 562)

Although Lin Daiyu wins the love of Jia Baoyu without the orders of parents or the words of a matchmaker, she can't marry Jia Baoyu. In the end, Lin Daiyu dies tearfully. And when Xue Baochai and Jia Baoyu get married, Xue Baochai just gets Jia Baoyu's body without the soul. The tragic love of Lin Daiyu and Jia Baoyu and the marriage tragedy of Xue Baochai and Jia Baoyu are the plot lines of *A Dream of Red Mansions* and the soul of this work. In *A Life Misspent*, the song states that “Well matched, all say, the gold and the jade: I alone recall the pledge between plant and stone,” which further explains the sadness of Daiyu and

Baochai because of their unhappy ending in love and marriage. “All say” and “I alone recall” contrast with one another and they also show the irreconcilable contradiction between Jia Baoyu’s feelings and the secular concepts. As we know, one of the outstanding performances of his rebellious spirit is that he pays more attention to emotion instead of etiquette. The pledge between the plant and the stone conflicts with the well-made-match between the gold and the jade. The conflict fully displays the conflict between emotion and etiquette. The two reasons for the tragedy are the external reason: confining the conservative etiquette; and the internal reason: persistent pursuit of love.

The ethical basis of feudal marriage stresses that couples must come from families of equal status, and there must be orders from parents and words from matchmakers. The love of Jia Baoyu and Lin Daiyu is in rebellion against the feudal ethics. This kind of love goes beyond the scope of a perfect match between a man and a woman in the traditional literary works, which lies in the consistency of Jia Baoyu and Lin Daiyu’s characters and their lives. In Jia Mansion with many beauties, only Lin Daiyu is the confidante of Jia Baoyu. The love between these two people comes from the bottom of their hearts. From first entering Jia Mansion when Lin Daiyu meets Baoyu, they get rid of worldly prejudice. They completely ignore the orders of parents, the words of matchmakers, political future, and family interests. Their love has congenital weakness, and they do not have the courage to show their wishes to parents, and just wish that parents would fulfill their marriage (Zhou 115). This passive waiting creates some resistance; moreover,

their love causes a fundamental conflict in regard to the principles of ideas, the selection of life paths, and feudal forces. These things lead to the tragic ending. In feudal society, marriage is a political act and a way to expand power. It plays a decisive role in families' interests. When marriage is not just based on the wishes of individuals, how can the final decision of marriage be made out of love?

As they rebel against feudal ethics, the love between Baoyu and Daiyu forebodes a tragic ending from the beginning of love's germination. In contrast, the well-made match between the gold and jade better conforms to the family interests and the will of a feudal patriarchal reconstruction of Baoyu, and is also better conformed to the requirements of feudal etiquette. However, such a choice not only causes the love tragedy of Baoyu and Daiyu, but also causes the marriage tragedy between Baoyu and Baochai. The pledge between plant and stone is the love without marriage, which is worthy of mourning; the match between gold and jade is a marriage without love, which is also pathetic. Just as "Vain Longing" says,

One is an immortal flower of fairyland, the other fair  
flawless jade, and was it not predestined, why should they  
meet again in this existence? Yet, if predestined, why does  
their love come to nothing? One signs no purpose, the other  
yearns in vain: one is the moon reflected in the water, the  
other but a flower in the mirror. How many tears can well  
from her eyes? Can they flow on from autumn till winter,  
from spring till summer? (Cao and Gao 784)

Hegel distinguishes the opposing sides of good and evil, and he says that the basic tragedy lies in the opposite sides of conflict having their own justifications. At the same time, the real content of the purposes or characters that each party insists on can only deny or destroy the opposite with the same justification (69). Therefore, both sides maintain the ethical ideal and fall into conflict in the realization of the ethical ideal. The love tragedy between Jia Baoyu and Lin Daiyu is not only caused by Xue Baochai, but it is also caused by Wang Xifeng, Lady Wang, and Grandma Jia. For these direct makers of this love tragedy, Cao Xueqin does not write them as clowns in the traditional drama novels; under his pen, these characters carry on activities along the irresistible social rules of their feudal society.

Tragedy can be caused just by the different statuses in a relationship. It does not need to have some horrible mistakes or accidents, or some malicious persons. It just needs the common people with ordinary morals being put under ordinary conditions and kept on opposite sides. The love tragedy of Jia Baoyu and Lin Daiyu is not just because the couples come from families with unequal statuses, or just because of free love breaking the feudal marriage system. But the love itself, which contains anti feudal color, will not be tolerated by the society, causing the love tragedy.

