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Dreams of Timeless Beauties: A Deconstruction of the Twelve Beauties of Jinling in Dream of the Red Chamber and an Analysis of Their Images in Modern Adaptations

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Dreams of Timeless Beauties:
A Deconstruction of the Twelve Beauties of Jinling in *Dream of the Red
Chamber* and an Analysis of Their Image in Modern Adaptations

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of the
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Introduction

Of the four classics in Chinese literature, *The Story of the Stone* (*Shitou Ji*), better known as *Dream of the Red Chamber* (*Hongloumeng*), is arguably one of the most timeless masterpieces. Unlike *The Water Margin* or *The Journey to the West*, which both act to retell and reshape popular tales and folklore, *The Dream of the Red Chamber* is a completely original work of fiction which expresses the artistic vision of a literary genius. Each of the two titles implies a different emphasis. While *The Story of the Stone* invokes supernatural and spiritual overtones, *Dream of the Red Chamber* evokes a sense of “delicately nurtured young ladies living in luxurious apartments” (Hawkes, 20) and of “a dream of vanished splendor” (Hawkes, 20). Its publication in the late 18th century marks a turning point in Chinese vernacular literature and has continued to fascinate and perplex readers to this day.

Dream of the Red Chamber is considered by some to be the pinnacle of Chinese literature. Written by Cao Xueqin in the middle of the Qing Dynasty, *Dream of the Red Chamber* not only tells a succinct story of the hidden crises and various kinds of intricate social conflicts of the declining feudal society, but also offers a deep artistic appeal. Cao manages to create a novel that not only provides a detailed historical snapshot of a family declining under a corrupt feudal system but also makes direct commentary on the economics, politics, culture, education, law, ethics, religion, and marriage system of the time. Many believe that *Dream of the Red Chamber* is a semi-autobiographical account of Cao’s own life, one that reflects the rise and fall of his own family.¹ The author himself notes that the story was intended as a memorial to the women of his youth.² Regardless of the validity of this claim, the story nonetheless contains a

¹ Spence, Jonathan D. *T’sao Yin and Kang-His Emperor: Bonservant and Master*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1988. 301-306

² David Hawkes, "Introduction," *The Story of the Stone Volume 1: The Golden Days*. England: Penguin Books, 1973. 15-19

cultural validity that is sustained throughout the novel. It is this cultural richness that gives it its profound social significance as well as its high historical value. In his youth, even Chairman Mao Zedong was an avid reader of the novel. Even Chinese communists have celebrated the book for its depictions of bourgeois decadence and its condemnation of arranged marriage as a backward institution of feudal China.³ Thus, it is not surprising that Cao's story and characters continue, even today, to inspire modern writers. Since its initial publication in 1792, *Dream of the Red Chamber* has given rise to innumerable sequels, as well as countless film and television adaptations, all of which make use of the original novel's story and characters.

Among the extensive and complicated cast of nearly forty major characters and an additional five hundred minor ones, the most poignant seem to be the novel's complex and oftentimes mysterious female characters, particularly, the group of women that compose the "Twelve Beauties of Jinling." This phrase comes as a translation of the term shier chai and can refer to all of the young women in the novel. However, as we learn from the heavenly registers of chapter five, it also refers to twelve women in particular. These are Lin Daiyu, Xue Baochai, Jia Yuanchun, Shi Xiangyun, Miaoyu, Jia Tanchun, Jia Yingchun, Jia Xichun, Wang Xifeng, Jia Qiaojie, Li Wan, and Qin Keqing. The origin of this phrase can be traced by to a poem written in the Liang period of the Southern Dynasties (502-527). In his poem "Song to the Water in the River," author Wu Dixiao writes a eulogy to love and laments the rarity with which people marry the people they love. He uses twelve head ornaments traditionally worn by women as a metaphor for a large group of beautiful women. Cao evokes the associations that have been traditionally ascribed to these images to set these twelve women apart from the rest of the cast of characters.⁴

³ Li, Zhisui, and Anne F. Thurston. *The Private Life of Chairman Mao: The Memoirs of Mao's Personal Physician*. New York: Random House, 1994. Print. 82

⁴ Edwards, Louise P. *Men and Women in Qing China: Gender in the Red Chamber Dream*. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994. Print. 144

Readers first learn of this grouping during Bao Yu's initial ascent into the Land of Illusion in chapter five and many continue to be intrigued by their elaborate tales well after the end of the novel. Their stories, however, are complicated by the incomplete nature of the novel itself. Prior to its formal publication in 1792, the book remained unpublished and existed in several different versions, none of them representing the "correct" edition. The novel that is read today and the novel that forms the backbone to this current thesis is the incomplete novel by Cao Xueqin in 80 chapters, together with a supplemental 40 chapters put together by Gao E and Cheng Weiyuan. The entire 120 chapters are now referred to as the as Cheng-Gao version. The debate over the final 40 chapters continues to this day with many scholars arguing that these chapters were a later addition written by Gao E himself on the basis of the information presented in chapter five. It remains unclear whether these final chapters were based on a manuscript that Cao wrote, discovered or based on notes from earlier rogue versions, or made independent of involvement by Cao other than by the exposition he establishes in earlier chapters.⁵ Whatever the truth may be, there are rather small, but nonetheless obvious inconsistencies between the prophecies from the registers found in the Land of Illusion and the eventual fates of some of the twelve women later in the novel. While in this thesis I choose to regard the original novel as the combination of the original 80 chapters and its supposed illegitimate ending, one of the first questions I hope to address how much did a change in authorship alter the intended role of some of these characters. Through a deconstruction of each of these twelve women, I explore the underlying reasons for their alterations within the novel and attempt to discern what role each character ends up playing within the narrative construct. There I ask whether this role is what was initially intended. I explore how alterations in the story were not only a product of change in authorial voice but also how political censorship influenced the development of these characters

⁵ Hawkes, 37

during the time of the novel's publication. Ultimately, I hope to discern why these twelve women in specific were chosen to be highlighted during Bao Yu's descent into the Land of Illusion.

Naturally, these modifications as well as questions of narratorial legitimacy make these twelve women in particular the topic of much discussion after the novel ends. Thus, these twelve beauties not only play a key role throughout the novel, but also serve as the backbone to many of the sequels and adaptations that follow. Their image has proven to be timeless as they continue to survive despite decades of sweeping social changes in China including the May Fourth Movement, the New Culture Movement, and the Cultural Revolution, all of which have greatly affected China's artistic output. Sequels have all been written in order to commemorate "a nostalgia for the good times of the original novel" (McMahon, 98). As a result, many of the sequels feature a modified ending that results in the union of Dai Yu and Bao Yu. It seems as though sequel writers felt that they needed to "right a wrong" (McMahon, 92) through their works. These early sequels played an important role not only in introducing the possibility of a separate female audience, but also in revealing a new subset of women writers who played a distinct role in shaping said sequels. For the most part, these rewritings are "independent creative acts, each with its own agenda, purposes, and intended readership" (Widmer, 119). While much work has already been done on sequels, less has been done in terms of modern adaptations such as film, television, and graphic art. Works that are traditionally categorized as sequels to *Dream of the Red Chamber* are products of an interest catalyzed by interest in the original work, but ultimately evolve along different routes. This background, compounded with their extreme departure from the original canon has led me to explore an alternative definition of the word sequel.

In the first essay of his anthology *Snakes Legs*, “Boundaries and Interpretations: Some Preliminary Thoughts on Xushu,” Martin Huang wrestles with the interpretation of the term xushu and through this discussion is able to construct a working definition that encompasses any and “all ‘ensuing narratives’ regardless of the specific nature of their relationships to their precursor texts” (Huang, 4). This definition, in turn, has become the central axis around which my thesis expands into its various parts to include film and television adaptation as well as rewritings and extension of the original novel, as opposed to what we normally considered to be the written sequels to *Dream of the Red Chamber*. Although these forms of media, too, attempt to replicate Cao’s original novel and adhere to his canon, they nonetheless reveal changes in how the characters are represented.

I have chosen Pauline Chen’s 2012 novel *The Red Chamber* as a first source of information in this study. Chen’s novel is set apart from its predecessors for many reasons. Foremost, it is the first rewriting of the novel that is intended for a modern, English audience. In her novel *The Red Chamber*, author Pauline Chen attempts a retelling of *Dream of the Red Chamber*. In order to condense the long, episodic nature of the novel and make it more accessible to modern audiences, she streamlines the plot and creates more narrative momentum by cutting out the majority of the subplots and secondary characters. Furthermore, she uses the inner lives and motivations of three major female protagonists as the crux of her narrative arc. In Chen’s rewriting of the novel, Baoyu’s voice is present, but it is only one among a chorus of primarily female voices, in particular, those of Xifeng, Baochai, and Daiyu. Ultimately, *The Red Chamber* boils down into a picture of the constricted lives of women and how they are deprived of any and all choice in life-- even marriage is presented as based on how it will further a family’s wealth and prestige, not how well it suits the individuals concerned. Chen asserts that

her novel is not an abridged translation of Cao's story, but rather an artistic retelling of it. During an interview with NPR, Chen states the following in response to the developments of her book.

I had to allow myself greater freedom to depart from the original plot to distill what I found most compelling about the work: an elegiac awareness of the illusory and evanescent nature of human life; also the excruciating conflict between female friendship and romantic love that occurs when women intimates become rivals for the same man. To these two central themes, I added a question that gripped me as a modern reader and writer: in a culture where women's opportunities and movements were ruthlessly restricted, in what ways could they shape their own destinies? (Wang)

Her ultimate goal was to overcome stereotypes of women from the Qing Dynasty; *and Dream of the Red Chamber*, not exactly rife with feminist qualities, became the perfect platform from which to do so. In an interview with *Time Out: Shanghai*, Chen expressed the view that Cao intentionally created a cast of women who enjoyed surprising amounts of freedom, given the harsh circumstances in which they lived. Its female characters are depicted as being both "original and pro-woman," but not really feminist.⁶ Her book is an homage to a kind of incipient feminism, but she also uses it to fully depict the limitations of feminism during the Qing.

In addition to Chen's novel I will be looking at two iconic television adaptations of *Dream of the Red Chamber*. The translation into a visual medium is a significant departure in how they are revitalized in print. Factors such as casting as well as costuming and other forms of artistic and aesthetic representation must be taken into consideration when analyzing narratorial choices. I choose to focus on the two main television adaptations for a variety of reasons. The original 1987 version seems to be an appropriate choice as it is often regarded by many within China as a near-definitive adaptation of the novel. Not only has it gained enormous popularity with its music, cast, and plot adaptation, it is also considered to be an addition within the canon of *Dream of the Red Chamber*. Continuing along a similar line of reasoning, I found it most

⁶ Sebag-Montefiore, Clarissa "Pauline Chen on *The Red Chamber*: The Chinese literature PhD reworks the classic tales in her new novel" *Time Out Shanghai* 8 Oct. 2012

logical to add the most recent TV remake of 2010, which also received a significant amount of press release. Both of these adaptations come after a media revolution in China and in turn reflects a significantly more modern social topography.

Translating *Dream of the Red Chamber* for the screen proved to be a challenge not only in visual representations but also in the descriptions of the complex human relationships present in the novel. When it was first released via China Central Television (CCTV), the 1987 series sparked a revitalization for the novel itself, so much so that it was said that bookstores around the nation quickly ran out of copies of the novel. Subsequently, an entire issue of *The Journal of Stone Studies* would later be dedicated to debates and discussions regarding issues such as the series' casting, scripting, costuming, and music.⁷ The 1987 television series was the first attempt to transform *Dream of the Red Chamber* into a television drama. Inspired by a trip to the United Kingdom in the early 1980s, director Wang Fulin hoped to create a televised retelling of the novel during a time when China was opening up to the West and the cultural elite of countries like England and the United States were eager to learn more about Chinese traditions.⁸ Since then, this series has been re-aired more than 700 times on a host of different syndicated channels in Mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan and various other countries in the Asian Pacific as well as South East Asia. Because it consisted of only thirty-six episodes with each episode running for around forty-five minutes, the series was organized in a way that was much more straightforward than the original novel. Thirty of the thirty-six episodes were based on the first eighty chapters, so it is obvious that the screenwriters took considerable liberties with Gao E's additional forty chapters, which were the basis for only four episodes. Furthermore, the series de-emphasizes the novel's fantastical elements and almost skips Baoyu's dream in chapter five altogether. Thus, the

⁷ Zhong, Xueping "The Story of the Stone on Television." *Approaches to Teaching The Story of the Stone (Dream of the Red Chamber)*, Ed. Andrew Schonebaum and Tina Lu. 428

⁸ Zhong, 430

first several chapters, which focus heavily on the supernatural elements of the story, are downplayed and condensed to around thirty minutes of the first episode. This eschewing of the mystical elements could be a result of the social-political environment of the time. However, the series attempts to make up for this change by structuring the narrative around the Prospect Garden as well as the song “A Dream of Golden Days,” an adaption of the poems that describe the fates of the Twelve Beauties.⁹ Despite all of these changes, the female characters play an integral role in this version of *Dream of the Red Chamber*. Interestingly, the series follows the book most closely when it uses the poems in the registers as background music to provide insight on each of the twelve beauties.

The 2010 remake of *Dream of the Red Chamber* series was met with widespread criticism. In an attempt to boost publicity as well as increase anticipation before the series’ release, Hunan Television Company decided to use a reality competition in which viewers voted for their favorite actors. The vote was based on weeks of elimination games in order to cast the main roles. This highly publicized casting call, in conjunction with the initial skepticism, created an air of controversy amidst the series’ pre-production, which would have detrimental effects on viewer reception after the series was finally released. Later, when then director Hu Mei refused to accept the established cast picked by the Chinese public, the series saw a drastic change. This was because Hu was replaced with fifth generation director Li Shaohong. Li further added to the controversy when, after being advised to do so by Hong Kong art director Ye Jintian, she decided to adopt a stylized kunqu-inspired hairstyle, which many viewers found grotesquely unrealistic. Netizens began to refer to this look sarcastically as *tongqian tou*, or “cone heads.” The response to the series following its debut was largely negative with one

⁹ Despite the fact that there are songs for each of the beauties, those that are featured most prominently are “Second Song: Hope Betrayed” and “Ninth Song: Caught by Her Own Cunning.”

reviewer referring to it as the pre-modern version of the melodramatic pop idol drama Meteor Garden.¹⁰ Audiences expressed dismay over the music, which vacillated between cartoon sound effects and anachronistic instrumentals, as well as the over-modernized and hypersexual use of makeup. Meanwhile, Redologists voiced disappointment with the lackluster dramaturgy and juvenile script adaptation.

Despite the overwhelming criticism of the newer version, it is not without its merits. Unlike its 1987 predecessor, the series adapts and remains, for the most part, faithful to the Cheng-Gao version. Large segments of the book's pre-modern Beijing dialogue is reproduced in full through the heavy use of a male voice-over reciting from the book's actual words. Furthermore, this series has 16 additional episodes, which allow the director and producers to touch upon the subtle, more complex nuances of the novel. Proponents of the series argue that its critics have "lost objectivity in their perceptions of the show" (Reming Wang English) and were too heavily influenced by pre-production controversies and biases or by the canonization of the 1987 version. Praise has been given to the high production quality and technical prowess of this series although aspects such as costuming and set design are either praised or critiqued, depending on the generation of viewers. One particular point of contention between the two groups is centered on casting. Many find the young, fresh cast appropriately invigorating while others find their inexperience and unfamiliarity with the text of Dream of the Red Chamber distracting. After the 1987 series was cast, the actors spent a year in Beijing doing research on the novel with the most renowned Redologists and literary theorists of the time. This is compared to a cast of theater students in the 2010 series, many of whom had not even read the entire novel before shooting began. Further dissatisfaction over casting was in part due to criticisms that all of the females looked virtually the same, despite the fact that the novel provided distinct

¹⁰ "Xin 'hongloumeng' manyan huangtang ju bi juan xinsuan xi" *Jinghua Shibao*. 9 Sept. 2010 <http://ent.163.com/>

descriptions of each character. This physical similarity allowed the director to switch individual actors' roles after the final casting had taken place. The rearrangement that garnered the most debate from viewers was when actress Yao Di was switched from Lin Daiyu and given the role of Xifeng. Viewers of today will notice another contrast: the 1987 series presents a tale that ultimately ends in tragedy while the 2010 remake is one with comedic undertones and an ultimate happy ending. Media critics as well as Redologists describe the newer version as a more commercialized attempt to garner audiences among the "post 1980's" generation.

Rather than dividing the chapters into the various types of "sequels" that I will be exploring, I've chosen to separate the Twelve Beauties into four chapters based on their role in the novel as well as their significance in the plot. Because there are natural groupings within the list of twelve, the chapters will be divided accordingly. I will open with what are considered to be by most as the two main characters, Daiyu and Baochai and then subsequently move into Xifeng, who, while ranked significantly lower, is nonetheless a key player in the narrative of family politics. Her daughter Qiaojie, another of the 12 beauties listed in Cao Xueqin's chapter five, will be taken up in the chapter with Xifeng. The final two chapters will focus on what I consider to be the "Four Springs," Yuanchun, Tanchun, Xichun, and Yingchun.¹¹ The last chapter covers the four women on the list who are not directly related to the Jia family, Keqing, Miaoyu, Xiangyun, and Li Wan. For each character, I will go through an analysis of their narratives, the goal being not only to reveal their importance in the novel but also discern the reason for their inclusion in the Registry as well as provide possible answers to why they are ranked as they are. Following this type of analysis, I will delve into their transformations in the above-mentioned works, paying particular attention to major changes in their narrative arcs as

¹¹ Normally, the term that is used is "Three Springs" in reference to Yingchun, Tanchun, and Xichun. However, because I have chosen to include Yuanchun in this group, I have renamed this group the "Four Springs."

well as their physical transformations. By looking at these alterations, I hope to illuminate the reasons for these changes. I ultimately hope to answer the following questions: Which types of works attempt to preserve Cao's original forty chapters and which rewriting what is sometimes considered to be the illegitimate addition of the Cheng-Gao version. Who adheres to the widely accepted textual editions most fully? Why are some characters usually left intact while others are often changed? What changes need to be made to the most iconic characters in order to ensure that this novel is accessible to a modern, non-Chinese speaking audience? In short, I proceed by groups of characters and within each chapter I begin with work by the original author, move on to the last 40 chapters or sequels, then take up Pauline Chen's novel and end with the two television series.

Chapter 1: The Pairing of Wood and Gold

Lin Daiyu

Lin Daiyu is considered one of the most crucial characters in *Dream of the Red Chamber*. Born in Suzhou to a scholar official and a lady from the Rongguo house of the Jia family, Daiyu becomes the reader's introduction into the Jia family for it is through her entrance that we, as readers, first become acquainted with the Jia family and the story's narrative begins to unfold. Raised by her family away from the capital and the rest of her relatives, she develops a natural affinity for literature under her childhood tutor, Jia Yucun who also happens to be a distant relative to the Jia family. When she was a child, a Buddhist monk insisted that she be taken away in order to spare her from a tragic fate. Unlike Miaoyu, who can in some ways be seen as a counterpart to her character, her parents disregard that advice and she develops a weak constitution, a willowy build, and her a fairy-like ethereal beauty. Following the death of her mother when she was six, Daiyu is forced to leave her family home and live in the capital with the Jia family. She has heard much talk about the wealth and elegance of her distant relatives and her entrance into the family compound is naturally marked by her remarks on the trappings of the luxury that she sees everywhere. She pays particular attention to the servants and the way they are dressed as well as the ornate furnishings and decorations within the home. As she is brought through the various wings of the mansion and introduced to her family members, she becomes the vehicle through which the readers become better acquainted with the narrative of the Jia family. In this way, Daiyu's entrance marks one of the first major shifts of the novel. With this entrance, the spiritual and supernatural elements seem to dissolve as the novel begins to focus on the more corporeal reality of the Jia mansion. Upon her arrival, she immediately bonds with Baoyu and her other cousins and eventually becomes one of Grandmother Jia's favorite

grandchildren. As the story progresses, her love of Baoyu becomes one of the main narratorial threads of the novel.

Because of the sheer number of characters in the novel, the detailed handling of such a vast cast is facilitated largely by focusing on a few typical traits and symbolic associations. In Daiyu's case, she is typified by her petulance and melancholy as well as her femininity. In fact, many scholars argue that Daiyu can be looked at as the most feminine character in the entire novel.¹² Her delicate physique and sickly constitution are perhaps her most well known traits and in turn become one of the centerpieces of her depiction. It is widely believed that she suffers from a form of tuberculosis, a disease that was endemic to China during the eighteenth century. Daiyu's affliction is appropriate as tuberculosis is a disease in China, as in the West, that is often associated with romantic agony and culminates in the wasting away of the body.¹³ Because of the nature of how the disease spreads, nearly all of the Jia household would have been exposed to it in some form or another. For example, it is believed that one of Baoyu's principal maids, Skybright, ultimately succumbed to consumption and maltreatment after she was forced to leave the Jia family. In the case of Daiyu, with her already sickly frame and her abstemious eating habits, "eating perhaps no more than five meals in every ten," (SS 2.35.183) the disease was much more likely to be fatal. The contemporary scholar Dore Levy believes that Daiyu's chronic illness is necessary for her development as a character. Her sickly body is a necessary element in her depiction as the physical manifestation of the Crimson Pearl Flower, her previous incarnation, whose grace and beauty are evoked from the images of a "flower reflected in the water and the wind-stirred willow shoots" (Levy, 81). Daiyu herself confirms that she has always

¹² Edwards, 47-48

¹³ Levy, Dore Jesse. *Ideal and Actual in the Story of the Stone*. New York: Columbia UP, 1999. Print. 80

been ill and even so the nature of her illness was never fully understood.¹⁴

“I have always been like this... I have been taking medicine ever since I could eat and have been looked at by ever so many well-known doctors, but it has never done me any good. Once, when I was only three, I can remember a scabby-headed old monk came and said he wanted to take me away and have me brought up as a nun; but of course, Mother and Father wouldn't hear of it. So he said, 'Since you are not prepared to give her up, I'm afraid her illness will never get better as she lives. The only way it might better better would be if she were never to hear the sound of weeping from this day onwards, and never to see any relatives other than her own mother and father. Only in those conditions could she get through life without trouble.' Of course, he was quite crazy, and no one took any notice of the things he said.” (SS.1.3.90)

Her physical weakness is further emphasized by the constant comparisons between her and Baochai who is described to be rosy and robust. While both can be described to have a type of femininity, Daiyu's jealous aggression seems to be preferred to Baochai's more maternal femininity by modern audiences.¹⁵ The stark contrast between Daiyu and Baochai is particularly relevant because of their competition for Baoyu's affections. The dichotomy between the marriage of “jade and gold” and the “affinity of stone and flower” are the major conflict presented in the novel.¹⁶ Thus, it is imperative that Baochai represent everything that Daiyu is not and vice-versa. Just as parts of their names combine to make “Baoyu,” the two of them together combine to form the perfect match for him as shown in his relationship with Two-In-One during his visit to the Land of Illusion.¹⁷ In this way, it can be argued that the two cousins form a yin and yang relationship with one another. However, the historical backdrop as well as social topography of *Dream of the Red Chamber* remind readers that, at least in the mortal world,

¹⁴ Tuberculosis, for a very brief time in history, became a symbol for a tragic beauty that marked the social structure of art and literature of the time. Although the disease was a potent killer that transcended all classes and nations, it came to embody the passion of a sensitive soul. In turn, tuberculosis, known as “consumption,” became intrinsically linked with the passion that seemed to oppose death itself.

¹⁵ Levy, 82

¹⁶ Both characters can claim to have “mystical” rights to marry Baoyu as Daiyu is the match of the Crimson Pearl Flower and Jade boy in chapter one and Baochai as the “match between gold and jade” of their paired jewelry symbols.

¹⁷ Yi, Jeannie Jinsheng. *The Dream of the Red Chamber: An Allegory of Love*. Paramus, NJ: Homa & Sekey, 2004. Print. 88

what is fated to happen in the spiritual realm may not always be fulfilled.

By comparison Baochai seems to have closer ties with the other women in the household and has a much more pronounced leadership quality. This is demonstrated by her short time replacing Xifeng when Xifeng was recovering from her miscarriage. In contrast, Daiyu seems to have little concern with the sentient world, especially when events don't directly affect her. She is rather aloof not only to greater political issues but also to simple matters of the Jia family. Moreover, she is often characterized by her emotional outbursts and extreme reactions. This type of overly sensitive nature as well as her emotional sentimentality, gives her an air of pettiness, which many people, particularly the servants, find off putting. Her self-absorbed preoccupation can possibly be a result of her own insecurities with her physical limitations and class background. Having come to realize that she is at a disadvantage socially to healthy women like Baochai and the Springs, she oftentimes becomes abrasive as a form of self-defense. While those close to her such as Baoyu, Baochai, and her maid understand the source of her moodiness and tend to comfort her, others tend to judge her more harshly. In some way Cao seems to be criticizing their unwillingness to penetrate the surface so as to discover her softness and utter helplessness.

Her mother's death seems to be the cause of Daiyu's plunge into a feeling of grief that leaves her feeling alone and unprotected. As a result, she is constantly preoccupied with the thoughts of her own morality.

As petals drop and spring begins to fail,
The bloom of youth, too, sickens and turns to pale.
One day, when spring has gone and youth has fled,
The Maiden and the flowers will both be dead!
(SS 2.27.39)

In this way, Daiyu identifies with flowers, as they become the epitome of transient beauty. Just as Tanchun can be seen to be associated with kites and Yuanchun with fireworks, Daiyu's

personality is reflected through fading flowers. Knoerle believes that Daiyu desperately craves love, but fears that love, like that of her mother's, will be taken from her forever. Thus, she has developed a defense system that shields her and makes it so that she is unable to appreciate compassion.¹⁸ It is this sense of insecurity that spurs her to bury flowers in flower graves and use the event to give voice to her ambivalent feelings about her position in the Jia family as well as her relationship with Baoyu. The flowers, like herself, are a manifestation of her delicateness of nature in addition to her vulnerability at the mercy of the elements.¹⁹ During the Dragon Boat Festival, Daiyu once again philosophizes about the fading flowers. The connection between Daiyu and the falling flowers continues until she hears of the fatal news of Baoyu's impending marriage to Baochai. Despite the fact that she is desperately trying to move away from her flower grave, her confusion repeatedly leads her back to her place of despair.

Can I, that these flowers' obsequies attend,
Divine how soon or late my life will end?
Let others laugh flower-burial to see:
Another year who will be burying me?
(SS 2.27.39)

This imagery becomes so integral to the characterization of Daiyu that the most enduring image of her portrayed in Chinese art and reenacted in Chinese operas is the aforementioned scene of her burying flowers.²⁰

Interestingly, the majority of her character is developed through small, unimportant incidents. The greater affairs of the family are of no concern to her. Rather, she relates everything and everyone to herself and has little or no concern for those who do not directly influence her life. Her distance from major events in the Jia household corresponds to how she

¹⁸ Knoerle, Jeanne. *The Dream of the Red Chamber: A Critical Study*. Bloomington: Indiana UP; for the International Affairs Center, 1972. Print. 59

¹⁹ Levy, 143-145

²⁰ Knoerle, 61

perceives her position in the family as an outsider, someone taken in merely through kindness and family obligation. That being said, her relationship with Grandmother Jia can be seen as particularly poignant. Despite her rather volatile personality, she has a rather close relationship to the head of the household. Perhaps the only other family member who enjoys such favoritism that of Daiyu's is Baoyu, who, as Louise Edwards argues, is actually fundamentally damaged by the matriarch's indulgence of his childish whims.²¹

From the moment Lin Daiyu entered the Rong mansion, Grandmother Jia's solicitude for her had manifested itself in a hundred different ways. The arrangements made for the meals and the accommodation were exactly the same as for Baoyu. The other three granddaughters, Yingchun, Tanchun, and Xichun, were relegated to a secondary place in the old lady's affections, and the objects of her partiality themselves began to feel an affection for each other which far exceeded what they felt for any of the rest. (SS. 1.5.124)

Thus, Daiyu can be seen as dependent on the matriarch's affection. She is given one of Grandmother Jia's personal maids, Nightingale, as her own principal maid and like Baoyu, is coddled to the point where others are unable to criticize her for her actions. While Cao describes this type of favoritism to be a rather quaint and lovable feature of the matriarch, he also hints at the underlying negative implications this behavior has on the family and how it contributes to its ultimate demise.