Wang Guowei points out that the traditional culture, which is accumulated and solidified based on ethics, takes filial piety as the link between individuals, family, and nation. When it puts emphasis on the harmony of individuals and

society, and the obligation of individuals to the state, it also creates submissive characters, self-compression, or even loss of self-personality to the ethical norms of the patriarchal society (128). The traditional culture is full of servility, and people lose their liberty and equality. This is a kind of cultural tragedy. Ethical culture has become ingrained in their cultural structure and ultra-stable social psychology. Many tragedies in *A Dream of Red Mansions*, especially those tragedies of young women, tear the gentle veil, which shows the world the cultural tragedy. No matter how kind-hearted and submissive Yingchun is, she is tortured to death. Xue Baochai consciously obeys etiquette and becomes a model lady, but she ultimately fails to escape her miserable destiny. Their tragedies are caused by the ethical culture.

Jia Baoyu is fascinated with love, while Lin Daiyu lives and dies for love, and the love for Jia Baoyu is the sustenance of her life. Although Jia Baoyu loves many people, he finds that Lin Daiyu is his one true friend. Jia Baoyu and Lin Daiyu are very relaxed and happy in their relationship, and are just like two children entering into the realm of freedom, finding the naivete and zenith of their love. In chapter thirty-two, Jia Baoyu announces, "Daiyu has never said the impudent remark. If she also said the impudent remark, I had already been remote with her" (Cao and Gao 615). This conversation implies that Baoyu and Baochai have an impassable gulf in thoughts, and the only person whom Baoyu is close to is Daiyu. It is because that love between Baoyu and Daiyu is the result of long-term understanding, and it is firmly established on the basis of common

thoughts. They are not only in deep love, but also they can understand and support each other mutually. Their love is sincere and steadfast, and their love is a beautiful flame in the vast night of feudal society. The love between Baoyu and Daiyu has the color of modern love, which is incompatible in the feudal society. That kind of environment cannot bear the existence and continuation of the love between Baoyu and Daiyu. However, in my point of view, their love is pure and beautiful. Once the love is destroyed cruelly, Vermilion Pearl dies and the attendant Shen Ying goes to Great Waste Mountain. How can we not let out a lamented sigh for them who suffer great agonies in the mind? The mutual choice of the love between Baoyu and Daiyu not only comes from the emotional appeal, but it also relies on the mutual recognition of life interests and personality value. When they reject the patriarchal clan system, their minds are closer and closer, and they leave far away from the specifications of feudal culture. Then it becomes a kind of treason. When they are steadfast for their love, the tragedy is awaiting them. They are so small in the feudal society and unable to contend with either the feudal family or the feudal marriage system. The love between Baoyu and Daiyu is based on common rebellious thoughts and characters, but this rebellion is not only limited by the category of the feudal ethics, but also limited by other fundamental aspects such as the feudal imperial examination system. Therefore, the love cannot be tolerated by the feudal clan rulers, and it is killed at last.

*A Dream of Red Mansions* presents us with the bloody doomsday picture, and it accuses the feudal society of destroying beauty and killing talents. It is full of

social tragedy, family tragedy, tragedy of marriage, and tragedy of life. It reflects the diversity, complexity, and profundity by revealing the tragedies. The decline of the family accelerates the occurrence and development of the marriage tragedy; meanwhile, the marriage tragedy deepens the family perdition. In the feudal society, marriage is a kind of political behavior, a new opportunity to expand forces by combining a new alliance, which determines that the interests of the family are ahead of individual wishes. The love between Baoyu and Daiyu is the main plot, but there are still some other love tragedies, such as the love of You Sanjie and Liu Xianglian. These love tragedies make people sad as well, and they reflect a strong resentment of feudalism. It can give people strong indignation against the feudal society, infinite compassion, and helpless lamentations for the delicate love and lives. *A Dream of Red Mansions* intoxicates people with deep sadness.

#### 4.2 The Quietus of the Ideal World and the Real World

The beauty of tragedy lies in the conflict. Any contradiction in any relationship can lead to conflict. Tragedy is a process of conflict, and tragedy always hides the plot of conflict. *A Dream of Red Mansions* not only describes the decline of Jia Mansion, love tragedies among Baoyu, Daiyu, and Xue Baochai, but also describes the miserable lives and tragic fates of a crowd of young women. Cao Xueqin creates another name for *A Dream of Red Mansions*, and that is *Twelve Beauties of Jinling* (Feng 78).