To step back to the beginning, although the character of Daiyu is not technically introduced until the third chapter, her presence in the novel emerges as early as the first chapter, which recounts a curious myth that at first seems to be dissociated from the main narrative. At the court of the goddess, the jade is attracted to a beautiful plant, the Crimson Pearl Flower, which it treats very kindly by sprinkling it every day with dew. In response to this loving care, the plant blossoms into a lovely female fairy. She vows to return the jade's love with tears if she may join him in life on Earth. However, this moment that moves away from the chronological

²¹ Edwards, 115

progression of time is actually a preview of the novel that touches on the significant themes and lines of action in the play. It can be said that this ostensibly superfluous addition to the main narrative actually establishes the standard of reality by which the Jias are to be judged. Furthermore, it provides insight into the preincarnation history of the Immortal Stone, Baoyu, and the Crimson Flower, Daiyu. Thus, Daiyu's only purpose in descending into the human world is to repay the debt of tears. As a result, tears constitute the essence of her life and become the governing principle of her overall existence. The "debt of tears" becomes an axis through which the novel develops into its subsequent parts.

"I have no sweet dew here that I can repay him with," Crimson Pearl Flower would say to herself. "The only way in which I could perhaps repay him would be with the tears shed during the whole of a moral lifetime if he and I were ever to be reborn as humans in the world below."

Because of this strange affair, Disenchantment got together a group of amorous young souls, of which Crimson Pearl was one, and intended to send them down into the world to take part in the great illusion of human life. "How very amusing!" said the Taoist. "I have certainly never heard of a debt of tears before." (SS 1.1.8)

This conversation between a monk and a Taoist implies that the entire concept of the Prospect Garden and the women who inhabit it hinges on this idea of a cosmic debt. In many ways, the story of Daiyu and Baoyu can then be read as an allegory of the debt of tears. This idea can be supported by Daiyu's preoccupation with the "number of tears" she has left behind. She does not describe her deteriorating health as others do with descriptions of her physical appearance. Rather than using conventional terms like "thin" or "pale" she focuses intently on "the decrease in tears." Even her prophecy in the fifth chapter makes reference to this deterioration through the loss of tears.

All, insubstantial, doomed to pass,
As moonlight mirrored in the water
Or flowers reflected in a glass.
How many tears from those poor eyes could flow,
Which every season rained upon her woe? (SS.1.5.140)

Thus, at least in terms of Daiyu and Baoyu's narrative, *Dream of the Red Chamber* holds to its promise of repaying this pre-established debt.

In his book *Reflections on Dream of the Red Chamber*, Liu Zaifu asserts that because of her previous existence as supernatural being, Daiyu is rather indifferent to the mundane world. She does not ask for the other people around her to live as she does, yet she is disliked by many because of her peculiar and unusually philosophical personality.²² Thus, Baoyu, her spiritual lover and mystical counterpart, becomes her sole lifeline. The youthful love between the two seems to represent a type of heavenly love and their relationship becomes based on a type of nostalgia, a yearning for their past. When they first meet they are struck by a sense of *deja-vu* and their love story in the human world becomes a reenactment of their first love. At first glance, it is easy to categorize their relationship as one tinged with sentimentality. Thus, Daiyu's tears seem to represent a significant portion of their interaction with one another. It comes to no surprise then, that Daiyu never wins approval to marry Baoyu. When Baoyu eventually fails to win her and instead marries Baochai, in turn succumbing to what Liu calls "love in the mundane world" (Liu, 36), Daiyu dies. Ultimately, this mystical tale instills in the reader a sense of debt that befalls Daiyu before the story even begins. It acts to affirm that the nebulous concept of *qing* and its various consequences set in motion the events that would eventually lead to her demise.²³

As mentioned above, one of the central narratives is the romance between Daiyu and Baoyu and the subsequent love triangle between those two and Baochai. In the garden, Baoyu is allowed to live in closer proximity with his female cousins and as a result develops what can be considered a childish crush on Daiyu. This affection eventually blossoms into a mutual romantic

²² Liu, Zaifu, and Yunzhong Shu. *Reflections on Dream of the Red Chamber*. Youngstown, NY: Cambria, 2008. Print. 118

²³ The concept of *qing*, which can be translated loosely as lust or and overflow of romantic feeling, plays an integral role in the novel. It can refer not only to Baoyu's "lust of the mind," but also the physical lust characters feel for one another.

passion. As demonstrated in the novel's opening chapter, the two are fated to be together, an indication of their relationship in a past life. The garden provides the perfect medium through which Baoyu and Daiyu are able to carry out the destinies set up by the previous existence with little to no inhibition or control from outside forces.²⁴ Interestingly, their relationship almost never progresses in a harmonious fashion. While the bond they share from their past life underscores the development of the relationship between the two, it does not give them happiness. They never seem to come to an understanding, instead they spend much of their time bickering and subsequently pinning for one another after they have driven each other away. Most of these incidences leave Daiyu in tears, which further ensures that she will pay off her debt. Even when they make plain declarations of love to one another, the message is somehow lost. Take, for example, in chapter 32 when Daiyu overhears Baoyu telling others of her superiority. Although she feels passionately for Baoyu when she hears him speaking about herself with others, she is unable to listen and is not receptive when Baoyu attempts to make his declaration in person. As a result, Baoyu ends up incorrectly making his passionate pledge to his maid Aroma. Their own inability to express their love to one another is only one factor that hinders the completion of their romantic fate.

Daiyu heaved a deep sigh. The tears gushed from her eyes and she turned and walked away. Baoyu hurried after her and caught at her dress. 'Coz dear, stop a moment! Just let me say one word.' As she wiped her eyes with one hand, Daiyu pushed him away from her with the other.

'There's nothing to say. I already know what you want to tell me.' She said this without turning back her head, and having said it, passed swiftly on her way. Baoyu remained where he was standing, gazing after her in silent stupefaction.

Now Baoyu had left the apartment in such haste that he had forgotten to take his fan with him. Fearing that he would be very hot without it, Aroma hurried outside to give it to him, but when she noticed him standing some way ahead of her talking to Daiyu, she halted. After a little while she saw Daiyu walk away and Baoyu continue standing motionless where he was. (SS 2.32.134)

²⁴ Plaks, 187

Ultimately, there is a sense that words themselves get in the way of their feelings. This, in combination with the indulgence and negligence among the guardians of the garden contribute greatly to the confused resolution in which Baoyu and Baochai marry unhappily. While the preference Baoyu and Daiyu have for one another is quite obvious to those around them, people are unable to see beyond the social restrictions and allow their love to evolve. Furthermore, Grandmother Jia, while able to enjoy the beauty and innocence the garden provides, is oblivious to the budding romance. Daiyu is almost immediately disqualified as a possible match for Baoyu because she is an orphan without fortune and would be unable to come to the aid of the debt-ridden Jia family. Although the cosmic affinity they share as the Crimson Flower and the Stone has translated into their earthly affection, the prophecy reveals that their love will ultimately end in doom. Daiyu dies alone in agony the same moment Baoyu lifts his bride's veil to see the wrong woman. It is important to note that here, Daiyu's death occurs in Gao's addition. Although Daiyu's death is considered one of the novel's pivotal tragic moments, many believe that Gao's ending is more optimistic than what Cao intended.

Many scholars see Daiyu's willingness to succumb to her disease as an example of a slow attempted suicide.²⁵ When Daiyu learns that it is Baochai and not herself that is intended to be Baoyu's bride, she allows the illness that has plagued herself all her life to finish its course. Shortly before her death, Daiyu instructs her maid Nightingale to burn all of her poems and letters. The action of burning her literary works in combination with her burying of the flowers can be seen as a funeral ritual she conducts for herself.²⁶ Her moment with the fading flowers can be seen as an elegy while the final burning of the flowers can be interpreted as the funeral

²⁵ Yu, Anthony C. *Rereading the Stone: Desire and the Making of Fiction in Dream of the Red Chamber*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1997. Print. 156

²⁶ Liu, 84

service. As her poetry is her one of the only ways she is able to express herself, the poetry is a part of her life and appropriately it is destroyed when her life is over.²⁷ The disappearance of her poetry thus becomes an indication of her exit from the human world. Critic Song Jing asserts that without the death of Daiyu, the subject matter of *Dream of the Red Chamber* is not fully established.²⁸ The overwhelming power of her death plays an integral role in how the novel is perceived as well as its subsequent legacy in the tradition of Chinese literature. Her death not only casts a shadow on the rest of the novel; it also instills in readers a sense of irreparable loss. This sense of loss is amplified by the anticipation of her death that had been looming, in the most foreboding sense, since the beginning of the novel. Perhaps the most poignant aspect of Daiyu's final moments arises from the mounting despair of her painful struggle from previous chapters.

That evening, when Daiyu went into her side-room to undress for the night, she caught sight of the lychees again. They reminded her of the old woman's visit, and revived the pain she had felt at her tactless gossiping. Dusk was falling, and in the stillness a thousand gloomy thoughts seemed to close in and oppress her mind.

'My health is so poor... And time's running out. I know Baoyu loves me more than anyone else. But Grannie and Aunt Wang still haven't mentioned it! If only my parents had settled it for us while they were still alive.. But suppose they had? What if they had married me to someone else? Who could ever compare with Baoyu? Perhaps I'm better off like this after all! At least I've still some hope.'

Like the rope on a pulley her secret hopes and fears spun up and down, tangling themselves tighter and tighter round her heart. Finally, with a sigh and a few tears, she lay down in her clothes, weary and depressed. (SS 4.82.63)

Her various attempts to continuously rationalize her possibility for happiness as she speculates about what might have happened had her parents not passed away is a painful struggle which intensifies the reader's pity and grief.²⁹

Because though there are things of burning importance to be said, without a father or a mother I have no one to say them for me. And besides, I feel so muzzy lately and I know that my illness is gradually gaining a hold on me. (The doctors say that the weakness and anaemia I suffer from may be the beginnings of a consumption.) So even if

²⁷ Liu, 88

²⁸ Yu, 132

²⁹ Yu, 241

I am your true love, I fear I may not be able to wait for you. And even though you are mine, you can do nothing to alter my fate.

At that point in her reflections she began to weep; and feeling in no fit state to be seen, she turned away from the door and began to make her way back again.

Baoyu had finished his hasty dressing and now came out of the house. He saw Daiyu slowly walking on ahead of him and, judging by her appearance from behind, wiping her eyes. He hurried forward to catch up with her. (SS.2.32.132)

The reader preoccupation with Daiyu's death can be seen most clearly through the way readers have studied her up to the modern period, so that she has eventually become a representation of a strong Chinese woman in a modern, international setting. Lin Daiyu came to represent something besides romanticism to readers in the People's Republic of China. In an important speech on class struggle, Chairman Mao Zedong even mentioned the heroine by name, saying: "Lin Daiyu did not belong to the four great families."³⁰ By then, *The Dream of the Red Chamber* had become the subject of an intense debate in China that led, among other things, to the identification of Jia Baoyu and Lin Daiyu with class resistance to feudal landlord values. Interestingly, acclaim for Daiyu as a character has become increasingly muted in the last few decades. While some continue on a line of Marxist appraisal on her "rebellious natures" and her campaign against what was then considered the oppressive feudalism of Qing China, recent criticism has placed greater emphasis on her neurotic and self-destructive tendencies.³¹ Although they wholly acknowledge her intellectual brilliance and literary prowess, she is now regarded more as a person marked by an excessively stubborn and self-pitying attitude. Furthermore, her constant preoccupation with how others view her as well as her obsession with marriage has been considered anti-feminist and to some degree deplorably pitiful.

Perhaps one of the most crucial aspects of Daiyu's characterization is her poetic abilities. She is arguably the most talented of the poets in the Crab Flower poetry club with Baochai being

³⁰ Edwards, 18

³¹ Louise Edwards goes into greater detail on the post Marxist appraisal on these characters in terms of their *qing* or sexual nature in her book *Men and Women in Qing China*.

her only intellectual rival.³² Daiyu's leadership of the poetry society was solidified in chapter 70 with the writing of her ballad "The Flower of the Peach." Her unconventional treatment of the poem is typical of her style of writing in that the majority of her poems are preoccupied with the idea of death, the passing of seasons, loss, and decay. Unlike the others, Daiyu does not write of trite themes of love and rebirth. Furthermore, she does not seek refuge in the prospect of a longer life. Rather, she embraces the notion of death, which is often reflected in her rather morbid works. Even in impromptu settings of poetry games, Daiyu's work focuses on demise. While she is universally admired, people often take note of her pessimism and the darkness at the heart of her imagination. Many scholars believe her unique approach to seemingly hackneyed themes is informed by her past existence as the Crimson Pearl Flower.³³ She is drawn to melancholy nature of her flower-nature and because of her illness; she is arguably not part of this world. Baoyu comments that Daiyu's writing is as such because she has actual experience of grief. A deeper inspection of this comment shows that he is not simply commenting on the death of her parents. If this were the litmus test for experiencing grief then Baoqin, whose parents are both dead, Baochai, who lost her father at a young age, and Xiangyun, who is also an orphan, would all be able to write at the same level. What his comment points to is the spiritual suffering that is inherent to her nature.

Her talent as a poet seems to be secondary to the role poetry plays in her everyday life. It is through poetry that she is able to adequately describe the grief that she feels and it is through verse that Baoyu and Daiyu are able to truly communicate with one another. When Baoyu is bedridden after a near-fatal beating inflicted by his father, he and Daiyu are able to share their feelings with one another using language that only they are able to understand.

³² Levy, 113

³³ Levy, 115

“What’s she going to do with a pair of your old handkerchiefs? Most likely she’ll think you’re making fun of her and get upset again.”

“No she won’t,” said Baoyu. “She’ll understand.” (SS. 2.34.145)

Through her written words she is not only able to converse with Baoyu in a way she would be unable to otherwise; she is also able to verbalize her own fears and insecurities. Surprisingly, within this poetry club she forms a strong connection with Shi Xiangyun with whom she composes linked verses during a time when Daiyu is in need of the most support.

“All that time about spending Mid-Autumn night enjoying the moon together and using the occasion to revive the Poetry Club with another linked couplets session-- and then, when the time comes, they leave us in the lurch and go off to enjoy the moon by themselves! No Poetry Club, no linked couplets, nothing! Never mind. Since the others haven’t come, we’ll make up some linked couplets ourselves and take them along tomorrow to shame them with.” (SS. 3.76.513-514)

The two continue to compose a poem to celebrate the present moment, despite the overwhelming feeling of impending doom as the Jia family comes closer to crumbling. Together, they are able to celebrate the Mid-Autumn festival with memories of their childhood and images of youthful companionship. The bond between Daiyu and Xiangyun proves to be important as Xiangyun is able to serve as a substitute for Baoyu during a time of his absence. However, that being said, Xiangyun also shares a rather poignant relationship with Baochai.³⁴ This ability to bond with both women is an indication of Xiangyun’s versatility as a character as well as the parallels she shares with Baoyu.

Appropriately, Daiyu is the first of the twelve beauties. Her relationship with Baoyu and her integral role in the story place her at the head of the group of twelve women. Although Daiyu is billed first, it seems as though in the fifth chapter Baochai’s song is presented first. David Hawkes believes that this choice actually places emphasis on Daiyu because in the song cycle it is possible to say that the first song is about both women and the second song is just about Daiyu.

³⁴ Levy, 124

However, it is equally appropriate to argue that the distinction between Daiyu and Baochai is not needed as the two are intended to represent complementary aspects of a single ideal woman. This possibility is further supported by the fact that these two characters, the most important female characters in the book, only have a single picture and a single set of verses between them in the Register. They often seem more as an extension of Baoyu himself than as two individual people.³⁵

In Pauline Chen's *The Red Chamber* Daiyu is significantly transformed. While Chen borrows heavily from Cao's original characterization, she also makes significant changes in order to better suit her own narrative purposes. When this novel opens, Daiyu is in her late teens and still living in Suzhou with her parents. Her mother, Jia Min, is on her deathbed and her father, fearing that he will be unable to find her a suitable marriage partner, is in the process of contacting her relatives in the capital to take her in after his wife passes. From as early as the first chapter, Chen creates a Daiyu who is not only close to both of her parents but is also reluctant to leave her family home. Furthermore, she seems to be fully aware of the corruption of her wealthy relatives and looks at them with a sense of disdain. This loyalty to her immediate family as well as her more fully realized life away from the capital presents background for the despair that she feels when she arrives at the Jia's. Chen also suggests that Daiyu's return would mark the end of a two-generation estrangement her family has had with the Jia clan which in turn hints at an at first unclear hostility that exists between the two. Her entrance through the Jia family gates is not filled with the same pomp and excitement that was described by Cao. While the Jias are described to be well-off, they are less powerful than they were in the original story. Daiyu's introduction to the individual members of the Jia family is handled through Jia Zheng who accompanies her on her trip from the south.

³⁵ Hawkes, 528-529

“Min wrote that you were coming. Everyone at Rongguo is making preparations for your arrival.” Uncle Zheng smiles at her, stooping his head and rubbing his hands together. “You’ll like it there. You’ll have many cousins to play with. There’s another girl staying with us, too, Xue Baochai. She’s the daughter of my wife’s sister. She’s eighteen, just one year older than you.” Ignoring her interruption, he continues, “And Wang Xifeng, your cousin Lian’s wife, will take good care of you. She’s only twenty-three, but runs the household like a little general.” She looks towards her father for support, but to her amazement, he is nodding as if in agreement with her uncle. (Chen, XX)

Instead of amazement following her arrival in Beijing, she is faced with unfamiliar and unflattering new sounds.

Her ears are filled with the spine-tingling shriek of a knife sharpener’s whetstone, the clang and hiss of cooking pots, the scrape of wheels and the jangling of harnesses, and above all the clamor of a hundred voices raised in argument and bargaining and gossip. The northern dialect, with its harsh, barking gutturals, grates on her ears. Like a child learning to speak, she silently mouths the new sounds, her teeth and tongue trying out the unfamiliar positions. (Chen, XX)

Perhaps one of the most crucial changes that occurs in these opening chapters is her relationship with the family matriarch, Grandmother Jia, who finds her presence in the household a nuisance. Grandmother Jia seems to bear a feeling of bitterness toward her daughter, who had run off to marry a low-level civil servant. Upon first meeting Daiyu, she notes that she looks a lot like her father, a fact that she “does not consider a merit.” Moreover, Grandmother Jia disapproves of her education, stating that it is enough that girls “receive a basic education, enough for them to be able to run the household” (Chen, 30) and that it is a “a waste of time for them to be educated like men” (Chen, 30). Ultimately, all of these details contribute to Daiyu’s oppressive loneliness in her new home. This in turn bolsters her relationship with Baoyu and strengthens their connection, which is particularly important because there is no supernatural subtext to explain their seemingly magical link to one another.

As mentioned, Chen does not employ any type of supernatural subtext to explain parts of her plot. It appears that Grandmother Jia is much less maternal in this version and Baoyu is thus kept under the tight control of his strict father. Aware that he is unable to pass the examinations

and betrothed to someone he doesn't love, Baoyu finds solace in the outsider, Daiyu, who is equally lost within the social confines of the family. Thus, Daiyu and Baoyu's relationship is built on their mutual understanding and their shared feeling of alienation in the household. The development of their relationship is much less melodramatic than in the original novel, perhaps because the characters are well past adolescence during their first meeting. There is almost none of the childish bickering and tearful misunderstandings of before. Rather, the tragedy in their relationship is that Baoyu is already betrothed to Baochai who has formed a tight friendship with Daiyu. Unwilling to damage her relations with Baochai and unable to compete with her for status within the family, Daiyu has resigned herself to the fact that she and Baoyu will never be together despite the fact the two managed to carry on a rather long affair in the novel even after he married Baochai. The two are not separated by a ploy plotted by Xifeng, but by Baochai, who leads Baoyu to believe that Daiyu had passed away. Like the original, Chen's novel ends with a sense of unrequited love, but Daiyu is not presented in the same tragic light she once was. Instead, she manages to find a different, more stable romantic relationship that eventually blossoms into another type of happiness. While her husband could not offer her the same passionate romantic love she had with Baoyu, he nonetheless was able to protect her and give her a home and family as well as nurse her back to health. In this way, Chen's novel is able not only to retell Cao's original novel, but also "correct" it as many sequels have attempted to do throughout the centuries.

The relationship between Grandmother Jia and Daiyu is not the only one to be greatly altered in the course of Chen's novel. Surprisingly, Daiyu and Xifeng, who essentially do not have a friendship in Cao's original novel, are close friends in *The Red Chamber*. Xifeng becomes Daiyu's main ally and uses her charms to help her stay on Grandmother Jia's good side.

Their friendship blossoms in much the same way her relationship with Baoyu did. Xifeng, with no heir and deteriorating health, finds that she has much in common with the newcomer Daiyu, whose position in the family is also rather precarious. In a way, Xifeng becomes Daiyu's guide through the complexities of the Jia family and the two bond over their shared unrequited loves. Ultimately, even though Xifeng is jealous of Daiyu's ability to escape the oppressive nature of the Jia family, she is also happy that her friend was able to discover a happiness that she herself would never be able to experience. Another point of contrast is that Daiyu and Baochai are painted to be in a slightly closer and friendlier relationship than before. Although they are in competition for Baoyu's affections, they also rely on each other for emotional support, as they share similar insecurities when it comes to love. Early in the novel the two develop a close friendship when Daiyu nurses Baochai back to health. Baochai, having to deal with her brother Xue Pan's illegal activities and care for her ailing mother, is under great pressure and finds that Daiyu is the only person she can talk openly with. This is because Daiyu lacks the coldness that is typical of the Jia family. Perhaps a better way to describe their friendship is one steeped in a reluctant rivalry. Distinct parallels between Daiyu and Baochai can be seen in Xifeng and Pinger, Xifeng's maid and romantic rival in Chen's novel. Although they both love the same man, both sets of women find it nearly impossible to sever their friendship in order to obtain his love. Even after she betrays Daiyu by revealing Daiyu's sexual relationship with Baoyu to Grandmother Jia, Baochai is plagued with a sense of never ending guilt that continues to the end of the novel. Chen suggests that the marriage between Baoyu and Baochai failed not only because of Baoyu's love for Daiyu, but also because of Baochai's love of Daiyu.

Despite the various changes Chen implements on Daiyu's character her overall narrative arc remains fairly similar to that in the original novel. As in the original, Daiyu is used as a prism

through which the reader sees and notes the excesses of the Jia family and gets a glimpse of their impending fall. She is unschooled in the elaborate customs of her richer relatives. She makes simple, but embarrassing, errors at formal family meals. She refuses to play political games in the household and fails to curry favor with the formidable Grandmother Jia, who makes many of the most important decisions. Such concerns pale in significance, however, as it becomes clear that the Jias' bloated wealth is founded on financial duress and a shaky political patronage which may soon be undone.

Lin Daiyu plays an integral role in the 1987 television series. Because it is only 36 episodes long, its narrative is rather selective in what it focuses on. The two most prominent story arcs are the collapse of the Jia family and Xifeng as the villainous catalyst to the family's downfall. As in Chen's novel, there is no mention of supernatural elements. Instead, attention is paid to the political backstory. Little change is made to Daiyu's story aside from the omitting of her past life as the Crimson Flower. This lack of change seems crucial as every other character outside the love story is in some way altered to fit into the central narrative. The most critical change we find with this character is the modification of the timing of her death. The director has her die before the wedding, so that her deathbed moment is significantly less dramatic. This change is mostly likely due to the overall dissatisfaction of many scholars with the last forty chapters. They argue that the coincidence of Baoyu's marriage and Daiyu's death makes the story less plausible and childish.³⁶ Instead, this series chose to highlight Daiyu's sentimentality and physical weakness and to mute her often petulant behavior. The most plausible reason for choosing to present her in such a light is to make her an overall more likeable and sympathetic character. These changes, however, often reduce Daiyu to nothing more than an overly sentimental girl who is unable to deal with her own mental instabilities. In her article "Stone on

³⁶ Zhong, 431

Television,” author Xueping Zhong argues that the over-simplification of Daiyu in terms of symbolic representation through bamboo and her blue attire makes her appear too sentimental without addressing the root cause for this sentimentality. Zhong also argues that Daiyu is only adequately conveyed when the series utilizes the lyrics and poems from the novel.³⁷ Ultimately, we as viewers are encouraged to side with Daiyu and hope that her love with Baoyu will come to fruition in the end, even when we well known our wishes cannot come true. In many ways, the director positions the viewer the same way Daiyu is positioned in the novel. We are constantly hoping for something that we know will never come, but we continue to desire it nonetheless. Although the 1987 version does not follow the Cheng-Gao ending, Daiyu’s fate and ultimate death do follow Cao’s original 80 chapters rather closely. This means that they accord with the poetic prophecy in chapter five very well. Furthermore, the casting process for Lin Daiyu proved to be an incredibly tedious and detailed process. The highly coveted role was eventually given to actress Chen Xiaoxu, who believes that it was her sensitive personality and physical likeness that gave her the greatest advantages during the audition process. Despite the director’s initial uncertainty, she firmly and boldly persuaded him, saying, “I am indeed Lin Daiyu. If I don’t play this character, the audience won’t like the series.” Following the completion of *Dream of the Red Chamber*, Chen, unable to change her type-casted image, gave up her acting career completely and disappeared from public view. She went into business and advertising for a short time before becoming a nun and joining a monastery after she discovered that she was suffering from breast carcinoma. Instead of seeking medical treatment she retreated into a spiritual world and slowly succumbed to her illness.

Considerable less focus is placed on Daiyu in the 2010 remake relative to the 1987 version as it attempts to closely follow what is written in the Cheng-Gao version of the novel.

³⁷ Zhong, 432

However, interestingly, it is the words of Daiyu's song in the Register that are modified to become one of the closing themes to the television series. The appearance of Daiyu is relatively different compared to that of the 1987 version, which many people found to be the ideal physical manifestation of Daiyu. While the 2010 Daiyu is still sickly and willowy, her figure is not as distinctively different from that of the other girls. In fact, it can be argued that that actress who plays Baochai actually has a smaller frame than the actress who plays Daiyu. Relatedly, the 2010 version places less emphasis on what would be normally considered Daiyu's iconic scenes (the burying of the flowers, the burning of her poems, etc.) and focuses more on the overall narrative of the story; while the love story between Baochai, Daiyu, and Baoyu is important, it is by no means the only focus. Perhaps because her character is so iconic, neither version wants to make any drastic changes to the way she is portrayed on screen. This consistency seems particularly important as a considerable amount of creative liberty is taken with some of the other beauties such as Shi Xiangyun, Miaoyu, and Jia Tanchun.

Unlike with some of the other characters, only one actress portrays Daiyu after she arrives at the Jia mansion. Two of the three springs and Baoyu are portrayed by two, one during their formative years and another as they reach adulthood. The choice to represent Daiyu with one actress throughout the entire series can potentially be explained by two possible reasons. The first is that by having Daiyu remain unchanged physically throughout the series, she is given a sense of ethereal unrealness that adds to her mysterious allure, an important aspect of her character. The second may be a way to show that while everyone else ages, Daiyu is unable to move past her supernatural and spiritual sufferings to reach adulthood like everyone else. While her cousins and the other women in the garden are evolving, maturing, and entering the real world, Daiyu is stuck in a constant state of adolescence.

Xue Baochai

Aside from Lin Daiyu, Xue Baochai is arguably one of the most important female characters in the novel as she plays a key role in the love triangle, which, in turn, plays a central role in the story's narrative. If Daiyu could be described as the embodiment of the individual pursuit of freedom, Baochai symbolizes conformity and social order. In his book *Reflections on Dream of the Red Chamber*, Liu Zaifu compares this dichotomy to the conflict between the need for individuality and the desire to move up in a social hierarchy, which leads into the argument that the juxtaposition of the two women becomes a representation of an inner dilemma Cao was grappling with while he was writing the novel.³⁸ Thus, Lin and Xue are not representations of good or bad, but a reflection of a type of social turmoil. Baochai is the only daughter of Aunt Xue, and her brother Xue Pan, is a dissolute, idle bully. However, unlike her brother, she represents the pinnacle of righteousness and piety and as a result, is well liked not only by the mistresses of the Jia family but also by the household servants. In this way she can be seen as a foil to Daiyu. This pairing of these two women as two thirds of a love triangle, which also includes the central male character, Baoyu, is interesting in that it highlights the two facets of the ceremony of marriage in Cao's time.³⁹ Ultimately, the love triangle is resolved through Baochai's marriage with Baoyu and the death of Daiyu. However, despite Baochai's apparent victory, her ending is also seen as a tragedy. This is because Baoyu is unable to truly forget Daiyu. As a result, Baochai is trapped in a loveless marriage and is in the end abandoned by her husband. She is left to raise a child alone, which she does as her filial duty. In this way there are distinct parallels between Baochai's and Li Wan's stories. Unlike Daiyu who has a spiritual tie to Baoyu, Baochai displays a constructed connection to him. As Baoyu has his jade necklace,

³⁸ Liu, 73

³⁹ Liu, 88

Baochai wears a necklace made of gold. This contributes to the interplay between the affinity of gold and jade.

Compared to Daiyu, Baochai can be described as a considerably more corporeal character.

‘Touché!’ thought Baoyu; but he hid his embarrassment in a stupid laugh.

‘No wonder they compare you to Yang Gui-fei, cousin. You are well-covered like her, and they always say that plump people fear the heat.’

The color flew into Bao-chai’s face. An angry retort was on her lips, but she could hardly make it in front of company. Yet reflection only made her angrier. Eventually, after a scornful sniff or two, she said: ‘I may be like Yang Gui-fei in some respects, but I don’t think there is much danger of my cousin becoming a Prime Minister. (SS 2.30.97-98)

While Daiyu actively attempts to distance herself from family affairs, Baochai is much more tuned into political matters. Rather than shirking from her responsibilities, Baochai actually makes herself available as a service to those around her. As demonstrated through her appointment as one of the deputies of the garden following Xifeng’s miscarriage, she possesses an agency that many other female characters in the novel do not have. Overall, she is treated as a sort of peacemaker and a woman of solid moral character. In addition to her role as de facto family manager, she is also called upon to manage her brother Xue Pan’s shrewish wife as well as help him sort through his various legal problems. She is obviously a huge help to her mother in both regards. In this way she is portrayed to be intelligent and capable, but more importantly, incredibly dutiful with an almost over exaggerated sense of righteousness. Painted as someone whose filial qualities and innate precocity seems to stem from responsibilities forced upon her during her youth, Baochai, in many ways, becomes a type of feminine ideal.⁴⁰ As a result she is able to gain the immediate approval and favor of the majority of the Jia family. Her practicality as well as her mild temperament makes her far less polarizing than Daiyu, however, that also

⁴⁰ Knoerle, 62

means that she is a much less vibrant character. This contrasts to the fact that in many cases, Baochai is characterized as much older than she actually is, particularly when her ability to mediate is juxtaposed with the petty squabbles and self-indulgences of the other inhabitants of the garden.

The introduction of Baochai in chapter four allows a shift in the narrative arc. With her presence the love triangle becomes a story of the transfer of an intangible, spiritual love into a corporeal one. While Daiyu represents the ethereal, Baochai is the physical. Even Baochai's bodily existence is much more in the physical realm than Daiyu's. Although it is known to readers that Daiyu and Baoyu share a celestial attachment to one another, this predestination is unknown to the characters in the novel. Thus, Daiyu and Baoyu's love is recognized only in an intangible sense. In contrast, Baochai wears a gold locket, the mate to Baoyu's jade, which implies a type of sentient destiny. In Chapter 8 this connection becomes apparent when Baochai asks to see Baoyu's jade and discovers the inscription that had previously been hinted at, which reveals that Baochai's golden locket was given to her by the same monk who had engraved Baoyu's jade. The matching couplets on both of their charms suggest that the two must be perfect matches. While Baochai is aware of the implications this connection holds, Baoyu seems to stubbornly brush it off as something rather insignificant.⁴¹

As she was speaking she undid the top buttons of her jacket and gown and extracted the necklace that she was wearing over the dark red shift beneath. Its pendant was a locket of shining solid gold, bordered with sparkling gems. There was a line of writing engraved on either side of it which together made up the words of a charm:

Ne'er leave me, ne'er abandon me"

And years of health shall be your fee.

He recited them a couple of times and then recited the words of his own inscription a couple of times.

"Why, yes!" he cried delightedly. "The two inscriptions are a perfect match!" (SS. 1.8.190)

⁴¹ The lines on Baochai's necklace are paired with Baoyu's two lines: Mislay me not, forget me not,/And hale old age shall be your lot

However, the existence of the union of gold and jade is actually an integral and imperative aspect of the narrative of the Stone and Crimson Pearl Flower. It is not beyond the realm of possibility that the concept of the gold/jade union was purposefully introduced in order to guarantee that the destiny of the flower and the stone will be fulfilled, but only in the celestial realm.⁴²

The Flower's brooding on the locket will help her pay her debt of tears. The Stone's disregard of the locket will help him realize the necessary disillusionment with emotional fulfillment, the perceived lack of which (in his shame and disappointment at being left over from Nu-wa's celestial repairs) started him longing for worldly experiences in the first place. (Levy, 41)

Thus, the "affinity of jade and gold" is a necessity in the present life while that of stone and flower becomes a prior attachment, and in many ways a superior one. In the end, the relationship between the two women is complicated by Baoyu's own actions. His unwitting provocations often invoke feelings of jealousy from Daiyu and they confuse his feelings for Baochai.⁴³

While it can be perceived that Baochai's role in Xifeng's fraud is a malicious act toward Daiyu, Anthony Yu contends that her reluctant consent was in actuality a decision "consistent with all that we have seen of her as a [generous] young woman" (Yu, 132).⁴⁴ She chooses to be Baoyu's bride not because of any selfish desire to be the sole proprietor of Baoyu's love or to actively compete with Daiyu in any way, but in the hopes that her marriage will stabilize and unite the family. As Baoyu's bride, she must struggle to bring about harmony to the family, even as she is up against the fact that she is not the one Baoyu wanted to marry. Dore Levy uses this logic to assert that while Baochai is not the ideal wife for Baoyu, she is the ideal wife for the Jia family. This conclusion is supported by the fact that while the saga of the Jia family ends happily

⁴² Yu, 176

⁴³ Li, Qiancheng. *Fictions of Enlightenment: Journey to the West, Tower of Myriad Mirrors, and Dream of the Red Chamber*. Honolulu: U of Hawai'i, 2004. Print. 140

⁴⁴ In the original novel, Xifeng, Lady Wang, and Grandmother Jia decide that Daiyu would not be an appropriate wife for Baoyu. They decide, instead, on Baochai. However, because Baoyu is in love with Baochai, Xifeng suggests that they disguise Baochai as Daiyu so Baoyu thinks he is marrying Daiyu. Xifeng takes advantage of Baoyu's derangement in order to have her plan come to fruition.

at the end of the novel, Baochai is forced to live a rather unfulfilled life after the disappearance of Baoyu.⁴⁵ If one were to attempt to tie this resolution back to the spiritual battle between the connection of jade and gold and that of jade and wood, it can be argued that it was not that the union of gold and jade triumphed, but that both in some way failed.⁴⁶

Like Daiyu, Baochai has also lost a family member close to her. But rather than allow herself to be consumed by grief, she challenges this loss and channels it into a type of productivity. Her father's passing inspires her take on the responsibilities in her household and this ability to maintain a rather stoic attitude allows her to display a sense of compassion and mental stability that is absent in her counterpart. However, in many ways, Baochai's need to adhere to Confucian values, as well as her desire to please others, stunts her emotional growth and acts ultimately as a restraint on her character, which in turn plays into her tragic ending. Her arguments as well as reasoning are based heavily on ethical logic and Confucian teachings and they contrast with Baoyu's way of thinking; he rejects the classics and relies on life experiences to support his arguments.⁴⁷ This struggle for proper communication between the two creates a chasm that allows Baoyu to appreciate Baochai for her beauty but means that he is unable to connect with her on a spiritual level the same way he can with Daiyu. Whereas he allows his entire being to be consumed by his desire for Daiyu, he vacillates between despair and resentment after he is married to Baochai, who manages to remain firm in her affections for him.⁴⁸

Interestingly, although she is Grandmother Jia's preferred match for the marriage with Baoyu, she is never shown the same degree of favoritism as Daiyu. On a fundamental level, this

⁴⁵ Levy, 99

⁴⁶ Levy, 141

⁴⁷ Liu, 74

⁴⁸ Knoerle, 51

dichotomy seems rather odd, however, it is also quite revealing in terms of illustrating the dynamics in the family as well as the degree of hypocrisy of the adults living outside of the garden. Although Grandmother Jia recognizes the intrinsic beauty and special qualities Daiyu possesses and rewards her for them, she does not perceive her to be an appropriate match given her background. Instead, she reverts to what is accepted or what is considered to be the norm. In this sense, she rejects what she initially felt was special and adheres to strict social restrictions. Her attitude demonstrates the polarizing nature the love triangle has not only with the adult figures in the novel but also the readers themselves.⁴⁹ It can be said that the two relationships exist at opposite extremes. At one extreme is the love between Baoyu and Daiyu, which fulfills the reader's expectations for a typical romance story, a vehicle through which the reader may live vicariously through a free of type of love. This is then compared to the marriage of Baoyu and Baochai which comes across as a physical manifestation of the favored social considerations of the time. Curiously, since the story came out, male critics have either aligned themselves with "team Daiyu" (*Yong Daiyu pai*) or with "team Baochai" (*Yong Baochai pai*); however, no such divide existed amongst women—they almost always side with the tragic heroine, Daiyu. The reason for this may lie in how these women feel about Daiyu's literary talents, which they associated with their own.⁵⁰

While the two women embody the conflict between the ideal and the actual. It is not necessarily that they represent the two competing sides. Rather, the pairing of the two and their coexistence in the story, particularly in relation to Baoyu, ensures that the conflict remains a prevailing theme throughout the entire novel.⁵¹ In this way they are integral in driving the plot forward. Ultimately, both women contribute to Baoyu's success. Perhaps it is more appropriate

⁴⁹ Knoerle, 31

⁵⁰ Yu, 207

⁵¹ Edwards, 161

to see their relationship as a type of “complementary opposition,” an idea that was first made popular by Yu Pingbo in his path-breaking study *Honglouloumeng Bian*. His theory is based on the notion that neither of the two women assumes a better or worse role. He likens their relationship to rivers flowing down the opposite sides of a mountain. This became known as the “Chai and Dai unification” or Chai-Dai *heyi*.⁵² If we apply Yu’s line of thinking then Daiyu can be looked at as a spiritual entity and Baochai as a corporeal one, nonetheless both exert a type of pull on Baoyu’s being. Thus, although there is a distinct separation between the two women, the ultimate split lies within Baoyu. He is pulled to Baochai as a physical entity, but mentally he feels irrevocably tied to Daiyu as a spiritual and mental ally. Thus, the two work together to construct the totality of Baoyu.⁵³

Although this view achieved a considerable amount of fame during the early half of the twentieth century, it becomes focus of attack from young Marxist scholars following the Communist Revolution. Theorists such as Lan Ling and Li Xifan argued that the two women were “diametrically opposed and represented progressive and regressive social forces” (Edwards, 46). They considered Daiyu to be an anti-feudal rebel while Baochai was looked at more as a “conservative upholder of feudalism” (Edwards, 47). Despite this negative appraisal, Baochai’s character underwent another revival in the late 1970s after she was reinvented as a victim of social pressures. Zhang Jinchi wrote that she was a “victim of feudal poisoning” (Edwards, 153) and she had actually been tricked by social morality. She makes specific reference to Baochai’s age and her youth, which meant that she “suffered oppression from a feudal ethics [after she was] unable to determine her own fate. She too was a victim” (Edwards, 150).

⁵² Yu Pingbo, *Honglouloumeng bian. Yu Pingbo lun Hongloulou Meng* (Yu Pingbo on *Honglouloumeng*) Shanghai guji chubanshe 1998. 186

⁵²For a more in depth analysis of *Chen-Dai Heyi* in English please refer to Louise Edwards’ *Men and Women in Qing China*

⁵³ Edwards, 45-47

Taking a step away from Baochai and Daiyu's competition for Baoyu's affections, the two have also jockeyed for first place in the poetry competition. Just as they represent two opposite but complementary types of women, their creative expression also mirrors their complementary relationship. Their respective ways of composing poetry reflect their nature and perception of the world around them. Baochai's poems about chrysanthemums are about "remembering" or "painting" them while Daiyu's poems personify the flowers as she ascribes them actions such as being "celebrated," "dreamt," and "questioned." Baochai favors physical appreciation of nature while Daiyu evokes an awareness of nature as something that coexists harmoniously with human beings.⁵⁴ Unlike Daiyu, who relies on poetry as her sole form of true self-expression, Baochai is aware of poetry in a more technical fashion. Furthermore, her attitude toward poetry is also steeped in a sense of conflict. She recognizes that she has a great talent for composition as well as an awareness of poetic theory; however, at the same time she recognizes that women outside of their small community within the garden do not practice poetry. Perhaps one of the clearest indications on Baochai's stance on poetry is her reaction to riddles written by her cousin Baoqin. She admonishes Baoqin for referencing fictional characters rather than historical ones and scoffs at Li Wan's explanation that their fame in literature makes it so they can be considered historical figures. In regards to this reaction Levy states the following:

It is not so much that she feels that poetry and plays undermine authority- she is well aware that the authority patterns in the household are already far from ideal. She understands, with regret, that the wish fulfillment so gratifying in literature is not to be found in everyday life, even in such a privileged household as this. Her critiques of poetry as an enterprise, therefore, are both ironic and self-ironizing. (Levy, 119)

Baochai's interactions with Caltrop compared to those of Daiyu further reveal her attitude toward women's role in poetry. Caltrop begs to be taught how to write poetry when Xue Pan is away on his mission. In response Baochai scoffs at her desire, but Daiyu readily agrees to teach

⁵⁴ Levy, 126-128

her. While Daiyu is much more optimistic about poetry and the role it plays in female education, Baochai looks at it with a type of self-doubting elitism. She takes the conservative Confucian path.

As mentioned earlier, Baochai and Daiyu are not given their own separate entries within the registry. Together with Daiyu, Baochai represents the first painting represented in the First Registrar and is talked about in the first song. We have seen that the first song can be interpreted as a combination of both women, while the second is about Daiyu alone. Thus, it is safe to assume that within the registrar, Daiyu is number one and Baochai is number two. In this way Baochai is never given an entry for herself, despite her high ranking. David Hawkes believes that this may be due to the fact that Daiyu and Baochai are unlike most of the book's other female characters in that they are not modeled on real people, but represent "two complementary aspects of a single ideal woman" (Hawkes, 529). Again, the two, arguably most important female characters in the book, are given only a single picture and a single set of verses between them.⁵⁵

As was the case with Daiyu, Pauline Chen takes great liberties with Baochai's character in *The Red Chamber*. The novel begins with Baoyu and Baochai already having been betrothed to be married. By introducing Baochai as an established member of the Jia household before Daiyu even arrives, Chen inadvertently elevates her position within the family. This move also inverts Daiyu and Baochai's positions in competing for Baoyu's affection. While in the original it was Daiyu who first enters the family and thus feels the need to fight off the newcomer, Baochai, Chen makes it so Daiyu is the newcomer of whom Baochai must be wary. Interestingly, even with this inherent advantage, Baochai is not only insecure about her looks, but also unsure about her position in the family because of the trouble caused by her brother Xue Pan. Readers are first introduced to Baochai when she is preparing in her chamber one early morning. Chen

⁵⁵ Hawkes, 529

emphasizes her preoccupation with how she appears physically and this introduction that seems to focus solely on her various insecurities acts to create a rather sympathetic portrait of her character.

Xue Baochai looks at her reflection in the West Ocean mirror, trying to hide her disappointment. Oriole had promised that doing Baochai's hair in the newest style would be far more becoming, but the two heavy buns on either side of her head make her face look broader and flatter than ever. Her small, single-lidded eyes, lacking in any expressivity, stare back at her in the mirror. She turns away from her reflection....She waits impatiently as Oriole re-dresses her hair. It is always the same each time she tries a new gown or hairstyle. The promised transformation never occurs, and she is forced yet again to confront the disappointment of her appearance: the plain uninflected expanse of her face, the solid, almost matronly figure, even though she is not yet nineteen. (Chen, 21)

Although her figure is contrasted to Daiyu's in Cao's original version, the connotation is completely different. He describes her as a woman of "flawless looks and great natural refinement" and goes on to highlight her many positive attributes following the death of her father.

A young lady, who, though very little older than Daiyu, possessed a grown-up beauty and aplomb in which all agreed Daiyu was her inferior. Moreover, in contrast to Daiyu with her air of lofty self-sufficiency and total obliviousness to all who did not move on the same exalted level as herself, Baochai had a generous, accommodating disposition which greatly endeared her to subordinates... Daiyu could not but feel somewhat put out by this-- a fact of which Baochai herself, however, was totally unaware. (SS 1.5.124)

Chen's reversal of hierarchy between the two women later becomes a way to justify Baochai's more sinister actions toward Daiyu and her other cousins.

Unlike Daiyu and the other girls, Baochai's figure is womanly, with full hips and breasts. Her honey-colored gown, though clearly costly, is drabber than the pinks and greens the other girls wear. Her complexion is beautiful: almost poreless, with the flush of a peach on her rounded cheeks. She gives the impression of distinction, but on closer scrutiny her face is not really pretty. Her mouth is rather tight and thin-lipped for her broad face, and her smallish, single-lidded eyes make her face look expressionless. (Chen, 28)

It almost seems as if she feels alienated from the rest of her family because she unable to achieve the same youthful appearance as the other women in the household, which in turn drives her to

do things that she would not normally do as a righteous and noble person.

The relationship between Baochai and Daiyu can be described as one of paired friendship and rivalry. Chen immediately establishes a close connection between the two women, a connection that was not quite as obviously present in the original novel and yet, at the same time the conflicts between them are more poignant perhaps as a result of how close their friendship was before they began competing over Baoyu's. Chen takes it upon herself to write Baochai as an incredibly jealous person, a trait that was originally ascribed to Daiyu. In this way, the roles between Daiyu and Baochai are once again switched. Daiyu, while attracted to Baoyu, is never jealous of his relationship with Baochai. Rather, she is just saddened by the fact that Baoyu must eventually marry Baochai. Baochai, on the other hand, has been attempting to attract Baoyu's affection from an early age and in turn feels the pressures of this newcomer into the family.

When Baochai was a baby, Mrs. Xue had joked with her sister, Baoyu's mother that they should make a match between Baochai and Baoyu, just six months younger. Whenever Baochai heard this story, she was secretly pleased, and hoped that it would come to pass. However, while she is aware that her birth and fortune make her an excellent match, she has never dared to hope that she could attract Baoyu's attention. (Chen, 23)

Chen's profound alteration of Baochai's character strips her of her nobleness. Her marriage to Baoyu is no longer an act of filial piety or an attempt to stabilize the Jia family. Instead, it is a selfish desire to come out on top. Because Baoyu is a significantly less indecisive character in Chen's retelling, there is absolutely no confusion in regards to how he feels about the two women. He does not tease Daiyu by flirting with Baochai and at no point does he even suggest that he has romantic feelings for her at all. There is no ambivalence about his marriage to Baochai. In fact, if one were to attempt to describe the relationship between Baoyu and Baochai, it would be one of unrequited love. While Baochai harbors a secret crush on Baoyu, he has no romantic feelings toward her. It can even be argued that Baoyu looks at her as a nuisance, especially after he began his relationship with Daiyu.

His first feeling is burning hatred for Baochai. He wants to strike her face, as cold and empty as a platter. He has always suspected that she tattled on Daiyu and made Lady Jia turn against her. Daiyu's death should be laid at her door. Only after a moment does it sink into his stricken brain that Baochai must have repented of what she had done. (Chen, 242)

While in the original, Baoyu often attempts to justify the marriage and question his own inabilities to live happily within it, the re-written Baoyu has clear intentions and makes his feelings toward his forced marriage known. His abandonment of Baochai and his family at the end of the novel are not only justified but are also vindicated given all of the wrong that was done to both him and Daiyu by Baochai.

In many ways, Baochai takes on the functional role of Daiyu in Chen's novel. She has a strained relationship with the women of the family, and while favored by Grandmother Jia, is unable to prove herself worthy in other aspects within the construct of family politics. Furthermore, she is the instigator of a great deal of family strife and in turn causes a great degree of the drama within the love triangle between Baoyu, Daiyu, and herself. Perhaps one of the greatest changes we see is her distrust and disdain for Xifeng. There exists a mutual sense of distrust as Baochai looks down upon Xifeng's method of handling the family as well as her relatively low rank in the family.

[Baochai] suspects Xifeng of some ulterior motive. Perhaps Xifeng wants to get rid of her because she knew of Xifeng's affair with Jia Yucun. Perhaps Xifeng does not want her as a rival for control over the household after she marries Baoyu. She glances at Xifeng, again trying to fathom her motives. (Chen, 235)

Although Chen describes her as filial, her more selfish actions as well as her overwhelming desire to marry Baoyu even after her mother attempts to sever the match after the Jia family falls into misfortune suggests that her obedience is more of a facade than an indication of her righteousness.

Ultimately, Chen constructs the character of Baochai in such a way that although she was

initially presented a sympathetic character, it becomes harder to find her relatable and as a result one likes her less as the story progresses. Even though she recognizes her faults and miscalculations at the end, her resolution does not come as a comfort to a reader nor does it redeem her character. Instead, her realization of wrongdoing justifies the reader's negative perception of her and exonerates our final judgment of her.

As for Baochai, does she really resemble Lady Jia? She had considered Daiyu her closest friend, but then, unlike Xifeng, she had betrayed her friendship in order to make sure her own marriage would prosper. She had married Baoyu knowing that he loved another woman. Perhaps Grannie is right. Perhaps she is Lady Jia's true heir after all. Her eyes fall on her belly, already growing round beneath the waist of her gown, and she thinks of Baoyu. Perhaps, she thinks bitterly, she is simply the victim of unrequited love, marrying Baoyu because she loved him even though he did not return her feelings. That makes her more foolish than either Daiyu or Xifeng. (Chen, 274)

Perhaps her most redeemable quality in this resurrection is her protectiveness of her brother Xue Pan. Even though he is her older brother, she resolves his problems not simply out of familial obligation, but also out of sisterly love. This type of affection is notably absent in Cao's original novel when Baochai's actions are presented in a significantly more dutiful fashion. In the end, although the significant changes made Baochai's character infinitely more complex, they do so by villainizing her in the story.

Because the 1987 television series attempts to understate the love triangle and instead focuses on Baoyu and Daiyu's love story, many of Baochai's key moments are missing. The first song is supposed to tell the tale of all three of them while the second song is about Daiyu and Baochai. The series omits the first song completely and in the second associates it with Daiyu alone. Furthermore, her marriage to Baoyu is understated by the fact that it occurred many weeks after the death of Daiyu, which makes this otherwise dramatic moment significantly less poignant. Perhaps one of the biggest changes to her ending is that in the 1987 version Baochai is never pregnant with Baoyu's child. Rather, the series is deliberate in emphasizing that Baoyu

abandons her when she is still a virgin. In many ways Baochai is relegated to a secondary character in this television adaptation. This simplification may be a result of the director's wish to make Daiyu more comprehensible. By making it so that Baochai is a nonthreatening figure in the story, Daiyu's character is subsequently reduced to nothing more than a sentimental young girl with mental problems, whose expressions of loneliness seem rather groundless. Ultimately, Baochai is depicted as someone who is colorless and lacks the same complexities as some of the more major characters such as Xifeng and Daiyu. In some ways this reduction of Baochai is problematic to the overall narrative structure of the story, however, because the producers choose to emphasize the wealth and lavishness of the Jia family while simultaneously hinting at its illusory nature the changes that are made in her character can be justified.

The overall tone for the 2010 version is completely different as far as Baochai is concerned. While the 1987 adaptation hoped to portray *Dream of the Red Chamber* as a tragedy, the 2010 one depicted it more like a drama that is resolved with a happy ending. This is rather reminiscent of the Cheng-Gao ending to the original ending. Although it would be difficult to describe the ending as "happy," scholars believe that it is nonetheless significantly more optimistic relative to Cao's original ideas. In contrast, this newer television series makes it so that Baochai becomes pregnant with Baoyu's child and in the end fulfills a Confucian duty to the Jia family. Thus, while the Baochai in the 1987 version is distraught at the absence of Baoyu, the Baochai of 2010 takes the news of Baoyu's departure rather calmly.

However, despite these changes to her character's overall narrative, the 1987 adheres much more closely to physical appearances than the 2010 version. The 1987 version seems to emphasize the physical differences between Daiyu and Baochai in order to bolster the effect of Daiyu's feebleness in both mind and body. Interestingly enough, the 2010 version actually

inverts the two characters in a physical sense. It is unknown whether the directors did this as consciously, but the actress who portrays Baochai is actually smaller in stature as well as younger in age than the one who portrays Daiyu. Because the 1897 version chooses to use the same actors throughout the course of the series, there are no (what some critics consider) awkward shifts between different actors. The 2010 version on the other hand, begins to switch actors following the death of Daiyu. One of the major complaints by film critics is the transition between the characters in their formative years to adulthood. They argue that the changes do not seem natural and detract from the overall story as they become a distraction to audiences. The switch from Li Qing to Bai Bing as the actress portraying Baochai was particularly criticized. Many believed that because the actress who played Daiyu remained the same, there was no need to change the one who portrayed Baochai. Although these small inconsistencies do not greatly affect the overall story, they do make the aesthetics of the narrative less believable. Consequently, while these alterations affect Baochai's overall characterization very little, but they do mute the effect the physical disparity has on Daiyu's perception of herself as well as its effects toward the end of the story.

Chapter 2: Mother and Daughter

Wang Xifeng

“It would be hard to find someone who is a helper, a sycophant, and an accomplice at the same time” (Liu, 247)

In his book *Reflections on Dream of the Red Chamber*, Liu Zaifu eloquently describes Wang Xifeng as “the woman of three talents.” By emphasizing her role as both a “helper” as well as an “accomplice,” Liu highlights the subtle differences between two seemingly similar words, thereby illuminating the many faces that Xifeng wears and her ability to change and adapt them at will. Furthermore, by pairing these two words with “sycophant,” Liu presents a character who appears to be simultaneously hardworking and talented as well as cruelly indifferent to the fates of her victims.⁵⁶ His adroit description emphasizes the fact that amidst a garden filled with delicate painters and poets, Wang Xifeng stands out for her unconventional yet equally exceptional abilities. By managing to be both seductive and deceptively cunning, she proves to be the most capable woman, if not character, in the entire novel. Ultimately, Wang Xifeng is considered by many to be the single most interesting and complex character of all. In his analysis of her, literary critic Cai Yijiang declares that Wang Xifeng provides the only trace of realness in a sea of fabricated, half-formed characters.⁵⁷ He asserts that she manages to do what the others do not--blur the line between fiction and reality. While they undoubtedly play large roles in the context of the story, it is Wang Xifeng who is able to consistently excite readers with her presence and make them long for her during her absence. Today, she remains so well known and highly referenced that she has managed to become a part of the common vocabulary. So much so that in Chinese popular culture, her name has become a shorthand for a cruel, conniving woman

⁵⁶ Liu, 245

⁵⁷ Cai, Yijiang. “*Wang Xifeng yu Qiaojie*.” *Hongloug Meng Zhong Ren*. Zhonghua Book Company. Beijing 2008

and mere mention of her character instantly invokes a clear image of what kind of person is being described.