The main story of *A Dream of Red Mansions* happens in the Grand View Garden, the artistic place where Cao Xueqin protects beauty, displays beauty and destroys beauty. The tragedy of the Grand View Garden is a tragedy of love, youth, and life. The Grand View Garden is a dream in the deep heart of Cao Xueqin. The dream symbolizes truth, goodness, and beauty, and he creates the Grand View Garden for beautiful lives. The Grand View Garden carries vicissitudes of those girls and ladies, and it carries much information of Chinese traditional culture. After experiencing a dream, Cao Xueqin wakes up from his sadness, takes his pen, and makes a perfect combination of dream and reality in his book.

As the main water of the Grand View Garden, Seeping Fragrance Pavilion is the symbol of a tragedy. It implies that petals drop and water flows. Flowers are representatives of beautiful things. *A Dream of Red Mansions* uses a lot of flowers to symbolize those beauties in the Grand View Garden. Petals dropping and waters flowing seem to set the tone for the tragic fate of young women in the Grand View Garden. Good things do not last long. The fame of the Jia family, the extravagant life of the high class, the beautiful looks of the sisters, and all the good prospects can collapse all at once. People hope time can stop, but good times never last. When everything is lost, it just leaves the decadent scenery behind. When the true powers have distinct conflicts, tragedy comes. In an ideal paradise as Grand View Garden, the tragedies of the daughters come under the intervention of the family interests. *A Dream of Red Mansions* reflects the beauty of tragedy, which can endow a work with its unique power and depth.

In the poetic environment of the Grand View Garden, the love between Baoyu and Daiyu grows without the supervision of the elders. After these girls move into the Grand View Garden, they really have a happy time together. It is the spiritual home and heaven of Baoyu and Daiyu. But the Grand View Garden is given by Grandma Jia and Princess Yuan. When they find out about the love of Baoyu and Daiyu -- especially in chapter seventy-five, in which Baoyu has a heart attack, which exposes the love between Baoyu and Daiyu to the public -- it stirs the vigilance of Grandma Jia and Lady Wang. In chapter seventy-three, the revelation of an embroidering pouch, which has an image of two people having intimate physical contact, evokes the exploration of the Grand View Garden. After that, the Grand View Garden can no longer continue to exist. Chinese traditional culture pushes people into positions, such as the symbiosis between humans and nature. This is unlike the western Renaissance, which emphasized the importance of individual obligations to the clan and nation, whereas the consciousness of Chinese traditional culture does not respect personal value and individual freedom. This cultural aspect, which lacks individualistic awareness, inevitably causes oneself to resign to adversity. The reality is cruel, and it gives these adorable, pure and beautiful women extremely limited freedom in a very dark, dirty world. Then, it destroys those beauties at lightning speed.

#### 4.3 The Conflicts Between Etiquette and Emotion

The dilemma or conflict is often faced by people. There are many kinds of

attitudes on facing conflicts, such as feeling sad, feeling powerless to resist, and so on. No matter what kind of outcome they have, it emits the tragic spirit.

*A Dream of Red Mansions* not only has a strong spirit of tragedy, but also has a strong ideal involving color. The book praises the steadfast love of Baoyu and Daiyu, and the struggles of Qingwen and Yuanyang to illuminate the author's pursuit for a new lifestyle. In particular, the love of Baoyu and Daiyu reflects the noble and beautiful side of human feelings, which is the core content of the author's ideal and pursuit. But Baoyu and Daiyu live in the world of etiquette which cannot tolerate the persistent pursuit of love. The development of their love is shown rebellious color enduring great pain and depression. The pure and sincere love is destroyed; Daiyu sheds all the tears in her life to repay her only confidante, Baoyu, while Baoyu becomes a monk. *A Dream of Red Mansions* links the love tragedy and social criticism closely together, which meticulously reveals the deep social root of the love tragedy.

The creation of the typical image of Jia Baoyu not only deeply develops the realm of love, but also surpasses the narrow confines of love between men and women. It displays the ideal color of humanitarianism. Unlike Tang Xianzu, who publicizes the differences between sentiment and etiquette, Cao Xueqin shows sharp contradictions between sentiment and etiquette through the artistic images, which can reflect the complex social life and fates of characters (Chan et al 56).

According to the developmental logic of real life, *A Dream of Red Mansions* describes the love tragedy of a pair of noble young people with rebellious spirits

to eulogize the good feelings of humanity. At the same time, it creates the profound social content by combining the description of love with the criticism of the feudal ethics and rites, and the enthusiastic pursuit of the ideal. It is beyond doubt that the love of Baoyu and Daiyu represents the author's ideal. Even in a realistic world of etiquette, the author hopes that love will always exist; therefore his works possess strong ideals. However, the clear understanding of the objective reality prompts him to mercilessly show the cruelty of life and destruction of love, which makes the love tragedy excite people's minds, and so the tragedy works even more profoundly.