Xifeng is the niece of Lady Wang and the wife of Jia Lan, Grandmother Jia's eldest grandchild. Thus she is related to Baoyu by blood and by marriage. She plays a rather significant role in running the Rongguo household financially. In this way, she can be described as the most powerful woman of the Jia clan after Grandmother Jia and Lady Wang. A great deal of her power comes from obsequious attitude to those in power, particularly Grandmother Jia. While she proves herself to be a competent taskmaster and keeps the household servants in line and somewhat honest, she lacks the necessary skills in money management and her refusal to make any long-term investments contributes to the Jia family's impending bankruptcy. However, despite her influence within the family, she is not treated kindly by Jia Lian who is often caught womanizing outside. The animosity that exists between the two may be a result of their fight over power as both of them are in charge of most decisions about hiring and monetary allocation. Furthermore, there is something almost Machiavellian about the way she handles the family affairs. This is perhaps best seen in her treatment of characters such as Jia Rui and You Sanjie.

Wang Xifeng, like the Grand View Garden, proves to be an integral aspect of the novel's narrative structure. Her rise to prominence and ultimate downfall as the household manager makes her the focus in tracing the decay of the rich and powerful family. Thus, her eventual death becomes a direct index of the Jia's decline. As the grandniece of the family matriarch Grandmother Jia, she is able to subversively exploit the authority bestowed upon her in order to augment her own wealth and status. Her carefully calculated and controlled actions as well as her social skill can be seen as her active attempt to maintain an illusion of power. It is overwhelmingly obvious that Xifeng is acutely aware of her precarious position within the Jia

family and thus, her choices and actions can be seen as wholly motivated by personal advantage and self-interest. In this way, her eventual failure and the exposure of her corruption, which subsequently brings disgrace to the family and reduces them to bankruptcy, occurs as no surprise to the reader. Rather, it seems to reflect a trope associated with female power. It acts to underscore the illegitimacy of the concept of a powerful woman and undermines her attempt to rise above a society constrained by patriarchal world order. Throughout the novel she is portrayed as someone in a position of power yet her vulnerability remains abundantly clear. This contradiction signifies familial instability as well as draws out the complexity of Xifeng's problematic image as a powerful woman.⁵⁸

This problematic image is magnified by the fact that Cao actively sets Xifeng apart from the rest of her female counterparts. She is not blessed with artistic grace or literary prowess. Rather, she is signaled out for her wit and self-assurance. Her fiery entrance in the third chapter highlights her dynamic presence as her loud laughter and frank comments disrupt the staid atmosphere. From the beginning she is presented as an unusual woman and in a novel where the author highlights the beauty of femininity, Xifeng, oddly, is highly masculinized. In fact, the constant reminders of her inability to read and write draw her closer to the stupidity of many of the Jia men and further distinguish her from the rest of the females in the story.⁵⁹ In an analysis in his Redology anthology, Yu Pingbo notes the repeated comparisons between her and the novel's men. He asserts that these references in conjunction with Baoyu's femininity act to undermine the rigid gender conformity of society during that time. He argues that her education contrasts with that of the boys of the family in the sense that while it is provided, it is not taken seriously. Furthermore, she is described as oftentimes challenging the males in the story in

⁵⁸ Edwards, 83

⁵⁹ Edwards, 94

typically male activities such as drinking, smoking, boating, and setting off firecrackers.⁶⁰ This motif of masculinity is continued throughout the entire novel. Feng, the second character in Xifeng's name, is the Chinese word for a male phoenix and in chapter 54 a blind ballad singer mentions a story with a male Wang Xifeng as the hero.

This story took place in the time of the Five Dynasties after the decline of the Tang,' said the woman. 'There was in those days a certain gentleman called Wang Zhong who, after having served as Chief Minister under two successive reigns, had retired because of old age to live on his estate in the country. Now this Wang Zhong had an only son whose name was Wang Xi-feng-'

This set everyone laughing. "Feng's double, evidently," said Grandmother Jia.
(SS.3.54.41)

Moreover, Xifeng as a name is considered to be a male's name. This is noted during Daiyu and Xifeng's first meeting when Daiyu notes that this cousin had the "somewhat boyish-sounding name of Wang Xifeng" (SS.1.3.91). Ultimately, even Xifeng herself acknowledges the desire to become male when she hopes that by being a good girl she "might be reborn as a man" (SS.2.46.407). In this way, she acts as a contrast to Baoyu, a male striving to be female. Ann Waltner addresses this gender bending as an active attempt to link gender norms to social stability. She notes that the gender confusion invokes a distinct sense of disorder and "[blurs] the distinction that make order possible" (Waltner, 65) However, even with this high degree of masculinity, Xifeng is compared favorably to the degenerate men around her. By doing so, she is given an almost androgynous air.⁶¹

Unlike most characters in the novel, Xifeng is not only multifaceted but she is also able to change and adapt at will. While she manages to remain attentive and loving with Grandmother Jia, she is often cautious and suspicious around her husband Jia Lian and although she manages to remain personable and pleasant at all times, she is also always in command, particularly

⁶⁰ Edwards, 85

⁶¹ Waltner, Ann "On Not Becoming a Heroine: Lin Daiyu and Cui Ying-Ying" *Signs* Vol 15, No 1. 1989. 66

around the household servants and maids. It seems as though Cao actively attempts to pair her humor and charm with her cruelty and murderous jealousy. Both sides of her personality, however, are linked to her desire to portray an air of power and superiority. Take, for example, her interactions with Grannie Liu, a distant relative living in the country who comes to ask for money in order to revitalize her poverty-stricken family. Although Xifeng's moments with Grannie Liu seemingly highlight her ability to show kindness, they are in no way a testament of her selflessness. Rather, it becomes obvious that she is using Grannie Liu as a vehicle to establish her position in the household in Grannie Liu's eyes. By providing her with twenty ounces of silver, Xifeng makes a grand gesture and demonstrates her capability within the household. This moment of generosity can be contrasted with her episode involving an abbess who asks Xifeng to intercede on the part of a friend involved with a lawsuit. When Xifeng at first refuses, the abbess preys on Xifeng's insecurities by suggesting that her inaction was a product of her status, or lack thereof. This suggestion inspires Xifeng's action and becomes a prime example of the great leaps Xifeng will go through to preserve the image of her status within the household. Examples of this type of manipulation from other characters in the book serve as constant reminder to the reader of the precarious nature of Xifeng's position in the family. In turn, it becomes clear that most, if not all, of her actions can be explained by her insecurities and her tireless attempts at self-preservation. In this way, even her moments of ruthless cruelty can be interpreted with sympathy for her helpless position.⁶² Furthermore, it can also be argued that Xifeng's relationship with Grannie Liu comes from a place of true concern and camaraderie.

A cursory examination on the preexisting criticism and research done on Wang Xifeng reveals that her character has been thought of as a "problematic female character." Beginning as early as the 1800s, critics have actively compared her with figures who have been typically

⁶² Knoerle, 59

regarded as villains and anti-heros in the popular imagination.⁶³ Placed in the same category as Ci Xi, Wu Zetian, and Empress Lu, who were looked upon as women who seized power through special relationships in order to satisfy a lust of power and money, Xifeng's position of power becomes a point of criticism. This negative image associated with female power can be summarized by an argument made by novelist and literary critic Lin Yutang in his article "Feminist Thought in Ancient China." Lin explain that historically women who have held positions of power are seen as nymphomaniacs or megalomaniacs. Women become the scapegoat that is used to justify the downfall of social order.⁶⁴ One example of this can be seen in the case of Xi Shi. She is blamed by historians for the downfall of the State of Wu despite the fact that the corruption of the overall Kingdom had been long established. This longstanding tradition of placing responsibility for dynastic failure on misplaced feminine power highlights the incompatibility between beautiful women and perceived success. In her article "Representations of Women and Social Power in Eighteenth Century China: The Case of Wang Xifeng" Louise Edwards argues that because of this inability to reconcile femininity and power Xifeng's greatest strengths become examples of her most debilitating weaknesses.⁶⁵

The multiformity of her character evolves from the contradiction between her relatively weak objective status as daughter-in-law and her undeniable power over the Jia's domestic affairs. Her skillful management is thereby an object of both praise and suspicion, just as her confident hold on power elicits respect and disdain. (Edwards, 68)

Interestingly, this type of criticism as applied to Wang Xifeng has not changed much despite social changes and the emergence of the image of the strong and independent woman in Chinese society.

⁶³ Edwards, 42

⁶⁴ Lin, Yutang. "Feminist Thought in Ancient China." *T'ien Hsia Monthly*, 1 No. 2 (September, 1935), 127-50

⁶⁵ Edwards, Louise "Representations of Women and Social Power in Eighteenth Century China: The Case of Wang Xifeng." *Late Imperial China*, Volume 14, Number 1, June 1993, pp. 34-59

Although some modern critics regard Xifeng as the novel's most feminist character, a close reading shows that despite her progressive qualities, ultimately she cannot be read as a true portrayal of feminism. This is because of two incidents in the novel. The first is the comic-tragedy of Jia Rui. When he makes an advance on Xifeng, she lures him to his death. This narrative plays out rather lightly, however, it reveals an underlying concern. Xifeng decides to teach Jia Rui a lesson by humiliating him. She does so by arranging a series of false rendezvous with him. Eventually, he finds himself locked outside in an alley, doused with manure, and kept out in the freezing night. Later, he falls ill and is once again taunted by a mirror that bears an image of Xifeng on the back, which subsequently drives him back into his crazed lust for her after repeated fantasies of their sexual encounters.

Rushing into his room he stripped off his clothes and washed, his mind running all the time on how Xifeng had tricked him. The thought of her trickery provoked a surge of hatred in his soul; yet even as he hated her, he longed to clasp her to his breast... From that time on... he longed for Xifeng with unabated passion. (SS 1.12.250)

It can be argued that Xifeng is not directly responsible for his death, but her flirtation and scheming contributed greatly to his mental instability. The severity of Xifeng's treatment of Jia Rui demonstrates her ruthlessness and the ease with which she exercises her control over other people, especially those below her in status or rank. Interestingly, the interaction between Xifeng and Jia Rui becomes a reversal of gender roles, a phenomenon that is rather prevalent with Xifeng's character.⁶⁶

Furthermore, a closer look at Xifeng's relationship with You Erjie and her Machiavellian scheming against her subsequently takes away from any possibility of a feminist reading of Xifeng's character. Xifeng is a jealous woman by nature, especially when it comes to affairs with her marriage to Jia Lian. Jealousy manifests itself in her constant suspicions which provoke

⁶⁶ Levy, 55

frequent scenes between them. Through her maid Patience, whom she forces to spy on her husband, Xifeng learns of his secret marriage to You Erjie. Although she was considered to be a loose woman before her marriage to Jia Lian, You Erjie later became a doting and faithful wife. Xifeng's fraudulently sweet tongue and her high-sounding phrases convince the naive Erjie to move into the newly decorated rooms of the family mansion during Jia Lian's absence. Following a series of schemes, Xifeng makes it so that You Erjie is constantly emotionally manipulated by the members of the family. Before long, Erjie falls ill and miscarries a son because of all of the maltreatment she has suffered. Finally, she is so distraught and unhappy that she commits suicide by swallowing a piece of gold. Her tragic ending is narrated in a sympathetic tone, revealing the author's indictment of the cruel treatment that she endured under Xifeng.

Despite her prominent role in the novel, Xifeng is listed ninth out of Twelve Beauties of Jingling. A close examination of Chinese numerology shows that traditionally the number nine has been considered as an auspicious number in Chinese history because the word for nine, *jiu*, is a homophone for "long-lasting." For this reason there are 9,999 rooms within the Forbidden City. The number nine carries a sense of directionality and suggests a certain type of cosmic power as it has long been associated with the emperor. Before the imperial examinations, officials were organized in a nine-rank system and the Emperor gave rewards and punishments based on the nine bestowments system and nine familial exterminations, respectively. Furthermore, the Emperor's robes had nine dragons, a parallel to the image in Chinese mythology of the nine children of the dragon. Eventually, the number nine also took on the meanings of peace and harmony. Because nine is the highest single digit number, it is also

considered to be the “ultimate masculine.”⁶⁷ These images of masculinity and power, or someone who sits in a position to give rewards and punishments, seems to tie in directly with Xifeng’s character. The harsh, yet meticulous way she runs the household in the beginning of the novel is indicative of her position as a leader in the family. Although it would be too much to make a direct comparison between Xifeng and an emperor-like figure, there are undeniable parallels between the two.

An alternative explanation that explains this considerably low ranking among the “beauties” can be attributed to a combination of her literacy, social decorum, and position in the family. It makes sense that Xifeng would rank lower than Lin Daiyu and Xue Baochai, the two main female protagonists. However it seems odd that she would be ranked below characters such as Miaoyu and Shi Xiangyun considering her important role in the novel. Yet, a close inspection of the other beauties who rank above her, the four springs, Yuanchun, Tanchun, Yingchun, and Xichun, as well as Miaoyu and Shi Xiangyun, shows that Xifeng is at a disadvantage in terms of direct ties to the Jia family. The others are all tied directly to the Jia family by blood, while Xifeng was married into the family. Furthermore, Xifeng is considerably less well-educated and relatively less proper. She is unable to write the same elegant poetry the other women are capable of and participates very little in the Prospect Garden poetry competitions. This second explanation is supported by the fact that Baoyu comes across multiple registers of beauties that are separated by social and class rank during his descent into the Land of Illusion. Stratification within each register by rank is thus not unlikely. A consideration of the three who come after Xifeng also acts to support this hypothesis. Logically, it does not make sense for Qiaojie to rank

⁶⁷ Werner, E. T. C. *Myths & Legends of China*. London: George G. Harrap, 1922. Print 224

higher than her mother, but her status as a daughter-in-law in the family justifies her position on the list before Li Wan and Qi Keqing who were both also married into the family.

Xifeng is a primary feature of Pauline Chen's *The Red Chamber*. Her story is greatly altered from her original portrayal. While she is still an indispensable power in the Jia household who is universally feared as well as respected, Chen focuses much more closely on errors Xifeng makes as a result of a "lonely heart." Critics and book reviewers refer to Xifeng as Chen's "most tragic character" and despite her intelligence, Xifeng is ultimately considered to be a failure because of her inability to bear a child. She is described as not only beautiful, capable, and strong-willed but she is also the only member in the family who realizes how much financial trouble the family is in while the men continue to fritter away money on extravagances. This awareness is one of the first of many divergent points from the original novel. Cao's Xifeng is either not aware or does not care about the family's decline. In fact, her underhanded actions in the end contribute to their economic deterioration. Cao utilizes Xifeng as one of the novel's primary antagonists as the novel comes to an end. While he does indeed create sympathy by providing insight into her "evil" motives with her unstable position in the family, ultimately, we as readers are unable to empathize with her fully because we are not told why she desires power as she does when the rest of the females live contently without it. By contrast, Chen attempts to paint her as the victim of the story by providing the backstory that explains this desire for power, which Chen links to Xifeng's inability to produce an heir. To further highlight this point, Chen takes away her daughter Qiaojie. Rather, Qiaojie is Jia Lian's daughter with his concubine, who also happens to be her principal maid. Jia Lian grows increasingly cold towards her and continuously relegates her to a corner of the household.

"No, listen." He grips her shoulders so she is forced to look him in the face. "You always act like it's an attack against you, for me to get another wife, but it's not. If she

has a child, it will still be considered our child, yours and mine. You'll still be called 'Mother' and—"

She wrenches herself away, shaking her head. Having grown up in the Wang mansion, she knows what happens when a principal wife cannot bear children. The husband marries again, and favors the concubines who bear him sons. The sons grow older, and make every effort to promote their birth mothers, while resenting the principal wife, whom they are forced to call "Mother." Meanwhile, everyone sneers at her barrenness behind her back. The fact that she retains the trappings and title of motherhood only makes things worse.

She clings to Lian's arm. "Please, give me just a little longer. Two years—"

He pulls his arm away. "Then what? I promised you one year already, and now you're begging for another. It is not as if you won't be able to have a child even if I marry again—" (Chen, 45)

Without her shrewd, cold, and calculating behavior, Xifeng would have no way to defend her position in the family, since she is unable to produce beautiful poems and her nature is oftentimes abrasive. Thus, Chen's Xifeng is the picture of a woman who falls to a dismissive husband, a husband who becomes addicted to gambling and susceptible to prostitutes, all the while treating her with scorn. In addition, she is in charge of family ledgers and sees that the fortunes are declining. With no way to alleviate the situation, she is ultimately caught in an unhappy life with no way out. In the end Xifeng is just a woman trapped in a world where her only solace and source of humanity are pockets of tenderness from people who basically want to see her fail. Xifeng's life thus becomes quite poignant. She is ever ready to resolve family problems, yet is thrown aside by those she serves so diligently.

Just as Cao plays on the relationship between Xifeng and her maid Ping'er, Chen makes this dichotomy between mistress and servant one of the central themes running through her story. In *Dream of the Red Chamber* Ping'er is Xifeng's chief maid, personal assistant, and chief confidant. She is known for her grace and impartiality and in turn is deeply respected by most of the other servants in the household. Furthermore, because of her proximity to Xifeng, she wields considerable power in the Jia household. Although she is technically Jia Lian's unofficial concubine as a result of being part a dowry from the Wang family, there is no animosity between

Xifeng and herself despite the fact that she is the cause of many fights between her master and mistress. In the end the novel portrays Ping'er as pretty and sweet natured, and, like Xifeng, intelligent and cunning enough to navigate the tortuous politics of the Jia family. Her loyalty to her mistress is unyielding as she is the one who arranges the plan for Grannie Liu to hide Qiaojie in her village after Xifeng's death leaves her motherless and alone.

Chen, in order to illustrate Xifeng's loneliness, severs the tie between Xifeng and Ping'er. After only a few years of marriage, Xifeng's husband, Jia Lian, decides to remarry. Knowing that she will lose both his affections and her position in the family if his next wife were to produce an heir, Xifeng pleads for him to reconsider. Her resistance causes Jia Lian to solidify his decision to remarry, even worse, he also ultimately chooses Xifeng's maid Ping'er. Chen paints this as a double betrayal as Ping'er accepts enthusiastically and basks in the opportunity to overtake her mistress in rank. Xifeng is left without her maid who had previously acted as her closest friend and confidant. On their wedding night, Xifeng sits in the chamber next door listening to her husband and her maid through the thin walls in what can only be described as a form of perverse self-punishment. In a fit of frustration and anger she begins to weave on her loom, hoping the sound of her work will remind the newlywed couple that she is "still there, still alive, still awake." This stressful circumstance is used to explain Xifeng's transformation into a cold-hearted mistress. After Ping'er and Jia Lian's daughter is born, Xifeng battles internally with the decision of taking the baby away from Ping'er and giving it to the wet nurse so she can raise Qiaojie herself.

If Xifeng hands her [the wet nurse] the baby, she can give back every ounce of humiliation and pain that Lian and Ping'er have inflicted on her. Instead she turns and thrusts the baby back in Ping'er's arms. Ping'er bursts into tears, but Xifeng turns away dry-eyed. How will she survive in this world if she can't harden her heart? (Chen, 165)

Following this moment, Xifeng comes to the realization that only by being selfish can she survive in a world in which she has been neglected. As a way to retaliate against the universe conspiring against her, Xifeng takes on a passionate affair with another man. This move ultimately sets off a chain of events that prove devastating and indirectly lead to her demise.

Interestingly enough, Xifeng becomes the voice of the other two women in the story, by expressing their internal thoughts and hidden secrets. At one point in the novel, she bleakly summarizes the desolation of the position of women, or at least Chen's interpretation of it.

“Just what I said,” Xifeng answers. “Do you think her fate is any worse than most women's?” The wine or the shock of Silver's death seems to have loosened Xifeng's tongue. Her gay smile is gone. Without it, there are hard lines at the corners of her mouth. “A woman doesn't have any choices in life. Even from a good family like ours, she has to marry whomever her parents choose for her. If, by a stroke of luck, he is a decent fellow, then she might be fortunate. But if he is a bad man, as is far more likely, she will suffer.” Xifeng tosses off another cupful of wine. “How much more so in a poor family like Silver's, where girls are usually sold off as maids and concubines to the highest bidders?” (Chen, 159)

Later during a picnic in the garden, the concubines are discussing the suicide of Golden, a maid who was forced to return to her family by Lady Jia for allegedly flirting with Baoyu. Xifeng applauds this decision and in some way expresses envy, saying the servant saved herself from a “worse fate.” Xifeng asserts that a girl has no choice over anything in life except for the decision to die. Chen creates a Xifeng who is not only understanding but is also arguably one of the most forgiving characters in the story. Even after her lover betrays her at the end, she feels no hatred for him but rather is filled with pity for both her fate as well as his situation. Her only reaction is to passively accept the situation as a result of the society they live in. She concludes that not even men are free from the strict constraints of the Jia household. They too are also “bound by duty and tradition.” Thus, however selfish Chen's men may be, their actions are also forgivable and the women of *The Red Chamber* never suffer so much as at the hands of other women.

Xifeng muses ruefully over the unfortunate lot of her sex, citing the Chinese proverb “A virtuous woman is an uneducated woman” (Chen, 159).

At the crux of the story are two pairings: the rivalry and friendship between Daiyu and Baochai as well as that between Ping'er and Xifeng. With Baochai's marriage to Baoyu and Ping'er's eventual death it seems as though Xifeng and Baochai win out in the Jia family. However, it is painfully obvious that this victory did not come without great cost. Chen suggests that both Ping'er and Daiyu are better off for having “lost” this victory and finding “freedom” instead.

Xifeng also plays an integral role in the two television adaptations. While there was some controversy and significant criticism of Chen Xiaoxu's portrayal of Lin Daiyu in the 1987 series, many critics considered Wang Xifeng to be the most successfully portrayed character. However, this success seems based less on the development of the character herself, and more on the depiction of her evilness and deception. Xifeng's most memorable moments on screen revolve around her acts of terror. Take for instance an iconic moment depicted in episode six in which Xifeng organizes an elaborate funeral for her close friend and sister-in-law Qin Keqing. In the novel this moment subtly reveals Xifeng's creativity and power within the family as the planning of funeral ceremonies were positions of great responsibility and rarely given to someone of Xifeng's age and status. Previously a dynamic scene in the novel, it was transformed by the television series in order to focus on her severe and harsh treatments of the servants. This follows her first major appearance in episode five where she schemes and punishes Jia Rui because he attempted to seduce her. The combination of Xifeng's constant look of contempt in conjunction with Jia Rui's earnest innocence further acted to emphasize her ruthless nature. The dissonant sounds of the sharp notes of various string instruments acts to emphasize her nefarious nature.

The series notes the perverse sense of enjoyment Xifeng gets from her success in driving Jia Rui to his eventual death. While Cao makes an attempt to portray her as a somewhat sympathetic character in the beginning in the novel, the television series makes no such effort. One cannot help but wonder if this treatment is intentional in order to portray her as nothing but a hateful, conniving shrew.

Out of the 36 episodes, there are six episodes named after Xifeng: “Xifeng Sets a Vicious Trap for a Lover,” “Xifeng Helps to Manage Affairs at the Ning Mansion,” “Xifeng Taken by Surprise Gives Ways to Jealousy,” “Xifeng in Jealousy Makes a Scene in the Ning Mansion,” “Lady Hsing Feels Wronged and Puts Xifeng in Wrong,” and “Forced Xifeng Resigned Herself to a Fate Spread East of Bed-Curtain.” It is important to note that five out of the six episodes focus on her villainous qualities and later foreshadow her unfortunate demise. In this way Xifeng’s feature moments are those based on her oppression of other women. Although Cao points to this relationship between women as a result of an oppressive patriarchal society, the television series seems to overplay this explanation to the point that Xifeng becomes the story’s ultimate antagonist. The emphasis on the deplorable actions of the series’ females is further explored when an entire episode is devoted to Xue Pan’s spoiled wife Xia Jingui. Originally a minor character who plays little, if any, role in the narrative structure, she is given nearly thirty minutes of the already abridged series to simply mistreat servants and show contempt for familial hierarchy. At the end of her episode, Jingui kills Caltrop, a deviation from the novel in which Caltrop dies as a result of Xuepan’s mistreatment. Viewers can’t help but be critical of this misplaced attention to such a minor character. In her article “The Story of the Stone on

Television” scholar Xueping Zhong asks whether the series unconsciously relishes in blaming women for their downfall and overdramatizes their negative qualities.⁶⁸

Perhaps this question can be best answered with a close inspection of Xifeng’s on screen ending. In the novel, Xifeng eventually dies of illness after the house of Jia falls apart and she is held accountable for her past acts. On her deathbed, Xifeng humbly begs Grannie Liu to protect Qiaojie and assigns her daughter to the old matron’s guidance. This moment stands out in stark contrast to her earlier arrogance and conceit directed at Grannie Liu, her changed mood being a result of the Jia family’s loss of power and prestige and Xifeng’s acceptance of her impending death. Cao allows Xifeng to die as a sympathetic character. In the end, she is a just a crestfallen mother seeking penitence for evil deeds by ensuring the safety of her daughter. In contrast, at the end of the series, the producers changed Xifeng’s death so that she dies in jail. Her final scene is a long shot of her body, wrapped in straw mats, being dragged through the snow. This image of her lifeless body, stripped of all its previous glamour, is juxtaposed with a montage of her most iconic moments. Predictably, the scenes that compose this montage consist primarily of Xifeng’s mistreatment of others. This pairing establishes that Xifeng dies a villain and in a way justifies her gruesome and pitiful death in prison. It is unclear why the producers decided to use Xifeng’s body gliding through the snow as her final image. One possible explanation for this choice can be attributed to one of the earlier versions of the novel which alludes the cause of her death as the result of her falling ill after sweeping the snow.⁶⁹ Interestingly, Pauline Chen includes this moment in her novel.

Xifeng uses the twig broom to sweep the deep snow covering the stoop. The snow is nearly a foot deep, and it is an effort to drag the heavy broom through it. She has no gloves, and the roughness of the broom’s handle chafes against her bare skin. She pulls the cuffs of her sleeves past her wrists, and uses the material to pad her cold palms

⁶⁸ Zhong, 435

⁶⁹ Zhong, 436-437

against the wooden handle. Again and again, until her arms are aching, she draws the broom back and pushes the growing pile of snow, until she has cleared a narrow band before the apartment. She turns back and begins to clear a second strip. Now, despite the coldness of the day, she is beginning to grow heated beneath her bulky clothes. Her panting breath forms a plume of frost in the air. (Chen, 258)

Ultimately, this drama reduces Xifeng to an evil woman. Furthermore, the complex “Nine Song: Caught by Her Own Cunning” is reduced to the first six lines:

Too shrewd by half, with such finesse you wrought
That your own life in your own toils was caught;
But long before you died your heart was slain
And when you died your spirit walked in vain.
Fall’n the great house once to secure in wealth,
Each scattered member shifting for himself (SS 1.5.143)

The omission of the last six lines suggests that Cao is placing all of the blame on Xifeng.⁷⁰ However, the complete song acts to justify her actions by placing her in the larger context of the male driven society in which Xifeng was simply fighting to survive. In this way, the 1987 version attempts to rid the story of any potential sympathy for Xifeng as a character.

Deng Jie, the actress to played the role, received many accolades for her ability to both please and destroy whomever she wants. Deng later became a successful, albeit, type-cast actress who often took on roles of women in precarious positions of power or women who must manipulate the men around them in order to maintain power. Shortly after *Dream of the Red Chamber* she embarked on the production of a four season series in which she played the calculating Yifei, one of Emperor Kangxi’s concubines who traveled with him during his incognito surveys of the countryside. Although the series was meant to be a comedic, it is obvious that Yifei was used less as the story’s love interest, and more as an antagonist who often attempted to sabotage the emperor’s plans because she was constantly afraid of losing his interest. Following the end of that project, Deng Jie began to take on roles of high-powered

⁷⁰ Zhong, 437

businesswomen and jealous wives. Through her subsequent roles, Deng Jie inadvertently perpetuated the image of an “evil” Xifeng and solidified her image as a “problematic female.”

The 2010 television series adaptation was not without its own share of criticisms. The rearrangement that garnered the most debate from viewers was when actress Yao Di was switched from Lin Daiyu and given the role of Xifeng. Interestingly enough, compared to Deng Jie, Yao Di looks physically more like Xifeng based on the description in the book. Deng Jie, who stood at less than five feet, could not emulate Xifeng’s physical form the same way Yao Di was able to. However, a close examination and a comparison between parallel scenes reveals a different representation of Xifeng in the modern remake.

As mentioned earlier, Xifeng’s entrance is arguably one of her most important scenes in both series. Not only does it set her apart from the other characters but it also provides invaluable insight into her ability to control and manipulate situations as we see in an analysis of Xifeng’s first lines. Upon meeting Daiyu she immediately compliments her on her beauty and her decorum. When Deng Jie delivers her line, she sits next to Grandmother Jia and subsequently delivers it to her. She also makes sure to throw occasional glances around the room. By doing so, she is able to establish her preoccupation with influencing and pleasing. Her over the top efforts and obsequious tone give viewers a first taste of Xifeng’s insincerity. Compare this to Yao Di’s delivery of the same line, which is directed on to Daiyu and her gaze remains unchanged through the entire exchange. While the cunning of her line is apparent, the underlying disingenuousness is not as apparent. This approach inevitably paints Xifeng in a different light and sets a different precedent for her character through the rest of the series. Another major difference can be seen in a deconstruction of the scene in which Xifeng finds out that Jia Lian has taken You Erjie as his concubine. While Deng Jie portrays her as someone who is violent and irrational Yao Di is much

more subdued. Her version provides a Xifeng who is simultaneously angry as well as heartbroken and confused. This difference seems less a testament to the skills of these two actresses, and more a result of differences in the intentions of the director. Ultimately, the 2010 version illustrates a Xifeng that is much more multifaceted as well as sympathetic.

Jia Qiaojie

Jia Qiaojie is the only child of Jia Lian and Wang Xifeng and is portrayed as small child through the majority of the novel, making her the youngest out of the Twelve Beauties. Moreover, she is the last of the Beauties to be introduced in the novel, not making an appearance until well into the second volume. Because her birthday falls on the seventh day of the seventh lunar month, her name shares a character with the Qiqiao Festival, the Chinese equivalent of Valentine's Day, which celebrates the annual meeting of the Weaver Girl and Cowheard, two romantic lovers in Chinese mythology.⁷¹ This name ultimately connects her to the Weaver Girl with whom she shares a similar fate. Just as the Weaver Girl married a farmer's son, Qiqiao is saved and marries Ban'er. If she had not been rescued by a trip to the countryside, her uncles would have sold her into concubinage to repay her mother's debts. Grannie Liu gives her name in chapter 40, hoping that it will bring her luck and that good fortune will arise out of a seemingly bad situation.⁷² This act of naming solidifies the triangular relationship between Grannie Liu, Qiaojie, and Xifeng that plays an integral role in Qiaojie's narrative. Unfortunately, due to her young age, Qiaojie remains a fairly nebulous character in terms of personality throughout the

⁷¹ The general story of the Weaver Girl and the Cowheard is the love story between Zhinu (the weaver girl) and Niulang (the cowheard). Their love is not allowed so they are banished to opposite sides of the Silver River (the Milky Way). Once a year on the 7th day of the 7th lunar month, a bridge is formed and they are reunited for one day.

⁷² Grannie Liu is asked to name Qiaojie because Xifeng felt that if she was named by an old, poor person it would ensure long-life and good luck. As she is naming her, Grannie Liu states the following: "I prophesy for this child that when she's a big girl and the others are all going off to get married, she may for a time find that things are not going her way; but thanks to this name, all her misfortunes will turn into blessings, and what at first looked like bad luck will turn out to be good luck in the end."

majority of the book. It isn't until the last forty chapters when her mother's death becomes imminent that we as readers begin to see remnants of her character shine through the text. She is illustrated almost as a foil to her mother. Like the other girls in the Grand View Garden, she begins to read the main books and follows a filial and Confucian way of life. However, because most of these events occur in the last forty chapters, Qiaojie's story is one that is more or less completely written by Gao E and is seen by many critics as the "most incomplete" of the Twelve Beauties. There is one scene in particular that Cao writes which may foreshadow Qiaojie's fate. During Grannie Liu's second visit to the Grand View Garden, Ban'er and Qiaojie, at this point not named Qiaojie, meet for the first time.

Just then the nurse appeared carrying Xi-feng's little girl, who at once became the main focus of their attention. She was clutching a large grapefruit, but as soon as she caught sight of the Buddha's hand that Ban-er was holding, she decided that she wanted that, and let up a wail when the maids who were attempting to coax it from Ban-er could not procure it for her quickly enough. A resourceful cousin saved the situation by hurriedly taking the grapefruit and inducing Ban-er to make an exchange. Ban-er had by this time been playing with the Buddha's hand for quite a long while and had more or less exhausted its possibilities; moreover at the moment he had his hands full of fried pastry-shapes; and the grapefruit not only smelled good but, being round, made an excellent football. For these three reasons he concluded that it was an altogether more satisfactory fruit than the Buddha's hand and abandoned all interest in the latter. (SS. 2.41.318)

During this meeting the two exchange fruits with Qiaojie giving Ban'er a grapefruit in return for a bergamot. If read in Chinese this exchange can be interpreted as an exchanging of fate as the name for the two fruits together become the homophone for the word fate.

Interestingly, the Gao E ending does not incorporate Cao's initial suggestion that Qiaojie and Ban'er may make a potential match. Instead, after she is rescued from the Jias, Qiaojie becomes the toast of her new village and Grannie Liu proposes a match between her and the son of the richest local family. She then sends Ban'er back to the Rongguo mansion, and he returns with news of the family's rehabilitation and a letter from Jia Lian inviting Qiaojie home.

There were a few quite well-off families in the village, who when they heard that there was a Miss Jia staying at Grannie Liu's insisted on coming to have a look for themselves. They all waxed eloquent on the subject of her fairylike appearance and sent presents of fruit, fresh produce and game. In fact, Qiao-jie's presence caused a considerable stir. The richest family was the Zhous, whose wealth was composed partly of money and partly of extensive holdings of land. They had one son in the family, a cultivated, fine-looking lad of fourteen, who had studied with a family tutor and had recently passed the preliminary Licentiate exam. When his mother set eyes on Qiao-jie she was lost in admiration.

'What a pity!' she thought to herself, with a deep inner sigh of regret. 'A boy from a country family like ours would never be thought fit for such a well-bred young lady.' She stood there for some time deep in thought, and Grannie Liu soon guessed what was on her mind. (SS 5.119.352)

The history of debate surrounding Qiaojie's fate is rather lengthy. In the Gao E ending, Qiaojie is rescued by Grannie Liu to prevent her from being sold into prostitution by her family members following the near bankruptcy of the Jia family. Yu Pingbo, however, believes that Cao actually intended to write that she was first sold to a brothel and then rescued by Grannie Liu. Cai Yuanpei agrees with Yu's assessment and proposes that Gao deviated from the "real ending" as his resolution was "insufficiently tragic for a woman in feudal China" (Edwards, 154). Finally, many critics believe that Qiaojie's ending is one of the most glaring errors in Gao's rewriting, citing that Cao's attention to realism would never create an artificial happy ending simply to satisfy readers.⁷³ Furthermore, it is believed that Qiaojie is supposed to be taken back to the village where she marries Ban'er, the impoverished farmer and then must learn to live as a self-sufficient worker.⁷⁴

Due to her age and lack of agency in the plot, many readers cannot help but wonder what prompted Qiaojie's inclusion in prestigious list of Twelve Beauties. Amongst the twelve, she ranks tenth, one below her mother. Her ranking within the list is not unreasonable. It would not

⁷³ Yu, 173

⁷⁴ Cai himself addresses the problem with what he believes to be the correct ending. He questions if Grannie Liu would be willing to marry Qiaojie to her grandson if she had already be sexually compromised in the brothel, but later concludes that peasants were not as concerned with these formalities as the feudal elites.

make sense for her to rank above her mother, but because she is directly related to the Jia family, her rank is rightfully higher than both Li Wan's and Qin Keqing's, who are both outsiders married into the family. Qiaojie's addition into the Twelve Beauties reveals much about the author's intent in creating this list in the first place. It seems as though Cao's Twelve Beauties is not a list of the twelve most important female characters. Rather, it is an attempt to provide a comprehensive picture of the Jia family through its women. Each beauty represents a different facet of the large family. The inclusion of Qiaojie is Cao's attempt to represent a new generation of women, one younger than everyone else. Qiaojie is an example of a beauty who was born into the Jia family, but in the end was raised in a completely different environment. By providing insight into a character who is in some way detached from the Jia family, Cao is able to create a more three-dimensional description of the family itself.

Even in the original novel Qiaojie acts as a literary device of sorts. She solidifies Xifeng and Grannie Liu's relationship and her fate is the physical manifestation of Xifeng's good deed early in chapter six. Grannie Liu's interactions with Qiaojie can also be seen as marking the evolution of the relationship between Xifeng and herself. When Grannie Liu names Qiaojie in chapter 40, it becomes obvious that she will be the savior that was hinted at in Qiaojie's poem in chapter five. However we are not surprised that Qiaojie's presence in later works and adaptations is minimal at best.

In Pauline Chen's *The Red Chamber*, I would argue, Qiaojie is given a more important role. In Chen's novel Qiaojie is not Xifeng's daughter. Instead, she is the daughter of Ping'er and Jia Lian. This distinction is important because it reminds readers that in the original novel Qiaojie provided security for Xifeng as she was proof that Xifeng had the ability to produce an heir. In *The Red Chamber* Xifeng is stripped of her motherhood, which further complicates her

status in the family. Interestingly, all of the moments with Grannie Liu, which are an integral aspect of Qiaojie's development in the original novel, are omitted from *The Red Chamber*. In this sense Qiaojie is reduced to a character with almost no agency of her own. In fact, she dies before her first birthday. Thus, while her actual character alters the novel very little, her symbolic existence is integral to the complicated relationship between Xifeng, Ping'er, and Jia Lian. Ultimately, Qiaojie exists as a type of benchmark. Her death becomes a marker of the family's financial decline as well as the breaking point for the fragile friendship between Xifeng and Ping'er.

In the 1987 television series her role is minimal. She is mentioned briefly by name and has few non-speaking appearances throughout the story. The only moment her character is heavily featured is when Xifeng humbles herself in front of Grannie Liu and begs her to take Qiaojie after her death. There is, however, a major difference in Qiaojie's story between the two adaptations. In fact, how Qiaojie's story is resolved becomes a crucial distinction between the messages the two directors hope to send. As the 1987 version ends as a tragedy, Qiaojie also meets a similar fate. During the final episode, Grannie Liu takes a teenaged Ban'er on a trip to Beijing to search for Qiaojie. Ultimately, they hear news of her at a local brothel. When they meet up with her it is revealed that she had been sent there by her father and uncle when she was a toddler. This contrasts greatly with Qiaojie's relatively happy ending in the 2010 version, which follows the Cheng-Gao version exactly. She is rescued by Grannie Liu and together with Ban'er the three go to the country and seek refuge together. Whether she ultimately marries Ban'er once she arrives in the country remains unknown.

Chapter 3: The Four Springs

Jia Yuanchun

Jia Yuanchun is older than her brother Baoyu by over a decade, which makes her the oldest of the Four Springs. In this way, the way she was named with the second character *chun* sets the pattern for the naming of the other three Springs.⁷⁵ Like her brother Baoyu, Yuanchun also had a rather remarkable birth, thus setting off a pattern of omens. These omens are then taken as predictions of good fortune but ultimately end up being hidden foreboding images.⁷⁶ Born on the supposedly lucky first day of spring, from which she gets her name Yuanchun which means “cardinal spring,” she is separated from her family at a young age and is unable to return after her promotion to the rank of imperial concubine. Despite her prestigious position, Yuanchun feels imprisoned within the four walls of the imperial palace. Ultimately, she dies early after a lonely and empty life there. Another example of such a seemingly good omen that turns bad is the blooming of the crabapple trees during an inauspicious autumn. Grandmother Jia takes this to be a positive sign, one that points to the marriage of Baoyu and Baochai. Instead, however this moment seems to predict both the death of the Imperial Concubine and the loss of Baoyu’s jade. While the mansion has always been impressive, prior to the building of the Prospect Garden the family has no defining feature.⁷⁷ The garden is built to welcome Yingchun home. Thus, it can be said that Yuanchun’s return to the Jia family compound provides the house with a type of unique identity in the form of the garden. Her illustrious position as a favorite of the Emperor marks the height of the Jia family’s powers. Consequently, Yuanchun’s sudden death becomes one of the first signs of the fall of the Jia family, with many critics believing that

⁷⁵ *Chun* refers to the character, which means spring.

⁷⁶ Levy, 109

⁷⁷ The garden becomes a rather polarizing aspect of the story’s central narrative. Although it invites this sense of art that makes it so essential to the pleasure of its beauty, different generations have different ideas of what should be celebrated. Thus, the construction of the garden becomes a conflict between the older and younger generations.

her death was caused by political intrigue, the result of political forces moving against the Jia family.⁷⁸

The Jia family receives an extraordinary honor when Yuanchun is selected as an imperial concubine and the garden paradise that is constructed to welcome her in elegant and opulent style is the result. During her visit she is not allowed to see any of the Jia males and must receive her father through a curtain, yet because the family still regards Baoyu as a child despite that fact that he is already fully adolescent, Yuanchun is able to admit him into her presence. On the basis of her position and status in the palace, Yuanchun decrees that all of her unmarried cousins and sisters be allowed to live in the garden after her departure. As an addendum to her decree she insists that Baoyu should be allowed to stay in the garden even though all of the garden's residents have reached the age of sexual maturity, a time where gender segregation is supposed to begin. Mary Scott comments that, “[this is] scarcely a proper arrangement by mid-Qing standards” (Scott, 92).

Yuanchun's position allows her to override her father's authority in household decisions, and Baoyu is able to reside within the confines of the mystical space created by the Prospect Garden. In this moment, the very intimate relationship between Yuanchun and Baoyu is revealed.

Before Yuanchun entered the Palace, she had been brought up mainly by Grandmother Jia; and when Baoyu appeared on the scene (at a time when his mother was already middle-aged and unlikely to have any more children) she had lavished all her affection on this little brother who spent all his time with her at their grandmother's... Although they were brother and sister, their relationship was more like mother and her son; and even after she entered the Palace, she was always writing letters to her father and her male cousins in which she expressed concern for the little boy who was so constantly in her thoughts. (SS 1.18.358)

Both points show Yuanchun's key role, even though she does not appear often. In the garden

⁷⁸ David Hawkes speaks about this in more detail in the introduction to his translation in the first volume. Hawkes looks closely at authorial legitimacy and subsequently performs a rather detailed historical analysis on the context of the novel. The autobiographical backdrop behind the creation of Yuanchun's character is also explored as he attempts to find a historical link to her death.

Baoyu is completely removed from male oversight, which includes any type of supervision from his father. Baoyu's uninhibited presence becomes one of the driving forces for the majority of the emotional and romantic dynamics of the novel. Dore Levy argues that the fact that this subversion of ideal and accepted sexual segregation comes from Yuanchun, a character whose authority comes from her status as an emperor's concubine which can be interpreted as a representation of a social constraint, is not only ironic but also casts a shadow of doubt on her choice.⁷⁹

The name "Prospect Garden" is given by Yuanchun herself in a commemorative verse that attempts to honor both her family as well as the garden's designer. Andrew Plaks notes that the phrase *daguan* literally means "grand view" and aside from the literal meaning also refers to the Buddhist metaphor for spiritual insight, which in spiritual terms suggests a type of profound insight or understanding of the natural universe.⁸⁰ This begs the question of whether Yuanchun's aptly chosen name is meant only to honor the newly erected fixture within the Jia mansion or does it also hint at the importance of its role in Baoyu's spiritual development? Although her distance from the garden as an Imperial Concubine may also distant her from the other Beauties, Levy argues that like the other Twelve Beauties, there are visual motifs closely entwined with Yuanchun's character. During the Lantern Festival, just as Tanchun's kite imagery begins to foreshadow her melancholy departure, Yuanchun's fireworks become the physical manifestation of her flashy rise, but rapid extinction as a mere "object of amusement."⁸¹

It is perhaps Yuanchun's poetic prophecy in chapter five that comes with the most uncertainties.

⁷⁹ Levy, 137

⁸⁰ Plaks, Andrew H. *Archetype and Allegory in the Dream of the Red Chamber*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1976. Print. 21

⁸¹ Levy, 125

In the full flower of her prosperity
Once more came mortal mutability
Bidding her, with both eyes wide,
All early things to cast aside,
And her sweet soul upon the airs to glide.
So far the road back home did seem
That to her parents in a dream
Thus she her final duty paid:
“I that now am but a shade,
Parents dear,
For your happiness I fear:
“Do not tempt the hand of fate!
Draw back, draw back, before it is too late! (SS 1.5.140)

It is unclear why Cao uses the line “so far the road back home did seem” as Yuanchun is physically rather close to the Jia mansions in the Imperial Palace in Peking. There seem to be three possible interpretations of this “distance.” The first is a metaphorical one. Because she has become an Imperial Concubine she is no longer allowed to return home regularly and it is as if she has married somewhere far away. The distance can also refer to the distance between the living world and spiritual one after her death. David Hawkes argues that the misuse of the word distance is actually a consequence of the fact that the fifth chapter was written when Cao had planned to place Baoyu’s family in Jinling (Nanjing). He believes that Yuanchun is actually modeled on the daughter of Cao Yin who married the Manchu prince Nersu, in which case the great distance refers to the distance between Nanjing and Beijing.⁸² Another interesting aspect of her prophecy is the end of the poem. It suggests that she comes back as a ghost and warns the family in a dream of their impending doom. While Xifeng receives a warning from Keqing shortly after her death, Yuanchun never appears in the Cheng-Gao version at the time of her death in a warning dream. Gao E may have inadvertently left out this detail as he was writing his continuation. An alternative explanation to this could be that Cao transferred this passage to be rewritten for Keqing, however, Hawkes believes that there is something “rather unconvincing

⁸² Hawkes, 530

about the apparition that Xifeng sees in chapter 13 because it from the mouth of a person like [Keqing].”

Appropriately, Yuanchun ranks third amongst the Twelve Beauties, behind only Daiyu and Baochai. Her age, position in the Jia family, relation to Baoyu, and overall social status as an Imperial Concubine convincingly explains her high ranking in the Registrar. Although Yuanchun makes only a small, short appearance during the first quarter of the novel, she plays a rather interesting role in the overall narrative structure of the novel. She becomes the character that directly brings about the construction of the garden as well as Baoyu’s presence in the garden in addition to being an empirical measure of sorts of the Jia family’s decline.

As mentioned above, there is an odd distance between Yuanchun and the rest of the Springs. Her age as well as the fact that she does not live in the garden contributes greatly to this distance, and yet it is important to note that despite her physical detachment for the garden, her presence continuously looms over its residents. This sentiment is echoed in Pauline Chen’s *The Red Chamber*. Although Yuanchun is not referred to as one of the “Two Springs,” she plays a pivotal role in the novel.

The older girl, who closely resembles the boy in the “peacock gold” cape, smiles at Daiyu. “I’m Tanchun, ‘Exploring Spring.’ ” She points at the other girl. “She’s Xichun, ‘Cherishing Spring.’ ” “They were named for our great-aunt Her Highness the Imperial Concubine,” Baochai explains. “Her name was Yuanchun, because she was born on the first day of spring.” (Chen, 42)

Like in the original novel, the naming of the Springs was inspired by Yuanchun’s success, however in Chen’s novel Yuanchun is not a cousin or sister to the Springs, but rather a great aunt whose legacy has been famous in the Jia family for many generations. Essentially, by doing so, Chen is able to move her story two generations away from where Cao had set his. In this way, the rise and fall and rebirth of the Jia clan has already occurred. This allows her to focus only on her three central characters (Baochai, Daiyu, and Xifeng) without having to take into

consideration the external social problems.

The moment Yuanchun's return to the Jia family mark prominent scenes in both television series. Because the 1987 version focuses very little on the supernatural aspects, choosing to frame the narrative with a distinct sense of realism, the central piece of the narrative is the garden itself. Thus, Yuanchun's entrance frames the subsequent progression of the story. Much of episodes 10 and 11 are devoted to this homecoming. Although she is only present for two episodes, her legacy lives on through the garden and we as viewers are constantly reminded of her presence through references to her by the rest of the Jia family as well as by the inner workings of the poetry club. As with most other characters, Yuanchun's ending is altered in the 1987 version. Interestingly, producers do not alter her story to fit Cao's prophetic poem in chapter five. Rather, they choose to ignore her altogether. By the end of the series, we, as viewers, actually have no idea what has become of Yuanchun. Her entrance and subsequent role in the 2010 version is more important, but ultimately serves a different function. Prior to the construction of the Prospect Garden the overall mood of the series is fairly light. Even the death of Jia Rui as a result of Xifeng's cunning was presented in an almost cartoonishly humorous way. Yuanchun's opulent and lush entrance completely changed the tone of the narrative and the childish sound effects are almost completely done away with from this moment on. It is almost as if the creation of the garden following Yuanchun's return home changes the familial dynamics. While her visit is meant to coincide with and reinforce the Jia's apex, the atmosphere of foreboding that follows her departure begins to foreshadow the family's decline.

Jia Tanchun

Jia Tanchun is the younger half-sister of Jia Baoyu and the second youngest of the Four Springs. The daughter of Jia Zheng and his concubine, Concubine Zhao, Tanchun ranks lower

than her other cousins in the family despite the fact that she is portrayed to be a very clever and capable person. Even Xifeng remarks that Tanchun's prospects are tempered because of her status within the family. She explains the following to her maid Patience:

I know being a wife's or a concubine's child isn't *supposed* to make any difference, and in a boy's case perhaps it doesn't; but I'm afraid with girls, when the time comes to start finding husbands from them, it often does. Nowadays you get a very shallow class of person who will ask about that before anything else and often, if they hear that that the girl is a concubine's child will have nothing further to do with her. (SS 3.55.62)

Her position as a concubine's daughter brings her so much burden that she often claims Lady Wang, Baoyu's mother, as her own. Although she is beautiful, she is described as having an extremely "prickly" personality, and is thus given the nickname of "Rose" by her cousins and aunts in the garden. In many ways she can be seen as a junior version of Xifeng, however without Xifeng's corruption and venom. As someone who is forthright and outspoken by nature as well as poetically talented, Tanchun becomes a foil character for her quiet, feeble, and comparatively less talented cousin Yingchun as well as her less active cousin Xichun. For this reason Tanchun often has to come to the aid of Yingchun during times of turmoil within the family. The founder of the White Crabapple Poetry Garden, the private poetry club for the residents of the Prospect Garden, Tanchun shows a talent for management and leadership. This translates into her temporary management of all household and economical affairs of the Rongguo Mansion when Xifeng is disabled by a miscarriage. She is one among the three deputies appointed to manage the affairs of the garden, the others being Li Wan and Baochai. Although they are all able young women, many argue that none of them is as ideally suited for management as Xifeng, Tanchun is included with this judgment because she is the unmarried daughter of a concubine and thus is often disqualified from overseeing matters having to do with

married members of the family or staff.⁸³ Moreover, her youth and innocence further diminishes her sense of authority.

Tanchun's assumption of power becomes a good illustration of the idea that inversion of the proper power structures leads to a sense of chaos, in so far as no authority follows the ideal patterns to which the family aspires. Dore Levy argues that this loss of control is a result of the fact that the elders of the household assume that, since the children are sequestered in both the garden and the walls of the family cluster they are somehow preserved in a state of childhood innocence. However, it becomes clear that the children themselves are more aware than any of their elders that their childhoods are coming to an end.⁸⁴ Interestingly, the adults are quite oblivious to the inner workings of the garden, but the young people see all too clearly what is going on in the adult world from which they are supposedly sheltered. Many members of the older generation seem to manage by avoiding responsibilities. This can be seen in Li Wan who often turns a blind eye and minds her own affairs. In contrast, Tanchun is fully aware of the family's vulnerability, but is in a position that renders her powerless to preserve the family's reputation.

It may be significant that Tanchun is the first character to bring news of the debacle of the Zhens, the mirror family to the Jia's. This happens close to the time that the illicit gambling ring is discovered Tanchun is aware that before the Zhens faced imperial confiscation, their servants carried out similar activities. During Xifeng and Lady Wang's inquisitions, Tanchun comments on the implications of their choices.

“I must say, I cannot understand the eagerness to meet trouble half-way. The searching will begin soon enough in this household when the day of the confiscation arrives. Didn't you hear the news this morning about the Zhens? They tempted fate, just as we are now doing, by carrying out a quite unnecessary search of their own servants, and now there is

⁸³ Levy, 115

⁸⁴ Levy, 117

a confiscation order against them and they are being searched themselves. No doubt our time too is coming, slowly but surely. A great household like ours is not destroyed in a day. 'The beast with a thousand legs is a long time dying.' In order for the destruction to be complete, it has to begin from within." (SS 3.74.471)

In his book *Reflections on Dream of the Red Chamber*, author Liu Zaifu argues that Tanchun's character is actually an embodiment of the concept of Legalism in the same way that Daiyu reflects Taoist and Zen cultures and Baochai Confucian culture. Tanchun is eager to make reforms to enhance what is beneficial and abolish what is harmful once she takes charge. Liu concludes that her slap on the face of Wang Shanbao's wife is a typical Legalist gesture. Ultimately, it is Tanchun's lowly position in the family that impedes her ability to reform.⁸⁵

Throughout the novel, the image of kites is often associated with Tanchun's character. In the Register of Twelve Beauties, the picture with Tanchun shows two people flying a kite with a young girl sobbing on a boat floating down a large expanse of water. Accompanying this scene is the following verse:

Blessed with a shrewd mind and a noble heart
Yet born in time of twilight and decay,
In spring through tears at river's bank you gaze,
Borne by the wind a thousand miles away (SS 1.5.142)

This same visual motif follows through the fourth poem in the Registrars, which tells the story of Tanchun's future marriage. The kite imagery continues as the novel progresses. During the Spring Festival, kites are flown and it is custom to cut the strings and let the kites drift away. The kites return during the Lantern Festival when Tanchun constructs a melancholy poem meant to be a riddle for the group. In the end Jia Zheng guesses the correct answer, but is so upset by the tone and general foreboding that he is forced to leave the party. Perhaps one of the most poignant kite scenes is in chapter 70 when Tanchun's kite, shaped like a phoenix, gets tangled with another kite the same shape. Although no one knows the owner of the other kite, the two tangled

⁸⁵ Liu, 64

kites become caught in a third kite with the symbol for marriage. The culmination of all these images together foretells Tanchun's marriage to a far away place. In the Cheng-Gao version, she eventually marries the son of a frontier official and lives her married life in a distant province far away from her family in Beijing. Unlike Yingchun, her husband's family treats her kindly, but her grief in having to leave behind those she loves in Beijing makes her a tragic figure. Although no one can say for sure whether this story fits in completely with Cao's original intentions, most scholars agree that originally her marriage was to take her to a place far away and lead her to sever all ties with the Jia Clan. Furthermore, Cao's kite symbolism and poetic prophecy seem to support this notion. However, she does come home to visit in the Cheng-Gao ending.