When Baoyu realizes the unique life, especially when his heart is in the midst of dreamy feelings, love becomes one of the most important pursuits of his life. Jia Baoyu's love is a human feeling, which is being shared by all the men and women in the ancient and modern world and which can't be fully possessed. Baoyu feels the love of Lin Daiyu haunting in her heart, mind, laughter, tears, thoughts, and dreams, no matter if she is alive or dead. It is the purest love in the world, and Baoyu is the saint of love. It means that his love reaches the highest state of human emotion rather than the general feelings between men and women. His love is not limited to the feelings between men and women, but an attitude towards life. Only emotion can consciously make a person understand the tragedy of life. Jia Baoyu not only loves sentient beings, but also loves lifeless things in the world. He is a philanthropic fool of love, who pours his tender and considerate care to the beautiful girl in the Grand View Garden. It even would touch his

emotions and feelings when he sees trees and flowers. The value of love is to break through the traditional feudal society and pursue human liberation.

*The Romance of Western Chambers* has great influence on Baoyu and Daiyu; it makes them shed tears unknowingly and gives them heartache. Beauty is full of fragility, shortness, sadness, and heartbreak. Looking at the imperfect reality from the view of aesthetics is an act of tragedy. Baoyu embraces the cold society, which must cause his tragic experience of life, with his hot love (Wang 89). His personality dooms him to attach great importance to the value of life, and he advocates true feelings in life. His pursuit of the arts and ideal lifestyle is shattered by the cruel reality, which makes him suffer the pain of losing his mind over and over again, and leads him to reflect life in a more profound, philosophical way - by becoming a monk.

Love is the core of Cao Xueqin's aesthetic thoughts. What he goes after is a world full of love. He depicts Baoyu and Daiyu's sincere and pure love with profound words and praises his love from the germination, the formation, the development, and the final tragedy. Through a sad and beautiful love story, he extols the value of love in life and expresses his pursuit of the liberation of human nature. His aesthetic thoughts are mainly reflected in the love story of Baoyu and Daiyu. From the plot of the story, the love he describes is against the feudal social culture and traditional norms. His love and feelings contained in the works run counter to the standard of the feudal law as well as the feudal ethics.

## Chapter 5 Conclusion

Cao Xueqin, by his literary talent and sad tears for social life, cast into the library of great classic literature a work that is known as a priceless treasure in the world - *A Dream of Red Mansions*. *The Travels of Lao Ts'an* is the lamentation of Liu Ying, *Li Sao* is the lamentation of Qu Yuan, *Chuang Tzu* is the lamentation of Meng Shi, *Shih Chi* is the lamentation of Sima Qian, and *Thatched Cottage of Poetry* is the lamentation of Du Fu. So Cao Xueqin laments in *A Dream of Red Mansions*. In Chinese literature history, in many ways, *A Dream of Red Mansions* is an insurmountable work, which represents the height of Chinese classical novels. As Wang Xilian says, it is an all-encompassing great work and no novel can be nearly as good as it is (63). It takes the rise and fall of Jia Mansion as the basic line, mainly depicts the love story of Jia Baoyu, Lin Daiyu, and Xue Baochai, and portrays strategies from family fate to society, showing multiple levels and a fusion tragedy world. Lu Xun says that *A Dream of Red Mansions* breaks the traditional thoughts and writing styles. In expression techniques, aesthetic concepts, and chapter construction, it really has different degrees of transcendence over Chinese traditional tragic works (157).

The purpose of tragedy is to correct or eliminate our passion, horror, and pity (Wu, 1958). *A Dream of Red Mansions*, through the destruction of tragic characters, arouses viewers' strong sense of reverence and mercy, and with profound moral and ethical education, it improves people's mental state and tempers the volition of the people. *A Dream of Red Mansions* is a nice beauty, a

noble and elegant beauty. It slowly penetrates into our hearts and our souls instead of impressing like a sudden storm. There is no extremely exciting impression, stirring up emotional waves; however, it still makes us think about the meaning of this tragedy and understand life in the deep consciousness. Waves of thoughts coming from the bottoms of hearts are more intense and profound, so we would not fall into a fatal dream, and our hearts are full of hope and a kind of detached comfort. It tells us that although everything is flowing and changing, and life can pass away, the will is unbreakable.

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