Tanchun is ranked second of the Four Springs at number four, behind only Daiyu, Baochai, and her older sister Yuanchun. Her immediate relation to Baoyu as well as her role in the garden as a natural leader and creator of the poetry club naturally puts her rank above that of her cousins. However, her age and her status as a concubine's daughter place her below Yuanchun, who is also the Imperial Concubine. In some ways, Tanchun's narrative presents what can be considered as a best case scenario in terms of marriage despite the fact that she is to be looked at as a tragic character. As the family declines and the women of the garden are married off, Tanchun's happy marriage is arguably one of the more favorable outcomes, especially when compared to Baochai's failed marriage to Baoyu and Yingchun's death at the hands of her abusive husband. However, the novel seems to imply that even though Tanchun is in a loving relationship with her husband and is treated nicely by her new family, her departure from the garden is nonetheless tragic. The idea is that the marrying away of the girls signifies that even Prospect Garden cannot resist the forces of social convention. Andrew Plaks argues that "the accelerating departure of its inhabitants" becomes the motif of "egress from the self-

contained world of the garden,” which includes both the idea of official service (*chu sheng*) and marriage (*chu jia*).⁸⁶

In Pauline Chen’s novel, Tanchun becomes one of the Two Springs. Chen chooses to focus on only Xichun and Tanchun, rather than including all four. Tanchun remains Baoyu’s half-sister by a concubine in this adaption and increased focus is placed on her lower status. We are introduced to her through the maid Snowgoose who emphasizes the fact that she was “born in the wrong bed.” Similar symbols and motifs associated with Tanchun follow her in *The Red Chamber*, including her love of kites. The Tanchun in this novel is described as having a very close relationship with Baochai. However, it seems as though she no longer has her assertive personality, and as a result she never takes on the roll as a family manager. Perhaps one of the biggest changes in Tanchun’s story is that although she does marry a nice man in an honorable family, she is allowed to stay close to home. In fact, she often brings her daughter and visits as well as comforts Baochai following her failed marriage with Baoyu.

Baochai has always been grateful for the fact that Tanchun lives close enough to visit frequently. When the time had come for Uncle Zheng to make a match for Tanchun, he had refused an advantageous offer from a Chang’an official in favor of a more modest proposal from a Capital family. Grannie Jia had resisted strenuously, but Baochai had supposed that he did not wish to be parted from his only daughter. (Chen, 359)

This change goes completely against what was in the original novel, where Tanchun was married to a far off land in the hopes of reviving the Jia Clan. Furthermore, the relationship between Jia Zheng and his daughter is markedly different. He only has the two daughters, Tanchun and Yuanchun, with Yuanchun being the more favored of the two. Interestingly, Chen also chooses to emphasize the brother/sister relationship between Jia Huan and Tanchun. While in Cao’s version Jia Huan is reviled by the family and carries himself poorly, he is a much more sympathetic character in Chen’s adaption. Rather than being a vile and jealous stepbrother to

⁸⁶ Plaks, 114

Baoyu, Jia Huan is looked to be less favored and thus he is described as working hard in an attempt to win his father's approval. Because they share the same mother, Tanchun feels a tie to Jia Huan and as a result is supportive and encouraging in his endeavors. She realizes the prejudices that accompany being a concubine's child and rather than shunning him and their mother, she embraces them. Another change is that Chen seems to present a much younger and naive Tanchun. She is considerably less knowledgeable of the family's decline and has lost many of her reformist qualities. One possible explanation for these changes is that Chen had hoped to highlight the stories of Daiyu, Baochai, and Xifeng over those of the other women. Moreover, by showing that there is no one to take Xifeng's place even during a time of great physical and mental stress, the novel highlights the duress and pressure Xifeng must face as a daughter-in-law.

Tanchun is significantly more prominent in the two television adaptations than either Xichun or Yingchun. In the 1987 version she is portrayed as a "voice of reason" who attempts to temper Xifeng's sometimes erratic and irrational decisions. Here her reformist attitude is magnified, in order to highlight Xifeng's role in accelerating the family's decline. Her two most iconic scenes, the one in which her kite becomes entangled with another identical one and her departure from the house after her marriage, have been prominent images in the *Dream of the Red Chamber* canon. Her final scene is a grand spectacle that culminates to her tearful departure away from the Jia family. All of the members are there to see her off and in many ways it mirrors Yuanchun's extravagant homecoming. Although not an incredibly poignant scene in the novel, Tanchun's departure from the Jia household is one of the most opulent scenes in the 1987 television series. This, however, can be explained by the fact that the 1987 version makes the romances of the women of the garden as well as Xifeng's schemes the central narratives of the story.

Oddly enough, Tanchun's story is almost identical to the one presented in the Cheng-Gao version. Among the Twelve Beauties, her story is the only one to remain completely unaltered by series producers. Considering that goal of the 1987 series was to preserve and present Cao's original story, it is interesting that they choose to emphasize Tanchun's Cheng-Gao ending in such an obvious manner. In addition, in the 1987 television series, Tanchun's supposed "prickly" personality is considerably muted, perhaps done, once again, to further highlight Xifeng's domineering way of running the household.

Tanchun is featured relatively less in the 2010 version than she is in the 1987. Comparatively less focus is given on her marriage, which is quickly glossed over by a narrative voice over. There is no display of her melancholy departure; rather her final scene is her packing her belongings with her maids while others arrange her trousseau. In this sense, the majority of Tanchun's story revolves around her role as the *de facto* household manager during Xifeng's miscarriage. Unlike the original novel, Li Wan and Baochai's roles are diminished slightly and more focus is given to Tanchun and to how her success is hindered by her social status. Ultimately, the 2010 version tells a considerably less emotionally charged and sentimental version of Tanchun's story, choosing to make her seem more like a junior Xifeng and emphasizing her clever abilities and leadership skills and highlighting her weak social position.

In terms of age, Tanchun is presented as younger in the 1987 version than in the 2010 remake. Among the Twelve Beauties, this reversal of age is only applicable to Tanchun is appropriate, as a younger, more naive Tanchun fits easier with the narrative of her tragic marriage that forces her to move far away, while an older Tanchun can more believably be the garden's manager during Xifeng's absence. That being said, her character is also more sexualized in the 2010 remake, a point that seems to be consistent for all the female characters.

Jia Xichun

The youngest of the three springs and second youngest of the Twelve Beauties, Xichun, which translates to “cherished spring,” is the sister of Jia Zhen, head of the Ningguo House of the Jia family, and Baoyu’s second cousin. Because her mother died when she was very young, Lady Wang brought her to the Rongguo Mansion to be raised with her cousins. Portrayed as a young teenager throughout the majority of the book, her most distinguishing feature seems to be her talent as a painter, as the Dowager commissions her to make a painting of the Garden when Grannie Liu comes to visit. The painting becomes a central thread that runs through the narrative during the first half of the novel as Xichun often shirks her position in the poetry club, preferring instead to work on her painting. In many ways the painting becomes a way to preserve the garden before it disintegrates and in the end Xichun is one of the few that remain living in the garden after Baoyu’s marriage to Baochai. Despite her youth Xichun is very much aware of the family’s increasingly bad reputation. Embarrassed by their deplorable behavior, she lashes out against the Youshi and the rest of the Ning household.

“That’s rather strange advice coming from you,” said Xichun sneeringly. “A girl like me is supposed to keep well away from scandal, not go running headlong towards it. You know the saying: ‘A father should help a son and the son his father, but not in slaying or in doing evil.’ The same principle holds good for you and me. I can only answer for my own integrity. If you people end up getting yourselves into a mess, *I* don’t want to have anything to do with it.” (SS 4.74.480)

Her distaste for the inner family scandals leads her to form a close friendship with Miaoyu, which ultimately becomes her link to later religious devotion.

Xichun is one character in *Dream of the Red Chamber* who rejects the secular world in favor for a more spiritual existence, the others being Baoyu, Xianglian, Miaoyu, Nightingale, and Fragrance. Although they all choose to adhere to a more religious way of life, their mentalities

differ drastically from one another.⁸⁷ While Baoyu's decision denotes a thorough awakening after his realization, through extensive emotional turmoil, that the material world is both a "contaminated reality and a desolate non reality," (Liu, 107) Xichun's rejection of the material reflects a more utilitarian goal. She wants to shirk her responsibilities in the corporeal world because she finds it rather distasteful and thus, her decisions stems from external factors rather than internal revelation.

With Mother and Father both dead and my own sister in law hating me the way she does, I find it so hard to face other people. Before there was always Grandmother Jia, I knew I could count on her for affection. Now that she's gone too, I'm utterly alone. What will become of me? Yingchun has been driven to her death. Xiangyun is married to a consumptive and Tanchun now lives at the other end of the world. Each one of them had her destiny, and each was powerless to change its course. Adamantina is the only free one among us, free as a wandering cloud or a wild crane. If I could only be like her, how happy I would be. (SS 5.112.234)

Xichun's admiration for a character so steeped in contradiction as Miaoyu exemplifies the above described misguided desire for religion. Miaoyu's death is a jarring taste of reality for Xichun and she asserts that, unlike Miaoyu, she will never be tempted by unholy thoughts. This vow seems to act as a premonition for imminent disaster. Thus, unlike Li Wan's who is praised for her chastity, Xichun, much like Miaoyu, is looked down upon for seeking sexual purity by becoming a nun. Louise Edwards believes that this entrance into spirituality is to be viewed as an "immoral act." When Xichun shaves her head and insists on entering a nunnery, Lady Wang attempts to dissuade her, stating "it would look very bad for a girl from a family such as ours to enter a nunnery. That really is unthinkable" (SS 5.118.318). It is almost as if Cao is suggesting that women who enter nunneries are opening themselves up to a form of sexual speculation and thus Xichun's willingness to place herself in that situation naturally horrifies her elders. A close inspection of Xichun's entry in Register No. 1 in the chapter five reveals that her membership is

⁸⁷ Liu, 55

based on the preconceived notion that her entry into the nunnery and her ultimate fate are tragic. Furthermore, Lady Wang's reaction begs the question of if it is "unthinkable" for a noble young woman to enter into a religious vocation. In many ways, Xichun's entrance into a nunnery and the consequences that follow foreshadow Baoyu's future as a man of religion. The juxtaposition between characters such as Xichun and Miaoyu with those like Baoyu and Nightingale highlights Cao's underlying commentary on the various intentions behind the seeking of religious sanctuary.⁸⁸

Xichun is placed eighth among the Twelve Beauties on the Registrar, one below her older cousin Yingchun and one above Wang Xifeng. By logic her age as well as her relation to Baoyu as his second cousin place her last of the four springs but also last of the Jia's blood relatives. The transition between her and Xifeng marks the shift in the registrar from those related directly to the Jia family to those who were married into it. She and her cousin Yingchun are separated from the other two springs through the insertion of Shi Xiangyun and Miaoyu. This split is logical as Xiangyun and Miaoyu play pivotal roles in the discovery of Baoyu's sexuality while Yingchun and Xichun exist primarily as Cao's narrative vehicles. They are in essence, secondary physical manifestations of the family's decline, rather than pivotal components of the novel's underlying romantic structure. Her presence among the Twelve Beauties is imperative as she is the only one of the Springs not to marry, instead, choosing to shield herself from the horrors she has previously seen associated with marriage by joining a nunnery. Interestingly, her poetic prophecy is titled "The Vanity of Spring," which suggests that in some way, Xichun's choice is intrinsically selfish. In this way, her ending provides an alternative resolution to the downfall of the Jia family.

Xichun plays a rather minor role in Pauline Chen's novel. This choice seems deliberate

⁸⁸ Edwards, 66

and was most likely made in the interest of streamlining the plot in order to condense the story into an easily accessible 300 pages. Moreover, her diminished presence in *The Red Chamber* is understandable because Miaoyu, a driving catalyst of Xichun's narrative, is also omitted. Thus, as a character, Xichun does not drive the plot that Chen attempts to create. Interestingly, Chen does not omit Yingchun from the plot completely and instead combines Yingchun and Xichun into a single character in her novel. While Xichun is portrayed as someone who is incredibly religious and devout, she is also weak-willed. The incident Yingchun has with her nurse pawning her goods for money in an illegal gambling rink is instead ascribed to Xichun and her maid Chess. Ultimately, however, Xichun is given her original ending and allowed to escape marriage and enter a nunnery. The meaning of Xichun's religious choices is rather nebulous. While they can be an indication of her selfish nature and fear of the realities of feudal life, they can also be taken as a symbol for what happens to Baoyu in the future as well as a depiction of an alternative way of life.

At the mention of Xichun, Baochai sees Lian frown. Xichun had begged for years to be allowed to shave her head and take the vows of a Buddhist nun. Although Uncle Zheng put off making a match for her for nearly seven years, he had consented to her becoming a nun only last year, when Lady Jia was no longer alive to oppose it. Xichun had given away all her possessions and moved out to the Water Moon Priory. To Baochai, she seems quite content, but Lian has never become reconciled to his half sister's choice (Chen, 347)

Interestingly, the most dramatic aspect of Xichun's story is her corrupt maid and the problems it causes with Xifeng. Thus, the power of her character lies not in Xichun as an individual, but as a character that is the combination of both herself and her maid, which mean she combines features of herself and Yingchun.

Interestingly, the 1987 television adaption seems to elevate Xichun's importance. In the 36 total episodes, she appears in 20 and plays a rather significant in the narrative arc. She is portrayed as a resilient and at times rebellious character who refuses to conform to the social

standards at the time. Furthermore, she is acutely aware of the corruption within the Jia family and is vocal at criticizing the others in her family. Perhaps one of her most memorable scenes is when she admonishes Youshi and Xifeng on their hypocritical attitude regarding social decorum. Following the tragic marriages of her cousins Tanchun and Yingchun, Xichun grows frustrated with the Jia family as it slowly disintegrates and chooses to forgo the secular world for a more peaceful existence in the nunnery. Although Miaoyu played a rather minimal role in the 1987 version, Xichun's religious narrative not only remains relevant within the story but is also rather poignant. While Xichun's choice to become a nun in the original novel was in some way tainted by a sense of selfishness, that self-interest is less evident in the television adaptation. She manages to escape a failing feudal family and for this reason is subsequently painted in a positive light. In this way, the alterations in her story fit in nicely with the rhetoric of the 1987 television series but deviates significantly from that of the original novel. However, as previously stated, the 1987 television series focuses only on Cao's original creation and for the most part reconstructs the last forty chapters based on the scriptwriter's personal research.

Consequently, the Xichun of the 2010 television series is presented in a significantly different manner. Like Chen's novel, the 2010 series paints Xichun as a fairly unremarkable character. Compared to being on screen for 20 out of the 36 total episodes, Xichun is present in the 2010 adaption only 15 times out of 50 total episodes. Moreover, the majority of her appearances are during long shots of the garden during which she is given little to no speaking parts. Thus, it goes without surprise that she comes off as a rather flat character and is oftentimes dismissed as a less developed version of Miaoyu. Actress Hu Zehong, who portrayed Xichun in the 1987 version has commented that she is rather disappointed in how diminished Xichun has become in the 2010 television series. She has also expressed her dissatisfaction with the choice of

casting, asserting that she felt that having two actresses portray Xichun at different ages distracted from the character and made the story less fluid. Ultimately, she felt that the newer adaptation focused too heavily on adhering to minor details, which ultimately detracted in creating relatable characters and telling a coherent story.⁸⁹

As with many characters in the television adaptations, the actresses who play Xichun in both versions are much older than the novel suggests. The 2010 adaptation makes an attempt to remedy this error by having two actresses portray Xichun. A younger Xichun of around eleven or twelve is presented in the first few episodes before an older Xichun takes her place after the project of painting the garden begins. This same device is used for Baoyu as a way to highlight the great physical change he goes through before and after his marriage to Baochai. The 1987 version, however, keeps the same personnel throughout the entirety of the series.

Jia Yingchun

Jia Yingchun is the daughter of Jia She, which makes her the younger sister of Jia Lian and Baoyu's oldest cousin. She is the second female family member of the generation of the Jia household after Yuanchun. Although she is described as very pretty and well educated, she does not compare to her cousins in wit and intelligence, a fact that becomes evident during the poetry competitions. Perhaps one of the most remarkable aspects of Yinchun is her "wooden" personality and her apathy toward worldly affairs, which in turn creates an unwillingness in her to meddle with the affairs of the family. This passivity, however, also translates into a type of weak will and weak supervisory ability. Following the discovery of the gambling network in Garden, Yinchun is humiliated when she learns that the organizer of the network is her nurse. Grandmother Jia burns the cards and dice, but ultimately Yingchun is unable to stop her nurse from continuing her illicit activities. Lady Xing becomes angry at Yingchun, who she claims is

⁸⁹ Hu Zehong. "87 ban 'Xichun' ping Xin Honglou Meng: Xing xiang qian jia" Sohu.com 31 Aug. 2010

too nice to stop her nurse from leading her ring, and asserts that her cousin Tanchun is much more reliable.

“I just don’t know what you think you are at. Incidentally, if she was a banker to a card-school, she must have had to get money from somewhere to start it with. I shouldn’t be a bit surprised to find that she’d talked you into lending her clothes or jewelry that she could pawn in order to raise her capital. You’re such a soft, flabby creature, you’d be just as likely as not to lend them to her. Well all I can say is, if she has and you don’t get them back from her, it’s no good coming to me for the money, for I’ve none to give you.” (SS 3.73.449)

Yingchun’s inability to fight back is highlighted by the fact that during this exchange she is only able to “hang her head and fiddle with her sash” (SS.3.73.450). Ironically enough, Lady Xing’s criticisms hold true. Yingchun is indeed, unable to retaliate, as shortly after, her nurse, Tangerine, carries her things away to pawn, a move Yingchun is powerless to stop. In the end Yingchun seeks Tanchun’s assistance, and Tanchun advises Yingchun to tell Xifeng about the stolen property in the hope of getting some of it back. This incident prefigures into Yingchun’s disastrous marriage to an official of the imperial court. In a desperate attempt to raise the declining fortunes of the Jia family as well as settle his own debts, Tanchun’s father marries her off to a cruel, insensitive, and abusive husband; and Yingchun has no ability to deal with the situation.

Jia She’s decision to marry his daughter off completely disregards the lives, feelings, and wellbeing of his mother and daughter. He has apparently not thought at all about the life she would lead when married into such a family. Moreover, he shows no remorse when Yingchun visits the family and recounts the horrors of her married life. In the end she dies within the first year of marriage after becoming a victim of domestic abuse and constant violence. Yingchun gives the following description to her Aunt and cousins:

Sun Shao-zu is an out-and-out libertine. Gambling, drinking and chasing after women are the only things he cares about. He has corrupted practically every maid and young woman in the house. I have protested to him about it more than once, but he only swears

at me. He calls me a “jealous little whore”. He says that Father borrowed five thousand taels from him and spent it all, and that though he has been around time and again to ask for it, Father refuses to pay it back. Then he points his finger at me and shouts: “Don’t put on the lady wife act with me, my girl! You’re no better than a bought slave - payment in kind for the five thousand taels your old man owes me - and if you’re not very careful I shall give you a good beating and send you to sleep with the maids.” He says it was Great-grandfather who took the initiative in making the alliance between our families because theirs was so rich and influential, so that by rights he ought to be Father’s equal. He says he was a fool to marry me, because that makes Father his senior; and besides, he says, it has given people the impression that he needed our help, whereas in fact quite the reverse is true.’ (SS.3.80.611)

It is interesting to note here that this description of Sun Shao-zu is not dissimilar from Jia She. Although the others are sympathetic to her situation, it becomes all too obvious that they are powerless to ameliorate her poor circumstance. Lady Wang later explains that Jia Zheng had attempted to talk Jia She out of the marriage, but was ultimately unsuccessful. “I remember your Uncle Zheng speaking very strongly against the marriage to your father, but your father was so set on it, he wouldn’t listen. It’s bad business” (SS.3.80.611). Both Yingchun’s death and Faithful’s later suicide are clear depictions on the consequences of Jia She’s selfishness as well as indications of the family’s impending fall.⁹⁰ Yingchun’s failed marriage is clearly described in her entry in the Registrars with the “Zhong-shan wolf”⁹¹ being a reference to her future husband.

Yingchun ranks sixth among the Twelve Beauties, just one above her younger cousin Xichun. Although she is older than Tanchun and they are both daughters of concubines, Tanchun is Baoyu’s sister while Yingchun is his cousin. It is possible that it is this difference in status

⁹⁰ Faithful is Grandmother Jia’s chief maid. Following the death of the Dowager, the lecherous Jia She begins to pursue her. She rejects his marriage proposal as concubine and commits suicide in order to avoid falling victim to Jia She when she is no longer protected by Grandmother Jia.

⁹¹ The Zhongshan Wolf is a popular Chinese fairy tale deals with the ingratitude of a creature after being saved. The first print of the story is found in the Ming Dynasty *Ocean Stories of Past and Present* published in 1544. In this tale a Mohist scholar Mr. Dongguo saves a wolf from a hunting party. The wolf refuses to eat various animals and ultimately, to Mr. Dongguo’s surprise, pounces on him and announces it intention to eat him. When Mr. Dongguo protests at the wolf’s ingratitude, the wolf presents the an alternative argument and the two present their case to the judgement of three elders. Two of the three elders side with the wolf, however the third beats the wolf an inch from death. The scholar begins to pity the world, but when a woman comes and tells the story of how the wolf ate her son, the two kill the wolf. Thus, the use of the Zhongshan Wolf in Yingchun’s story becomes a symbol of both ferocity as well as ingratitude with the implication that the Sun family is in some way indebted to the Jia’s, but ultimately betrays their gratitude.

elevates Tanchun above Yingchun. Furthermore, it can also be argued that Yingchun plays a significantly lesser role in the novel than Tanchun does. Yingchun's mental weakness and apathy toward the affairs of the Jia family paired with her mediocrity as a poet when she is compared to her cousins adds to her rather wooden and unexceptional personality. Like Xichun, she becomes rather forgettable and thus, it is logical that she is ranked among the last few of those who are related to the Jia family by blood. Even Daiyu, who is perhaps one of the physically weakest characters in the novel, looks down on Yingchun's inability to advocate for herself. Nevertheless, Yingchun, like Xichun, plays an important role in the overall narrative of the novel. Her marriage and death are painted as one of the greatest tragedies of the novel and they illustrate the problems that arise when the garden is dismantled and the youthfulness of the poetry club begins to fade away. In fact, Yingchun becomes one of the most memorable of the three springs given the violent and devastating nature of her marriage. Her departure from the garden shows the horrors of the adult world and in this way reinforces the sanctity of the sanctuary that was built within the walls of the Jia family. As a pair, Yingchun and Xichun are sad examples of the consequences of one of the novel's central premises, that the lives of young women are very uncertain once they marry.

Chen makes an interesting rearrangement of characters in her novel *The Red Chamber*. She chooses to omit Jia She from the story completely and makes Jia Lian the son of Jia Jing who in this case is married to Lady Xing, Jia She's wife in the original novel. By doing so, Chen greatly streamlines the number of characters and is thus able to take out one of the springs. She chooses to keep Xichun by making her the daughter of Jia Jing and Lady Xing. Consequently, Yingchun is omitted from the story altogether. However, as stated above, remnants of Yingchun's character remain present in the novel. Xichun is essentially a combination of both

Xichun and Yingchun and thus her narrative manages to live on. Interestingly enough, Chen chooses to include many of Yingchun's personality traits in her novel by merging Yingchun's role in the original novel with the Xichun of her novel. This is seen when the plot of the corrupt maid is ascribed to Xichun. Perhaps Chen chooses to include such detail in order to provide a depiction of the state of the Jia family. Moreover, Chen paints this moment as a source of embarrassment and stress for Xifeng who must manage the family's assets. Thus, the illicit activities of the maids are a direct way to justify the criticisms Xifeng receives from the family and become important in the overall plot. It is unclear why in her version, Chen does not want to introduce Yingchun's failed marriage and instead ends Xichun's story with her entering a nunnery. One possible explanation for choosing this particular ending for both Xichun and Yingchun is that Chen opts for a more feminist retelling of the novel. Thus, Yingchun's death at the hands of her brutally abusive and inhumane husband whom she was forced to marry under the order of her father reads rather misogynistic and thus does not fit in with her ultimate message despite the fact that in the parent novel it was a powerful argument against arranged marriage.

Like Xichun, Yingchun is not given much attention in the two television adaptations. The primary focus of her character is her marriage to Sun Shaozu. This is particularly true for the 1987 version, which chooses almost to ignore her mental and emotional feebleness and passivity. Rather than portraying the downfall of the Jia family as an intricate web of deception and illicit activities from multiple sources, the television series chooses to place the blame on Xifeng alone. Thus, Yingchun's inability to control her maids is unnecessary, as it would dilute the depiction of Xifeng as the story's sole antagonist. Furthermore, little attention is placed on her failed marriage despite the fact that it continues to be memorable with modern readers. As viewers we

are given no insight on her husband with her final scene in the series ending with her preparing for her marriage ceremony. Unlike in the parent novel, she does not return home to inform her family on her life after leaving the Jia family and is subsequently never mentioned again. In this way the tragedy of her marriage is not dissimilar from that of Tanchun's in that the tragedy lies in the fact that she must leave the sanctity of the garden. It is unknown why details regarding Sun Shaozu are not revealed in this television adaptation. A possible explanation is that directors felt that the violence of her story did not fit well with the rest of the series. The omission of Miaoyu's violent ending seems to support this idea. The 2010 version uses two actresses to portray Yingchun. One plays her during her formative years and the other during her adult years. However, unlike Xichun, the switch between the two actresses is made shortly before Yingchun leaves for her marriage with Sun Shaozu. In this way, Yingchun is actually portrayed to be younger than Xichun despite the fact that she is supposed to be a few years older in the novel. The switch seems to be used as a device to demonstrate the drastic change Yingchun goes through after her marriage. It also emphasizes a certain loss of youth after she is forced to leave the garden. Consequently, the Yingchun of the 1987 television series is seen to be considerably older than that of the 2010 adaptation. Perhaps the main difference between the 2010 remake and its 1987 counterpart is the addition of Yingchun's physical feebleness. In fact, the 2010 version highlights this feature of Yingchun in great detail and later uses it as a justification for her fate as a tool of her father. In both adaptations, Yingchun is shown wearing light colors perhaps as a way to highlight her innocence, youth, and naivety. She is also set apart from the rest of the Springs through her air of apathy which is illustrated by her constant reading. During times of dramatic tension and gossip among the garden, Yingchun is placed far away from the action.

Chapter 4: Beyond the Jia Family

Qin Keqing⁹²

*However, the death of Qin Shi is the most obscure, complex and indeed, the most uncertain of all and only through careful, detailed analysis can it be clarified.*⁹³

Perhaps of all the characters in the novel, Qin Keqing and the circumstances surrounding her life and early death are amongst the most mysterious. For this reason, Keqing (often referred to as Qin Shi) in the Ningguo House remains one of the most closely studied and actively debated of the Twelve Beauties. During the rise of the school of literary thought known as “New *Hongxue*,” a fascination surrounding the inconsistencies surrounding Keqing’s death began to emerge.⁹⁴ Scholars belonging to this new school of thought regarded Gao and Cheng’s roles in the publishing process as editorial and thus asserted that the last forty chapters were fabrications and could not be analyzed in tandem with what they consider to be Cao’s original work. Of the twelve beauties, Keqing is the only character to have her entire narrative resolved within the first eighty chapters. However despite the supposed completion of her tale by Cao Xueqing himself, there continue to be speculations that something is awry with her tale. In her article “New *Hongxue* and the Birth of the Author: ‘Yu Pingbo’s ‘On Qin Keqing’s Death,’” Louise Edwards argues that the chapters leading up to Keqing’s death are written with much less coherence and attention to style and detail than is typical of the remainder of the novel.⁹⁵ This suggests that an alteration of some sort was applied to the text, but whether this alteration was done by a later

⁹² Although Qin Keqing is also referred to as Qinshi in the novel, I have chosen to use Keqing exclusively as to streamline the number of names used.

⁹³ Edwards, Louise. "New *Hongxue* and the 'Birth of the Author': Yu Pingbo's 'On Qin Keqing's Death'," *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews (CLEAR)* 23 (2001): 46

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ A detailed summary and more in depth analysis of these debates regarding the authenticity of the last forty chapters can be found in Bing C. Chan’s, *The Authorship of “The Dream of the Red Chamber”*, 25-35

editor or Cao himself still remains a point of contention.⁹⁶ It was this sort of contestation of scholarship that would eventually inspire Yu Pingbo's bold essay "On Qin Keqing's Death" in which he attempted to uncover her original ending through detailed readings of the text and accompanying commentaries.

In the extant versions of the novel, Qin Keqing's death is caused by a gradually worsening, vague illness that results in her slowly wasting away, despite efforts made by various doctors. Although the novel hints at the possibility of an optimistic prognosis, Keqing herself remains convinced of her imminent death. She ultimately succumbs to her illness and shortly after her death returns as a spirit to warn Xifeng of the family's decline. As well, she recommends that Xifeng invest in a school in order to preserve what wealth the Jias have left. The novel proceeds to depict, in lengthy detail, the preparations leading up to the funeral and eventually the ceremony itself. Through this process it becomes abundantly clear that regardless of her age, gender, occupation, and rank Keqing was well loved and respected by the majority of the household. Yet, despite the pomp of the funeral ceremony as well as her universal popularity, she is never once mentioned again by members of the Jia family during subsequent chapters. Her one and only later appearance is in a dream where she supposedly teaches Faithful how to commit suicide by hanging. This insertion, which takes place in the last 40 chapters of the novel, greatly complicates our previous perception of Keqing's character. While a cursory reading of these events suggests that nothing of significance can be inferred from these details, a close examination of the elaborate descriptions of her relationships with her mother-in-law Youshi, husband Jia Rong, and close friend Xifeng as well as the original prophecy laid out in chapter

⁹⁶ David Hawkes suggests that Cao was given instructions by Odd Tablet, presumed to be his father, to remove the offending sections of Keqing's affair with her father-in-law. While it is assumed that Cao removed these offending sections, it is still unclear whether these modifications were actually made by Cao himself or they were alterations done after his death.

five suggests that circumstances are perhaps not what they seem.

Yu utilizes these inconsistencies to frame his argument that Keqing's death was actually a result of suicide by hanging after her adulterous and incestuous relationship with her father-in-law, Jia Zhen, was discovered by maids.⁹⁷ In his essay Yu claims that his argument is "proven" through an analytical, pseudo-scientific approach that removes the uncertainty and doubt that had been prevalent in the interpretations of earlier commentators such as Hu Shi and Cai Yuanpei. Published in *Jingbao* his essay "Random Thoughts on *Red Mansions*" was his first effort to provide details of Keqing's relationship with Jia Zhen. Upon first reading, Yu initially dismissed this theory as nonsense, however, he soon began to see a connection between this image and the one presented in the "Register's of Twelve Beauties."

Perfumed was the dust that fell
From painted beams where springtime ended.
From supported heart
And amorous looks
The ruin of a might house portended.
The weakness in the line began with Jing;
The blame for the decline lay first in Ning;
But retribution all was of Love's fashioning. (SS 1.5.144)

The second line very clearly alludes to a death by hanging with the reference to dust that is "perfumed" pointing toward Keqing whose introduction very much hinged upon the intoxicating aroma of her bed chamber. Furthermore, the "amorous looks" can be seen as an allusion to the illicit relationship between Keqing and her father-in-law. Consequently, as hinted by one of the older family servants Big Jiao in chapter seven, this scandalous relationship implicitly refers to and becomes a reflection of the dissolution of the Jia family.⁹⁸ To further strengthen this image, a

⁹⁷ Yu Pingbo, *Hongloug meng bian* in *Yu Pingbo lun "Honglou meng," Shanghai guiji chubanshe, 1988* as translated by Louise Edwards in "New Hongxue and the 'Birth of the Author': Yu Pingbo's 'On Qin Keqing's Death'"

⁹⁸ This rant by Big Jiao has become the centerpiece of the arguments of many contemporary scholars. Using his inebriated rant, many later critics have gone to extent of saying that Xifeng helped murder Keqing out of her desire for her husband Jia Rong.

picture of a beautiful girl hanging by her neck from a beam with the words “love boundless as sea and sky is but an illusion” accompanies this poetic prophecy. Some scholars speculate that the portrait and poem are actually representations of Faithful, who commits suicide with the aid of Keqing’s ghost. This, however, seems unlikely because it appears in Register No. 1 as opposed to Supplementary Register No. 2, which is reserved for maids and servants. The confusion with the paintings is very likely a result of Faithful’s suicide by hanging in the Cheng-Gao version. It is possible that the passage in the Cheng-Gao version was informed by this earlier image, but any such conclusion would be speculation.

Looking past the evidence presented in the Registers, Yu also cites various sources of external evidence to support his claims. He focuses particularly on the events directly following Keqing’s death just prior to her funeral. In Chapter 13 the household is described as “bewildered by [the news of Keqing’s death] and [everyone was] in one way or another deeply distressed.”⁹⁹ (SS. 1.13.258) Yu argues that this perplexity and sense of surprise is odd simply because it would seem logical that if Keqing had been chronically ill as the novel suggests, those around her would be fully prepared for her death.¹⁰⁰ He continues to note the peculiarity of Baoyu and Jia Zhen’s reaction as well as Youshi’s absence from the funeral. Baoyu learns of Keqing’s death in a dream that causes him to “start up in bed with a jerk” (SS 1.13. 259) after which he felt “a sudden stabbing pain shot through his heart” (SS 1.13.259). The trauma terrified him to the point where he later “retched involuntarily and spat out a mouthful of blood” (SS 1.13. 259). Yu contends that this complex and dramatic reaction is simultaneously concealing as well as

⁹⁹ In the original Chinese novel, this line appears as “彼时合家皆知，无不纳罕，都有些疑心，” which translates to “by the time the entire household had heard the news all were filled with bewilderment as well as suspicion.” This perplexion and suspicion further highlight the mystery surrounding Keqing’s death.

¹⁰⁰ A close reading of the texts shows several revelatory aspects of Keqing’s disease. In Chapter 10, Dr. Zhang says “There is no real danger this winter. I should say that if she can get past the spring equinox, you could look forward to a complete recovery.” Her death, however, occurs later that winter. If one were to take Dr. Zhang’s words as truth, then it becomes clear that Keqing did not die of disease.

revelatory. The progression from surprise to anguish to guilt indicates that he believed that he was in some way responsible for her death. This reaction is then juxtaposed with Jia Zhen's excessive display of grief, which hints at an inappropriate intimacy between Keqing and himself.

“Everyone, young or old, kinsman or friend, knows that my daughter-in-law was ten times better than any son. now that she has been taken from us it's plain to see that this senior branch of the family is doomed to extinction!” and he broke down once more into uncontrollable weeping. (SS. 1.13. 259)

This incongruity informs Yu's claims that problems exist in the development of this episode. Furthermore, while both Baoyu and Jia Zhen show inappropriately emotional responses to Keqing's death, Youshi is notably absent despite the fact that previous chapters described her deep and intimate relationship with Keqing. David Hawkes addresses these inconsistencies in the introduction to his translation of *Dream of the Red Chamber*, stating that “it would be naive to suppose that Xueqin simply overlooked the discrepancy” (SS.1.41). Hawkes asserts that the holes in Keqing's story are most likely a result of Cao's unwillingness to make changes to his manuscript. Thus, his failure to make the necessary logical adjustments were intentional, a result of the frustrations he felt at having to rewrite and apply alterations, which he believed to be “artistically wrong.” This pressure is possibly stemmed from family who feared political persecution.¹⁰¹

Regardless of the veracity of these claims, it is important to note that Keqing remains markedly different from the other beauties. While characters such as Xifeng, Daiyu, and Baochai are given detailed, conventional descriptions that highlight their mannerisms and physical appearance, Keqing's introduction is significantly more dramatic and divergent. Upon first meeting Keqing, we as readers are immediately impressed by her sensuality. Cao does not

¹⁰¹ This argument is made with the assumption that Cao himself made the alterations. As mentioned above, it is unknown when these changes occurred and who they were done by. It may very well be that the alterations were done posthumously by a family member, perhaps Red Inkstone or Odd Tablet or even later by Gao E.

provide a portrait of her character as he had done with previous characters, rather he slowly unravels Keqing's seductive nature through a depiction of the aura that surrounds her. As Baoyu first steps into her room, he is quickly assailed by her intoxicating perfume and room filled with erotic paintings and symbols of seduction.

On a table stood an antique mirror that had once graced the tiring-room of the lascivious empress Wu Zetian. Beside it stood the golden platter on which Flying Swallow once danced for her emperor's delight. And on the platter was that very quince which the villainous An Lushan threw at beautiful Yang Guifei, bruising her plump white breast. At the far end of the room stood the priceless bed on which Princess Shouyang was sleeping out of the doors under the eaves of the Han Zhang Palace when the plum flower lighted on her forehead and set a new fashion for colored patches. Over it hung a canopy commissioned by Princess Tongchang entirely fashioned out of ropes of pearls. (SS. 1.5.127)

By making various references to women who have been historically wanton and seductive, Cao creates an erotic world in which Baoyu is given an almost voyeuristic view of sex and sexuality. Keqing's room becomes the perfect place for Baoyu to segue into his journey into the Land of Illusion, where he is introduced to "two in one," also named Keqing, as a way to cure him of "lust of the mind." This mystical fairy is the combination of strengths of Baoyu and Daiyu, and is therefore, Baoyu's ideal partner. There have been various debates on whether Baoyu's sexual encounter with this Keqing is illusion or reality or just a dream, but as the entrance to the Land of Illusion suggests, the line between truth and fiction are easily blurred. In this way, it can be argued that, in the novel, Keqing is the physical manifestation and embodiment of both sensuality as well as lust. Both of her names, Qinshi as well as Keqing, exist largely for symbolic reasons. The use of *qin/qing*, which can be interpreted as love, makes oblique references to an excess of sexual pleasures and passions.¹⁰² By pairing her with her brother Qinzhong, the author expresses his attitude toward the concept of *qing* itself. Their early deaths act to highlight the

¹⁰²Epstein, Maram. *Competing Discourses: Orthodoxy, Authenticity, and Engendered Meanings in Late Imperial Chinese Fiction*. Cambridge, MA: Published by Harvard University Asia Center, 2001. Print.

fragility of the brevity with uninhibited romantic passions can exist in a feudal society.¹⁰³

Of the Twelve Beauties, Keqing ranks twelfth, an arrangement that proves to be reasonably logical for several reasons. Foremost, she dies relatively early in the novel and makes only two brief reappearances in later chapters. Furthermore, as Baoyu's niece-in-law through her marriage with Jia Rong, she shares no blood relation to the Jia family. However, a closer examination of Keqing's birth and origins provides an even more compelling reason for her low rank. It is revealed that Keqing is the adopted daughter of one of the Secretaries in the Public Buildings Department of the Board of Works, which suggests that she comes from a background of dubious social standing. As a result, her marriage into the Jia family was a result of her adoptive father's connections. From a more theoretical standpoint, Keqing's ranking can also be attributed to her role as "two-in-one" or the combination of Daiyu and Baochai who are one and two respectively. As a number, twelve can be seen as the combination of one and two just as Keqing is the amalgamation of the first and second ranked.

Although her character is widely studied and debated within the scholarly community, it seems as though Keqing has not been able to make her mark in modern adaptations. She is completely absent from Pauline Chen's *The Red Chamber*. This can be explained semantically by the fact that Chen begins her book with Daiyu, Baochai, and Baoyu in their late teens. If one follows the canonical chronology, Keqing would have died long before the start of *The Red Chamber*. Furthermore, Chen's novel seems to focus exclusively on the House of Rong and completely ignores the House of Ning, which can also explain why Xichun is also not featured. This makes sense as Chen's novel is not an attempt to translate Cao's story. Rather, it is an attempt to render it accessible to a contemporary western audience by reshaping the narrative and

¹⁰³ Several commentators have noted the puns that are present in both of their names. Qinzhong can be read as "seed of passion" and his role is the concentration of that passion in other characters like Baoyu with whom he has had a supposed homosexual relationship.

characters to focus on such issues as women's opportunities and rights within a controlling household. In this way, *The Red Chamber* discards the elements of the supernatural and focuses solely on the experience of three contentious women. Because Chen believes that Xifeng, Daiyu, and Baochai were the only characters that were able to work as modern characters, Keqing does not seem to fit in the overall framework of Chen's narrative.

Keqing's role in the 1987 television series is also minimal. As there is less of a focus on supernatural elements, Baoyu never enters the Land of Illusion, and thus, Keqing is neither featured during that initial lunch meeting or as "two-in-one." Keqing's first introduction is ironically also her last. She is introduced on her deathbed warning Xifeng of the Jia family's imminent downfall and recommending that she invest in a schoolhouse in order to preserve the family's remaining wealth. The next scene is her funeral, but unlike in the book the scene focuses entirely on Xifeng and the way she manages the servants and maids. In this way, Keqing is used as a plot point to introduce Xifeng's "ruthless wickedness" and give reason for the blame placed on Xifeng at the end of the series. It is because Xifeng did not heed Keqing's advice that the family ended up in shambles. This portrayal of Keqing follows the imperatives of this series quite well and her diminished role is not unreasonable. It is clear through the drama's portrayal of Xifeng and emphasis on characters such as Aunt Zhao and Xia Jinggui, that the director was not aiming to remain faithful to the original story but instead to create a narrative that would highlight the oppressive nature of women in power. Thus, it is unsurprising that the friendship between Xifeng and Keqing has been conveniently omitted and Keqing's character has been reduced to nothing more than a tool with which audiences can later criticize Xifeng.

Because the 2010 remake adapts the Cheng-Gao version and thus follows the book much more closely, Keqing's role changes significantly in the newer remake. Her character is given

substantially more weight and becomes a central factor in the series' early episodes. Upon entering she is immediately set apart from the rest of the characters in both mannerism and dress. Unlike the other females who are dressed either in light pastels, or in Xifeng's case bright red, Keqing is clad almost exclusively in black. The only time this is different is within the Land of Illusion during which time she appears in white. This choice in costuming seems to serve two main roles. First, it distinctly separates her from the rest of the cast and subsequently surrounds her with an aura of mystery. Second, it becomes a sort of visual cue for the audience. As the actress cast to play Keqing also takes on the role of the Fairy Disenchantment, the color of her dress allows audiences to create a distinct barrier between what is considered to be reality and what is an illusion. The choice to have Keqing and Disenchantment be played by the same actress also proves to be quite revealing. By having Keqing literally lead Baoyu through the Land of Illusion, Director Li Shaohong makes direct commentary on the role Keqing plays in Baoyu's understanding of *qing* (feeling). The disorienting scene in which Baoyu seems to stir from his dream while the clothes on Disenchantment seem to quickly change to black in subsequent flashes suggests that perhaps Baoyu's descent into the fantasy world and his encounter with the mystical Keqing are more steeped in reality than previously thought. These sensual scenes and the erotic imagery that surrounds them thus highlight Keqing's sexuality, which operates not only to adhere to the descriptions in the book but also to bolster the show's ratings among the younger generation.

Perhaps one of the most notable differences between the two versions in their portrayal of Keqing is the depiction of her death. While the 1987 version clearly show Keqing taking her last breaths on her deathbed, the 2010 remake is filmed such that Keqing's death is shown off screen. For this reason, it is unknown whether Director Li intended to have her die of illness or suicide.

Although she is seen as being very ill, her final scene with Xifeng when she comes back as a ghost to warn her of the Jia's imminent decline and of the evils of corruption and over indulgence suggests that her death may not have been as unambiguous as previously thought. Tang Yifei, the actress who portrayed Keqing in the 2010 version, has stated in an interview that she believes the greatest difference between her portrayal of Keqing and the 1987 portrayal is the degree of added complexity. Tang goes on to assert that the character of Keqing needs to be played in such a way that the audience can believe that she is sensual and vivacious but so lacking in hope as to actively consider ending her own life.¹⁰⁴

Ultimately, the contending viewpoints on Qin Keqing's cause of death makes her one of the most difficult characters in *Dream of the Red Chamber* to portray accurately. In the Yueju Opera version of *Dream of the Red Chamber*, Qin Keqing is given the role of a tragic character hero. Her husband Jia Rong strictly abides by feudal discipline and she is later raped by her father-in-law, Jia Zhen. Too humiliated to live in a world where she is thought to be adulterous, she commits suicide.

I was born a poor girl
and married to Jia Rong, a spendthrift
He is not a considerate husband
neither understanding
nor caring about me
He only cares about beauties and wine
The big family here gives me great pressure
I'm so depressed to see my youth withering away
However, I should hide away my depression and hatred
in order to be a tender and considerate wife
I always look at myself in the mirror
but who will appreciate my beauty then?

She sings this song as her introduction and it becomes instantly clear that she is the victim of a system run by dishonest men. This opera seems to introduce a degree of victimization to

¹⁰⁴ Tang Yifei. "Qin Keqing Tan Xinban Hongloumeng" Interview by: Ding, Peng. *Women.Tianjin*: 2010

Keqing's story that had not been present in earlier studies, however, this interpretation is not without its own degree of legitimacy. As we are never given a description of her relationship with her husband, the most of the understanding we have of Keqing is based on the observations of other characters, this song most accurately represents her thinking. In the end, representations of this character very quite widely and reflect the different purposes of the "sequels" in which she appears.

Li Wan

Li Wan differs significantly from the other women married into the Jia family. Unlike the fiery and at times conniving Wang Xifeng and the sensual and erotic Qin Keqing, Li Wan is portrayed as the perfect proper mourning widow. Upon her introduction, it becomes clear that Li Wan is the novel's epitome of a woman who is both self-sacrificing and dedicated to upholding moral standards. In a family that is steeped in corruption, her upstanding, and often self-effacing behavior sets her apart from the other female characters, who often indulge in gambling and other illicit activities.

[T]his young widow living in the midst of luxury and self-indulgence was able to keep herself like the "withered tree and dead ashes" of the philosopher, shutting out everything that did not concern her and attending only to the duties of serving her husband's parents and bringing up her child. (SS.1.4.108)

Her simultaneous dedication to and unwillingness to receive praise for her son Jia Lan's education and his subsequent accomplishments throughout the book solidify her role as the ideal Confucian woman. When Lan passes the Imperial Examination, he is able to win reprieve for the disgraced members of his family and in this way, contributes to the Jia's regeneration.

The wife of Baoyu's deceased elder brother, Jia Zhu, Li Wan's main responsibilities were to bring up her son and supervise her younger cousins, Daiyu, Baochai, the Three Springs, Shi Xiangyun, and Baoyu in the Prospect Garden. It has been suggested that Li Wan is able to live in the garden, which is considered to be a "girl's world," despite the fact that she had once been

married, because she was widowed at a young age and thus saw very little male pollution.¹⁰⁵ Furthermore, like the other unmarried girls, she is able to live her life without being under the constraint of a husband. Although ultimately she is able to attain a high status within the family due to the success of her son, the novel suggests that despite her realization of traditional values she is to be looked at as a tragic figure because of her wasted youth spent upholding the strict societal standards of the time. The tragedy of her character can be clearly seen in the opening and closing lines of her prophecy as presented in chapter five.

Favour, a shadow in the glass;
Fame, a dream that soon would pass:
The blissful flowering-time of youth soon fled,
Soon, too, the pleasures of the bridal bed...
... To see him so exalted stand
Yet the black night
Of death's dark frontier lay close at hand
All those whom history calls great
Left only empty names for us to venerate (SS 1.5.143)

The last four lines suggest that Li Wan, despite her young age, dies shortly after Jia Lan's success with the implication that even despite all of her great deeds, she remains just another empty name that is superficially respected, but not wholly remembered. This element of forgetability remains a constant throughout the entire novel. Li Wan takes Xifeng's place as household manager after the latter falls ill, but her passive and conventional actions means that people focus on Tanchun instead.

One of Li Wan's most memorable moments is during Daiyu's death. Because she is a widow and technically considered to be an unmarried woman she does not participate in Baoyu's wedding festivities and is instead left in charge of the garden while everyone prepares. Thus, she is able to stay with Daiyu in her dying moments. Perhaps the most interesting aspect of Li Wan is her education and upbringing. Until her father's generation, all the members of her family,

¹⁰⁵ Edwards, 128

including the women, had been given what was then considered a “first class education” (SS 1.4.107). It was shortly after Li Wan was born that the educational policy for her family changed to abide by the maxim “a stupid woman is a virtuous one” (SS 1.4.109). For this reason, Li Wan was not allowed to engage in serious study and could only work her way through *The Four Books for Girls* and *Lines of Noble Women* with the main focus of her learning being on spinning and sewing “Her name ‘Wan,’ which means a kind of silk, [is intended] to symbolize her dedication to the needle” (SS 1.4.108). However, it seems odd that Li Wan, who is described as only “being able to recognize a few characters and be familiar with some of the models of female virtue of former ages,” (SS 1.4.110) supervises all of Jia Lan’s studies as well as judges the poetry competitions. Regardless, her role as the judge marks the beginning of her growing importance as a character that culminates in her becoming a pseudo-replacement for Xifeng. Through her temporary replacement of Xifeng, Li Wan is able to display the parallels she share with Xifeng. Both come from prominent families and are considerably less literate than the other girls in the garden. However, while Xifeng’s lack of education becomes an indictment of her ability to hold power, Li Wan’s conservative educational background gives her the authority to supervise others. In her book, Edwards concludes that the similarities between the two women juxtaposed with their very different fates create an ironic contrast. Thus, Cao creates a foil for Xifeng in Li Wan and through it demonstrates the importance of the mothering of a child.¹⁰⁶

As mentioned in the previous section, Cao’s ranking system seemed to be based on a combination of relationships with the Jia family, literacy, and role in the novel. Thus, unsurprisingly, Li Wan is ranked eleventh among the Twelve Beauties. She is one of three

¹⁰⁶ Some critics argue that Li Wan’s characterization is rather important in tracing the development of Baoyu’s upbringing. As Jia Lan’s success brings reprieve for the family due through Li Wan’s nurturing thus illustrating the importance of mothering in the later development of children. In this way, ruined children like Baoyu are depicted as the result of the failures of the elder women. Louise Edwards provides a rather detailed analysis on this line of thought in her chapter about Jia women in *Men and Women in Qing China: Gender in the Red Chamber Dream*.

women who has joined the Jia family through marriage and is thus naturally positioned lower than those who share a blood relation with them. Her influence within the household and her role in the novel puts her lower than Xifeng, but her birthright as the daughter of a distinguished Nanjing official places her higher than Keqing, who also loses ground because dies during the first quarter of the novel. Although she plays a seemingly insignificant role in the grand scheme of the novel's narrative, her presence on the Register is required if Cao wishes to paint an accurate picture of life in the Jia family. Li Wan not only represents the ideal Confucian woman but she is also a surprisingly stable character. Her stability as well as her role as the societal ideal become a benchmark against which the development of other characters can be measured.

Like the other characters in this chapter, Li Wan does not play a role in Chen's *The Red Chamber*. However she is mentioned briefly when Jia Zhu is referenced as Baoyu's brother. Because Daiyu does not die in *The Red Chamber* and instead marries into another family, Li Wan's role as Daiyu's confidant shortly before her death is not needed. Furthermore, she also appears only briefly in the 1987 television series with appearances in only 3 out of 36 episodes. However, when she is on screen, she is more often than not portrayed as the benevolent and forgiving household manager who takes the place and ameliorates the damage done by Xifeng's conniving ways. As mentioned earlier, Xifeng is painted very much in the antagonist as the series, and in a way, Li Wan's presence intensifies Xifeng's villainy as their actions are presented in juxtaposition to one another. However, Li Wan's iconic moment as a confidante for Daiyu during her last few moments before death is not present in the 1987 version. Because Daiyu's death does not coincide with the day of Baoyu and Baochai's marriage ceremony, the entire Jia family is present in various moments of her illness. In the end, Daiyu's main companion before death is her servant. Ultimately Li Wan is not presented as a nuanced

character. Rather, her presence is strategically placed in order to further the director's claim on Xifeng as the story's antagonist. The juxtaposition of Li Wan's socially acceptable behavior with Xifeng's almost sinister actions heightens the frustration we as viewers are asked to feel about Xifeng.

In contrast, the 2010 version seems to emphasize her role as the Confucian ideal and focuses less on her relationship with Xifeng. She is used more as a moral compass, which is not so much the judge of "goodness" of the characters around her, but as a way to show how far society has drifted from the societal ideal. Because her screen time has been substantially increased, Li Wan is also presented as more complex character and we as viewers are given more insight on her hardship in attempting to simultaneously ensure Jia Lan's success and manage the young women of the garden. This turmoil is most evident in the scenes where she must oversee her son's studies. Her limited education makes it difficult for her to help him with certain aspects of his schoolwork and she is also without a husband to help in those matters. She is seen struggling to ensure that everything in her son's life goes smoothly. Thus, this Li Wan is much less effortlessly perfect than the one in the 1987 version. In both versions, Li Wan is portrayed as somewhat matronly and as someone visibly older than the rest of the girls despite the fact that according to the novel, she should only be in her early 20s. While she is portrayed as somewhat younger in the more recent adaptation, she is nonetheless set apart from the others by her age.

Miaoyu (Adamantina)¹⁰⁷

Like Keqing, there is much speculation that surrounds the characterization and narrative of Miaoyu. Her name translates directly to mean "wonderful purity," however the second character *yu* can also be seen as a blatant pun on a homophone for the character, desire. The use of the character *yu* is also significant as it strengthens the symbolic link between Miaoyu and

¹⁰⁷ As with Keqing, I choose to use Miaoyu exclusively as to streamline and simplify the reading of the essay

Daiyu. In many ways, the two can be seen as mirrors of one another with Miaoyu being a glimpse of what Daiyu might have been had her parents followed the monk's warning and sheltered her from contact with the material world. Both share exquisitely refined taste as well as a distinct skill for poetry, but they fail to take full advantage of their religious or in Daiyu's case, spiritual, privilege.¹⁰⁸ Initially, she is presented as a pious nun who sits in a temple and reads Zhuangzi's scriptures while others her age are out engaging in games and other frivolous activities. We see this contrast especially when we learn that she enters the Jia's family nunnery with a group of young nuns in order to avoid being physically ill, a disaster that otherwise would await her, which she knows about because it was previously predicted by a monk. Her unusual circumstances in entering the convent in addition to her physical beauty and her high rank immediately set her apart from the rest of her cohort. One of her most distinct qualities is her arrogance as well as her fastidious attitude toward cleanliness, and as a result she looks down on common people like Grannie Liu but speaks candidly with people she believes are her equals. Yet, despite her perceived spiritual superiority, Miaoyu has technically only taken what are considered to be "half vows." She has cut her hair, but she has not fully shaven it as the others have. In her book *Ideal and Actual in The Story of the Stone*, Dore Levy argues that it is this obsession with purity and refinement that points to her equivocal state of existence. Ironically, the material concerns that give her a sense of legitimacy become indicators that her Buddhist wisdom in the nunnery is rather superficial.

It quickly becomes apparent that Miaoyu is a character marked by contradictions. Although she has renounced the red dust nun, Miaoyu continues to be concerned with material

¹⁰⁸ Levy, 125

values when she asks that the cup used by Grannie Liu be left outside.¹⁰⁹

Just as Adamantina was about to fetch cups for the girls, an old lay-sister appeared at the door carrying the empties she had been collecting in the foyer.

“Don’t bring that Cheng Hua cup in here,” said Adamantina. “Leave it outside.”

Baoyu understood immediately. It was because Grannie Liu had drunk from it. In Adamantina’s eyes the cup was now contaminated. (SS 2.41.321)

This is where her snobbishness makes her rather unsympathetic. The poor, old woman, Grannie Liu, who is received warmly and benevolently by the others in spite of being a distant relative and supplicant, is despised and shunned by Miaoyu to as a source of contamination. The nun, who is supposed to be benevolent and transcendent in observance of the doctrine that all creatures should be treated equally, proves to be the greatest of snobs, quite preoccupied with maintaining her own personal purity. Later, she finds Baoyu another “priceless” drinking bowl “carved from a gnarled and ancient bamboo root in the likeness of a coiled-up dragon with horns like antlers” to replace the cup she had discarded. Moreover, as an uncompromising young nun, she is repulsed by the presence of the crude, elderly peasant woman, but she is completely comfortable around Baoyu, a young man, going as far as to serving him tea in her private quarters. Ironically, for Miaoyu, the low status of the peasant woman is more polluting than a male from her same social class. In this way, she becomes a parody of religious self-enlightenment as she is never able to fully become pious and selfless and continues to be motivated by material needs.

It can be argued that Miaoyu can be classified as the third most passionate character in the entire novel following Daiyu and Baoyu.¹¹⁰ As her story continues, we see her mental weaknesses escalate as she grows increasingly infatuated with Baoyu. In chapter 63 she sends Baoyu a birthday greeting while forgetting the birthday of her longtime friend Xing Xiuyan with

¹⁰⁹ The use of the term “red dust” is a reference to the Chinese idiomatic expression 看破红尘 which means to see through the world of mortals and often refers to a Buddhist nun or monk.

¹¹⁰ Edwards, 64-65

whom she shares a deep connection. By granting him a branch of her plum blossoms, a sign of purity and coldness, Miaoyu sends a physical representation of herself. However, as always many aspects of Miaoyu are contradictory, so the second half of her gift underscores what she wants to represent. Her pink letter paired with the sending of a flower clearly points toward some sort of sexual attraction. The inconsistencies in her character become the reason for Miaoyu's later tragedy when she is fully transformed from a pure nun to a polluted prostitute, when she is abducted and gang raped by a group of ruffians. This event subsequently causes rumors around town and leads to the burglary of the hermitage and her ultimate ruin. What exposes the over-fastidious quality of her chastity is her lack of true renunciation of the world, which her snobbishness betrays. By joining a nunnery she has avoided marriage and, most importantly, shown through her vows of lifelong chastity that she renounces participation in a patrilineal society, but her relationship with Baoyu breaks her vows, and contributes to her fall. Her tragedy is that the renunciation forced on her has been shallow and false, and it finally distorts and destroys her.¹¹¹

Previous analyses have argued that her death is necessary as a result of her "failure to truly extinguish her desires," and her fate is seen as a way for her to be "duly punished by the gods for her false sincerity." Author Lin Yutang has gone as far as to describe Miaoyu as nothing more than an "abnormal sex maniac." Later critics will reject this reading and argue that while she did undergo a drastic personal decline, the dissolution of her character was a physical manifestation of the decline of the feudal system as it progressed toward socialism.¹¹² Their argument hinges upon the idea that Miaoyu's tragedy is not a punishment for her hypocritical

¹¹¹ This bifurcation of character plays into what Louise Edwards argues is Miaoyu's Madonna-Whore complex. She becomes an instructive display of the link between the pure and polluted as well as the blurred line between religious spirituality and sexual desire.

¹¹² Edwards, 155-160

actions but rather a depiction of a pure minded innovator overcome by the inertia of society. In *Men and Women in Qing China: Gender in The Red Chamber Dream*, Louise Edwards suggests that by entering a nunnery, Miaoyu makes herself even more desirable because of the added component of unattainability. The sexual restraint of nuns and their ability to react to temptation become a measure of their sincerity. Because of her strange history and her transcendent fastidiousness, Miaoyu's vocation as a nun can be seen as equivocal from the start and in the end her inability to fight off the bandits becomes a testament to her sincerity.¹¹³ Interestingly, her verdict in the Registrar predicts the end of her mortal life as thus:

Sad it seemed that your life should in dim-lit strines be wasted,
All the sweets of spring untasted:
Yet, at the last,
Down into the mud and shame your hopes were cast,
Like a white, flawless jade dropped in the muck,
Where only wealthy rakes might bless their luck (SS. 1.5. 142)

This prediction seems to imply that Miaoyu is eventually sold into prostitution by the bandits who kidnapped her. However, as noted by Edwards, her ultimate fate still remains a mystery. Gao E does not make clear whether she submits to her ravishers or resists and meets her death. Early *Hongxue* scholar Cai Yuanpei believes that this ending was left purposefully vague because Gao attempted to make "happy endings in a society that could not provide it" and thus his completions were "insufficiently tragic."¹¹⁴

Among the Twelve Beauties, Miaoyu is the only one to have no relations, either through blood or marriage, to the Jia family. Thus, at first glance, both her placement in Register No. 1 as well as her relatively high ranking seem out of place. Although one can argue that her high social status makes it inappropriate for her to be grouped with Skybright and Faithful in Supplementary

¹¹³ As noted by Kathryn Tsai in her article on the Chinese Buddhist order for women, if a nun is sufficiently sincere and determined to remain pure, then when she is confronted by a band of knife wielding ruffians, Guanyin will step in and protect her.

¹¹⁴ Cai Yuanpei cited in Louise Edward's *Men and Women in Qing China: Gender in the Red Chamber Dream.*, 24

Register No. 2, the fact that she is placed above characters such as Wang Xifeng and Jia Xichun at number five remains difficult to explain. This is further complicated by the fact that within the first eighty chapters, Miaoyu makes only two formal appearances in Chapters 41 and 76. There have been some arguments that Miaoyu was added to the Twelve Beauties because Cao wanted to create a group of twelve, but was unable to find a final character and in the end settled for Miaoyu because of her literary skills. Redologist Liu Xinwu has since debunked this theory by pointing out that Cao could have easily replaced her with Xue Baoqin who not only plays a more prominent role in the story but also is related by blood to the Jia family.¹¹⁵ One possible explanation for her high position amongst the Twelve Beauties is her proximity to Baoyu and the role she plays in the Prospect Garden. Aside from his servants, she is the only person other than Daiyu, Baochai, and perhaps Xiangyun to have hints of a possible romantic relationship with Baoyu. For this reason, it can be argued that Miaoyu, along with Baochai, Daiyu, and Xiangyun, make up the four fairy maidens that Baoyu is introduced to in the Land of Illusion. Continuing along the same lines, it can be inferred that Miaoyu's rank is closely tied to her role in Baoyu's understanding of love and passion.

Because of her violent and tragic ending, Miaoyu's story is often left out of sequels and early media adaptations. Thus, she, is completely left out of Chen's rewriting, *The Red Chamber*, most likely for the same reasons Keqing and Xichun were omitted. Miaoyu was virtually not present in early film and opera productions of *Dream of the Red Chamber* and did not become a major player in any visual form until the 1987 television series. There she has two iconic scenes, one playing *go* in Prospect Garden and one in which she and Baoyu share a somewhat intimate

¹¹⁵Although he has been a major cultural flashpoint in China since he first elaborated on his own ideas and conceptions about the Chinese literature classic *A Dream of Red Mansions*, Liu has also been widely criticized by more traditional scholars of the novel with many believing his close readings departed too far from the original text and made too much use of personal speculation.

moment after a walk. The 1987 version seems to significantly mute the ambiguities presented in the book, choosing to focus instead on Miaoyu's purity, and showing her as a demure character with great skill in poetry writing. Because it wanted to portray her as such an upstanding person, the directors also did away with her aloof and often snobbish attitude. The only remnants of that can be seen in her singular interaction with Grannie Liu. The series seems to focus heavily on a possible romantic relationship with Baoyu, despite her status as a nun. This is particularly evident in episode 19 where the two share a moment amongst the plum blossoms growing in her compound. However, while her encounters in Prospect Garden with Baoyu and Grannie Liu are portrayed in great detail, her narrative is not completed. There is no mention of the possibility of her being taken by ruffians and oddly enough, it is Shi Xiangyun who becomes the prostitute. This diminished role at the end can be explained in two ways. First, early notes on a manuscript version of the novel suggest that it was indeed Shi Xiangyun that was intended to fall into prostitution. It is likely that the producers, in their alteration of what happens after the first eighty chapters, decided to follow the commentary rather than the prophecies in chapter five. Some Redologists believe that this change better illustrates how dire the circumstances of the Jia clan would eventually become, which they say was Cao's original intention.¹¹⁶ Secondly, because the 1987 series was limited to only 36 episodes, it could only focus on a few main points. For this reason, dramatic plot points such as the love triangle between Baoyu, Daiyu, and Baochai as well as Xifeng's fall from glory were given much more emphasis than the other story lines.

Perhaps the most notable difference between the 1987 version and the 2010 remake of the series is that the 2010 remake provides a conclusion to Miaoyu's story. In her final scene, she is seen dragged away by a group of bandits during one of her meditations. A song composed with the words of her prophecy in chapter five plays eerily in the background as she disappears from

¹¹⁶ Zhong, 433

view, leaving only the shattered pieces of her prayer necklace which had fallen from her neck during the altercation. As in the Cheng-Gao ending, the details following Miaoyu's abduction remain unclear. Interestingly enough, "Miaoyu's Song" ends with "Down into the mud and shame your hopes were cast, Like a white, flawless jade dropped in the muck." Thus, it omits the lines that imply she was sold into prostitution. When interviewed, actress Gao Yang, who portrayed Miaoyu in the 2010 version, attested that she preferred this type of open-ended conclusion, stating that it was more characteristic of the mystery that shrouded Miaoyu in the book. She believed that there were two sides to Miaoyu-- the pristine and perfect nun and the immoral pretender who causes those around her to be suspicious of her true motivations. By allowing the audience to come up with their own interpretations, the series ultimately creates a more fluid character.¹¹⁷

There are two main visual differences that set the two film versions apart from one another, the most striking of which is probably the casting. In the 1987 version, the actress who played Miaoyu is significantly older than Baoyu and Daiyu, despite the fact that we are led to believe that there are romantic tensions between the two. The new Miaoyu that was cast in 2010 was actually younger than both Daiyu and the actor who was designated to play the older Baoyu. Her youthful appearance in the newer version seems to follow closer to the novel and in many ways created a more sympathetic side within Miaoyu. This time her arrogance seems less like intended snobbishness and more like youthful misjudgment and indiscretion, while her romantic dabbling with Baoyu seemed more like a childish infatuation than a deliberate attempt to violate her religious vows. Furthermore, unlike its predecessor, the 2010 remake costumed Miaoyu conservatively and made her look identical to the other nuns save for her long hair and a single pink flower in her headpiece. This choice may go back to the remake's desire to remain close to

¹¹⁷ "Xin 'hong' shouguan mingque Miaoyu jieju" Sina Entertainment (*Xinliang Yule*). September 27, 2010

the Cheng-Gao canon as well as create a less salacious character out of Miaoyu.

Shi Xiangyun

Considered to be one of the least polarizing characters of the novel, Shi Xiangyun enters the story in a much less conspicuous manner than the other Twelve Beauties. She is not given a formal introduction like the others, rather she is introduced almost without warning in Chapter 20 as one of the many women who surround Baoyu in Prospect Garden. Often referred to by the others as Cousin Shi, Xiangyun is Baoyu's younger second cousin and the favorite grandniece of the Grandmother Jia. Upon her arrival she immediately strikes an alliance with Baochai, which inadvertently initiates a rivalry with Daiyu. This reality is further exacerbated by her possible romantic connection to Baoyu through her kylin and his jade. Later, Daiyu and Xiangyun, eventually warm to each other, however, and Xiangyun becomes one of Daiyu's closest companions, as Daiyu begins to recognize Xiangyun as someone who is her equal but also unthreatening. The two can be said to balance one another in terms of both personality and writing style. This pairing is most evident during the poetry competitions. In arguably one of the most poignant moments in the garden, Daiyu and Xiangyun compose linked verses. This moment comes at a time when the garden is at a point of rapid decline and Daiyu attempts to lift spirits with her poem "The Flower of the Peach." Her efforts seem to fall flat, however they are resuscitated when Xiangyun answers in kind.

Xiangyun knows the meaning of compromise and is able to find happiness in less than ideal circumstances. [Her] capacity for reflection and equanimity can fortify and encourage Daiyu. [During the poetry competitions], they bring out the best in each other. They compose poems celebrating the present moment, even as its melancholy tone acknowledges the end of their childhood. (Levy, 125)

In another sense, Xiangyun seems to be Daiyu's ideal partner because she is a plausible substitute for Baoyu. This is because unlike the other girls in the garden, she is not preoccupied with her physical appearance and is painted to be a fairly masculine girl who does not share the same

degree of cultivation or the overly refined nature of most other feudal ladies. It is revealed that Xiangyun not only enjoys dressing in men's clothing but "even looks more fetching in boy's clothes than she does in girls" (SS.2.49.474). In other words she is very much painted to be a feminized version of Baoyu's own style. Just as Baoyu is a feminized masculine energy, Xiangyun is a masculinized feminine energy. Unlike Xifeng, another female with masculine tendencies, she does not openly desire to be male and does not harbor the same aggressive attitudes. Her androgynous beauty and her penchant for light-hearted joking as well as her spontaneity and sympathy further developed the parallel. Moreover, her relationship with Daiyu makes her an appropriate and effective replacement for Baoyu because she is able to support Daiyu in moments of intimacy that would be otherwise inappropriate for people of the opposite gender. Ultimately, her similarities to Baoyu make her a favorite among the cousins and she ultimately becomes a permanent fixture in the garden and a mainstay in the poetry club where her work rivals that of both Daiyu and Baochai's. Interestingly, this cheerful attitude and exuberant mischievousness that makes her so reminiscent of Baoyu is contrasted with her less than optimal upbringing. Because she was orphaned during infancy, she grew up with her wealthy aunt and uncle who treated her unkindly and forced her to do work for the family. The juxtaposition of Xiangyun's lighthearted attitude and her less than fortunate background becomes a device the author uses to illustrate the impending end of the feudal era at the expense of the ignorance of the current generation.¹¹⁸ Through Xiangyun, Cao not only hints at the fall of the Shi clan, one of the four main powerful families in the novel, but also shows how the restraints of feudal society destroy the beauty and goodness of youth.

Perhaps one of the most interesting aspects of Xiangyun is her marriage. Amongst all of the Twelve Beauties, she is in arguably one of the happiest marriages. Although it comes to an

¹¹⁸ Levy, 137

early ending, Xiangyun's wedding changes her for the better. This happy state of affairs is contrasted to the changes Baochai undergoes following her marriage to Baoyu. When Baoyu sees Xiangyun for the first time after her wedding, he is surprised to see that she looked even prettier than she did before she was married.

I always imagined that Xiangyun would change once she was married; that's why yesterday I was rather reserved with her. As a result I suppose she herself decided to keep her distance. But to hear her talk now, she seems quite the same as ever. Why has marriage made *my* wife more modest and bashful than before, more tongue-tied than ever? (SS 5.108.161)

The happiness Xiangyun experiences in her marriage is a direct contrast to that of the other women in the novel. Baoyu's bride, Baochai, is not only under the immense burden of having to bring harmony and fulfillment to a family that is very quickly spiraling into ruin, but she is also mocked by the knowledge that her husband does not love her and would have chosen to marry someone else had he been given the choice. Xifeng's relationship with Jia Lian deteriorates after his infidelity and insults cause her to be consumed by sexual jealousy, and Yingchun dies at the hands of a viciously abusive husband. Critic Zhang Qingshan believes that Shi Xiangyun was actually the author Cao Xueqin's favorite character, and thus she was initially provided a happy marriage.¹¹⁹ However, his insistence on being a realist author made him resist happy endings, even for the characters he supposedly loved. In order to paint a more realistic picture of society at the time, Xiangyun ultimately comes to a tragic end as prophesied in the following passage from chapter five:

You were a crystal house by wind and moonlight scoured,
Matched to a perfect, gentle, husband,
Security of bliss at last it seemed,
And all of your childish miseries redeemed.
But soon alas! the clouds of Gao-tang faded,
The waters of the Xiang ran dry.
In our grey world so are things always ordered:

¹¹⁹ Edwards, 151

What then avails it to lament and sigh? (SS 1.5.141-2)

The second to last line suggests that Xiangyun's ultimate tragedy is something that is inescapable in society's current state.

Her story may be one of the reasons why Xiangyun became a much better received character in post-Communist China than in any other era. During this time, the concept of a classless nation hinging upon the ideas of "goodness" and "beauty" was introduced and thus, characters such as Xiangyun who embody this exact ideal were praised. Her tragic story only further reinforced the ills of the feudal past and became a way for critics to exemplify the progressiveness of Chinese society after Mao came to power.¹²⁰ Cao's novel realistically depicts the circumstances of women in the past and thus by implication provides a positive reinforcement of the positive aspects of the current society. Consequently, critics of that time pointed to Cao's novel and his depictions of characters such as Xiangyun as examples of a feminist opposition to feudal customs regarding the situation of women.

Of the four beauties mentioned in this chapter, Xiangyun ranks the highest on the list at number five. Because she is a direct descendent of Grandmother Jia, she naturally ranks higher than those who married into the family or those like Miaoyu who had no relation to them. But at first glance it seems odd that she would be ranked higher than Jia Xichun and Jia Yingchun, given their position as permanent dwellers in the garden as well as their membership in the Jia family. A close inspection shows that both Xichun and Yingchun, unlike Tanchun and Yuanchun, are only Baoyu's cousins and thus hold the same relation to Baoyu as Xiangyun does. Comparatively, Xiangyun plays a more prominent role in the novel than either Xichun or Yingchun who are both rather wooden characters. Together with Miaoyu, she comes between the four springs on the list. Some critics believe that Xiangyun and Miaoyu are presented in the

¹²⁰ Edwards, 24

Registrar together as four and five because they represent the elemental opposites of one another with Miaoyu being the “cold, yin” who wants nothing more than to live in clean, pristine solitude and Xiangyun being the “hot, yang” who yearns for excitement.¹²¹ Many of these same critics argue that both of them are included in the Registrar because of Cao himself who seems to be particularly fond of these characters from an artistic standpoint.¹²² However, if one were to disregard these external reasons and adhere only to the textual evidence, it seems likely that, like Miaoyu, Xiangyun’s high ranking is due to her close relationship to Baoyu and her role in the development of his sexuality.

Xiangyun’s absence from Chen’s *The Red Chamber* is what I consider to be one of her most glaring omissions. Given that Cao’s original novel focuses on four great families, the Jia’s, the Wangs, the Shis, and the Xues, the absence of Xiangyun takes away from one of the basic framing elements of the story’s narrative arc. Moreover, the death of Xiangyun’s parents and her less than ideal upbringing would have been a good way for the author to depict the fall of the Shi family and thus foreshadow the Jias imminent decline. Without the Shis the fall of the Jias ultimately becomes less obvious. One possible reason for Xiangyun’s absence here could be that Chen had hoped to highlight Daiyu’s loneliness and vulnerability. In the original novel, Xiangyun and Daiyu held similar positions within the family and thus the two of them acted to support one another when it came to the inner workings of family politics. Furthermore, Shi Xiangyun proved to be integral in Daiyu’s development as a character in later chapters and thus, her absence makes Daiyu’s solitude much more exaggerated and dramatic.

In recent film and visual adaptations it seems as though the most creative liberty has been taken with Shi Xiangyun’s character. In the 1987 television series it was the alteration of her

¹²¹ Chen, Taiyue “*Shi Xiangyun yu Miaoyu*,” *Honglouloumeng Zhongren* Beijing Publishing Company. Beijing, China 2008. 95

¹²² Chen, 95

ending that generated the most criticism. In the last episode, Baoyu is released from jail and begins to wander aimlessly down a dirt road where he runs into Aroma and has a brief exchange. Eventually he sees Xiangyun, who has been absent from his life since her marriage, and he finds that she has become a prostitute. It is implied that although they had a happy union, her husband's early death has reduced her to poverty, hence this means of seeking employment. This extreme departure from the ending of the novel has angered many critics who believe that this move did a major injustice to a character many of them held dear. Speculation about a possible explanation for this ending included the reasoning that the director lacked a way of resolving the plot after he decided to discard the Cheng-Gao version of the text. Others believed that the screenwriters wanted to combine Miaoyu's ending with Xiangyun's because Miaoyu's story was much too graphic to be shown in its entirety, but at the same time wanted to include the details of Xiangyun's future as a way of staying close to the novel's concerns. The most widely cited reason is that early notes on the manuscript of the novel wrote of final meeting between Baoyu and Xiangyun in a brothel, but it is not known whether this was simply a meeting place or whether Xiangyun had actually taken on prostitution as her profession.¹²³ Whatever the case, it is likely that the producers, in their efforts to refine the Cheng-Gao ending and tie it more closely with Cao's original eighty chapters, chose to make use of this preexisting commentary. The series' producers stood by their decision to make Shi Xiangyun into a prostitute, claiming that this resolution provides a realistic view of the dire circumstances faced by women at this time.

This alteration was revised in the new remake of 2010, which adhered more closely to the Cheng-Gao version of the novel. Xiangyun's story saw no alterations, however, it is important to note that her tomboy-ish exterior was not highlighted as much in the film version as in the novel. Just as the other girls wear pastels, she is generally seen wearing a sea foam green dress paired

¹²³ Zhong, 439

with intricate headpieces. It can be argued that she is almost presented as hyper-feminine despite the fact that the book described her as a somewhat androgynous character. One possible reason for this feminization is that the producers, in order to garner a younger audience, felt it necessary to sexualize the characters in order to make the current generation of viewers better able to relate to them. Oddly enough, in the 2010 series, Xiangyun is paralleled much more closely to Xifeng than she is to Daiyu. Her boisterous attitude and lack of social graces are exemplified in such a way as to make her seem like a younger version of Xifeng. It is very possible that the juxtaposition of these two characters was unintentional, however, the resemblance between them does make an interesting commentary on Xiangyun's later tragic fate.

Conclusion

Cao Xueqin's Twelve Beauties of Jingling continue to be some of the most perplexing characters in the novel. Their inclusion in this prestigious list prompts readers to question their importance in the novel and inspires them to look closely at their respective contributions to the novel's plot. Although many of the members on the list are not considered to be "main characters," their presence is nonetheless important to the novel's progression. Each of the Twelve Beauties provides a different perspective on what it meant to be a feudal woman while their stories and tragic endings expose Cao's intrinsic dissatisfactions with society at the time. A deconstruction of the characters show that they are not simply ranked based on their importance in the novel. Rather their position on the list is a product of a variety of different factors including their rank within the family, intrinsic artistic value, relation to the main male protagonist Baoyu, romantic fate, and spirituality. Ultimately, the twelve narratives become a representation of feminine agency and the limited choices that are given to women during Cao's time.

A close look at the various groups of characters illuminates their roles in describing a particular facet of the Jia family. The Four Springs reveals the different possibilities for young, well-educated women after they come of age and the various ways the outside world corrupts their pure and youthful innocence. Yingchun's disastrous marriage, Tanchun's departure from Beijing, and Yuanchun's early death as the Imperial Concubine all reflect a different tragic possibility that comes with marriage. Through Xichun and her decision to become a nun and enter a nunnery, Cao provides an alternate ending that comes with the denial to conform to social norms. These characters are paired with an older generation that includes characters such as Xifeng, Li Wan, and Qin Keqing each of whom represent what is like to be a daughter-in-law in a prestigious feudal family. Li Wan becomes the epitome of the Confucian expectations of the

time while Xifeng and Keqing deviate from this socially expected norm. Xifeng's thirst for power contributes to her fall from grace and it is suggested that Keqing's hypersensuality causes her untimely death. The inclusion of peripheral characters like Miaoyu and Shi Xiangyun provide an interesting view on an outsider's experience within a failing feudal family and the ripple effect their fall has on tangential members. Finally, the inclusion of Qiaojie introduces a new generation of Jia family and is integral in providing a comprehensive picture of the Jia family. Born into the Jia family, she is ultimately raised in a completely different environment. Interestingly, the two characters considered to be the novel's two main characters seem to reveal the least less about the family dynamics. This may be because they are the only two characters who supposedly do not have an autobiographical basis. Regardless, they do provide interesting commentary on the state of social propriety and the role it plays in marriage ceremony. In this way, the twelve of them together illuminate the tales of three generations of women belonging to a powerful family and how their lives evolve during a time of social unrest.

Since the novel's publication Cao's *Twelve Beauties of Jingling* have been modified, omitted, simplified, and questioned in subsequent works. In a way their various representations in the original novel foretell the various changes implemented in later works. While it can be argued that these "sequels" in many respects are highly imitative and are certainly not as complex or fully developed as the parent novel, they are not without their own merits. None of these works adhere completely to the original novel and yet they are nonetheless able to captivate and perplex readers. Each work not only provides a reflection of the time period they represent, they also revitalize the original novel and continue to enhance the legacy of Cao's work. More importantly, these sequels are tailored to coincide with their respective audiences and thus the changes that are made provide subtle commentary on the social topography of the

time. Adaptations in film and television provide a type of visual representation and a unique form of storytelling that had not previously been seen while rewritings and translations invite the interpretations of a new generation of readers and a new cultural perspective with which to analyze them.

Pauline Chen's *The Red Chamber* introduces Cao's iconic masterpiece to an American audience as she re-imagines the characters and attempts to create a compelling new version of China's great literary masterpiece by winnowing the cast of over four hundred to a little over twenty. Because she chooses to focus her story on what she considered to be the three main female characters, Lin Daiyu, Xue Baochai, and Wang Xifeng, the interplay between the various women in the "red chamber" has been radically simplified. The goal of her retelling is not dissimilar from Gao E's goal in finishing Cao's original novel. Her desire stemmed from a feeling of incompleteness following the end of the parent work. However, unlike Gao E, her ultimate goal was to tell a story that could speak to a contemporary audience while simultaneously espousing a more feminist agenda, something she felt was missing from the original novel. She attempts to give these characters more power and agency during a time of female isolation and rearranges the story so that these strong women forged bonds, redeemed their lives, and found moments of happiness through friendship and generosity. Through the omission of particularly tragic female characters such as Miaoyu and Yingchun and those that are driven by more traditionally Confucian principles as well as through the modification of the storylines of relevant characters, Chen is able to accomplish this type of retelling. Ultimately, her choices in characterization reflect her artistic desires and are by no means attempts to retell every aspect of the parent novel. Clearly the characters that are preserved in the end are those who are able to resonate most strongly with her intended Western audience. Interestingly, Chen also

seems to point to her doubts about the ending proposed in the Cheng-Gao version. While she takes creative liberties with much of Cao's work, she almost wholly disregards the final forty chapters.

The fact that the 1987 television series began filming when it did is rather important in analyzing the particularly changes and directorial choices that were made during its production. Given that writing began during a time that boasted a return to social realism, as opposed to the socialist realism promoted by the Chinese Communist Party during the Mao Era, it was decided that the adaptation should emphasize the realism in the novel. Directors hoped that the adaptation would show how the novel functioned as an index of China's feudal society and depict how the Jia family and their associated characters reflected class struggles of the time. As a result, many of the supernatural elements were completely disregarded. Furthermore, it was decided that this adaptation should stay faithful only to the first eighty chapters. As the goal was to provide a concise televised narrative geared to an audience composed of people who had a background in the novel as well as people who had no understanding of it whatsoever, the series was organized in a way that was significantly more straightforward than the novel. In this way, the changes implemented to the characters, their narratives, and their visual cues were made to accommodate this simplification. As the love triangle between Daiyu, Baochai, and Baoyu is largely dependent on supernatural elements, that part of the original plot is downplayed significantly. Moreover, as the drama was also meant to be a type of social commentary on feudalism, changes had to be made to Xifeng's character in order to villainize her as the representative of feudal practices.

This TV version contrasts to the remaking of another televised version of *Dream of the Red Chamber* in 2010. The differences between the two versions is rather symptomatic of the social changes that have occurred in the past two decades, as the socioeconomic and

sociopolitical culture has shifted to focus on the consumer market. In this way, this new adaptation attempts to appeal to a younger viewing audience, a group that has the greatest amount of power in the cultural market. The cinematography and the casting and costuming reflect the need to gain this type of viewership. Even the switch to include the Cheng-Gao ending can be explained by this intended audience. By having a voice over tell a familiar story, the producers are able to satisfy consumers and channel their creative energies into making the series visually appealing.

In the end, the twelve beauties represent rather fluid characters. While Cao might have been their initial creator, he is no way their sole proprietor. They have been molded throughout the years and have taken on lives of their own in various forms that Cao would have never thought possible. Their existence is rather timeless as they go on being continuously revitalized. In this way, their continued use in modern works and their continued interest to students become a testament to their resilience. Cao may have not anticipated these changes, but ultimately he gave rise to characters who could interest people in new situations and different times.

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