

紅樓夢

CHINESE CLASSICS

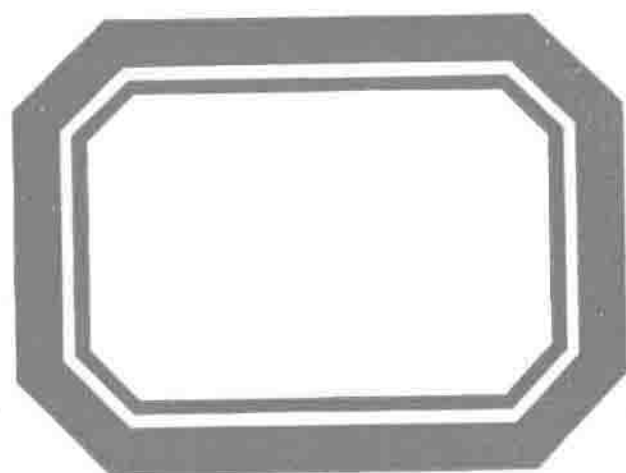
A Dream of Red Mansions

BY CAO XUEQIN AND GAO E

VOLUME I



FOREIGN LANGUAGES PRESS BEIJING



TEAM OF RED MANSIONS

Volume I

CAO XUEQIN
and GAO E



FOREIGN LANGUAGES PRESS BEIJING

First Edition 1994

Fourth Printing 2005

Translated by

Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang

Website:

<http://www.flp.com.cn>

E-mail Addresses:

Info@flp.com.cn

Sales@flp.com.cn



ISBN 7-119-00643-6

©Foreign Languages Press, Beijing, 1994

Published by Foreign Languages Press

24 Baiwanzhuang Str., Beijing 100037, China

Distributed by China International Book Trading Corporation

35 Chegongzhuang Xilu, Beijing 100044, China

P.O.Box 399, Beijing, China

Printed in the People's Republic of China

A DREAM
OF RED MANSIONS

INTRODUCTION

In a book called *Folk Ballads of the Capital*, published in the early 19th century during the Jiaqing reign period of the Qing Dynasty, we find the following two lines: "One can not call himself erudite / Without touching upon *Red Mansions* in his talk." In fact, *A Dream of Red Mansions* is a controversial work, so much so that when discussing it even the best of friends almost come to blows. Two hundred years have passed since its first appearance, and yet this novel is still a hot topic of conversation among the Chinese people, and criticism and research concerning it have crystallized into a specialized branch of study, whimsically referred to as "Redology."

A Dream of Red Mansions is rich in ideas and concepts. It is a multi-faceted world of art into which the more one delves the more one finds. The charm of the novel lies, in short, in its revealing youth fully and truthfully, in its uncovering the naivete, zeal, grace and tenderness of the younger generation. Although the era in which the protagonists of the novel Jia Baoyu and Lin Daiyu lived, together with its social conditions and cultural environment, has long since vanished, their dreams and longings, together with those of the young ladies of the Grand View Garden, still strike a sympathetic chord in the hearts of the people of today.

The author of *A Dream of Red Mansions* is Cao Xueqin (1715? – 1763?). His personal name was Zhan, and

his style (name adopted by a man at his coming of age), Mengruan. He was also known as Xueqin, Qipu or Qinxi. His ancestral home was in what is now Liaoyang City, in Northeast China, and his forebears, although Han Chinese themselves, had been accepted into the Manchu Right White Banner. For three successive generations, a period of some 60 years, his ancestors had held the post of Textile Commissioner in Jiangning (present-day Nanjing). His paternal great grandmother, surnamed Sun, had been nursemaid to the infant who was later to become the Kangxi emperor, and his grandfather, Cao Yin, had been the future emperor's study companion and close attendant, accompanying him when he came to the throne on four of his six inspection tours of the south, a singular honor. After the death of Cao Yin, the family, under the headship of Cao Xueqin's father Cao Fu, continued to enjoy the emperor's favor, but when the Yongzheng emperor ascended the throne, Cao Fu was removed from his office and punished on charges of financial mismanagement and incompetence in the management of courier stations. The family property was confiscated, and the Caos' halcyon days came to an end. They moved to Beijing. Cao Xueqin, who had spent his childhood in pampered luxury, now shared the family's fate of a wretched existence. Dogged by poverty, he eventually moved to a rustic hovel on the western outskirts of the capital. The death of his young son in 1762 was a crushing blow to Cao, from which he never recovered, and on February 12, 1763 he himself passed away.

There is no reliable documentary evidence for the exact dates of Cao Xueqin's birth and death, and scholars are

divided on the subject. There are three theories regarding the date of his death, namely, the "Renwu" theory (the 27th year of the Qianlong reign period, 1762), the "Kuiwei" theory (the 28th year of Qianlong, 1763) and the "Jiashen" theory (the 29th year of Qianlong, 1764). Regarding the year of his birth, it can be calculated from the fact that he had not reached the age of fifty when he died.

Cao Xueqin was haughty by nature, but an extremely talented literary man. His friend Dun Cheng compared his poems to those of the Tang Dynasty poet Li He, describing them as bold, solid and having the cold glitter of a knife blade. Unfortunately, all that survives of Cao's poetry is two lines of a poem dedicated to a play adapted by Dun Cheng from the famous Tang Dynasty poet Bai Juyi's long narrative poem *Song of a Lute Player*. Cao was also a painter who liked painting stones, in a style described by another friend, Dun Min, as sturdy. But Cao Xueqin's fame rests on his magnificent achievement in writing the full-length novel *A Dream of Red Mansions*.

We know little about the process of the novel's creation. In the "Author's Preface," Cao says, "In this busy, dusty world, having accomplished nothing, I suddenly recalled all the girls I had known, considering each in turn, and it dawned on me that all of them surpassed me in behavior and understanding; that I, shameful to say, for all my masculine dignity, fell short of the gentler sex. But since this could never be remedied, it was no use regretting it. There was really nothing to be done.

"I decided then to make known to all how I, though dressed in silks and delicately nurtured thanks to the Imperial favor and my ancestors' virtue, had nevertheless ig-

nored the kindly guidance of my elders as well as the good advice of teachers and friends, with the result that I had wasted half my life and not acquired a single skill. But no matter how unforgivable my crimes, I must not let all the lovely girls I have known pass into oblivion through my wickedness or my desire to hide my shortcomings.

"Though my home is now a thatched cottage with matting windows, earthen stove and rope-bed, this shall not stop me from laying bare my heart. Indeed, the morning breeze, the dew of night, the willows by my steps and the flowers in my courtyard inspire me to wield my brush. Though I have little learning or literary talent, what does it matter if I tell a tale in rustic language to leave a record of all those lovely girls. This should divert readers too and help distract them from their cares."

From this we know that *A Dream of Red Mansions* was written in circumstances of dire poverty, after Cao had suffered the decline of his family fortunes from its heyday of power and affluence. His life experiences not only provided the material for the novel, they also raised his awareness and tempered his character. In Chapter One, he says that he spent ten years writing and revising the novel. In an early handwritten copy of the novel, under the title *The Tale of the Stone* (Jiaxu edition), it says in Chapter One: "Pages full of fantastic talk penned with bitter tears / All men call the author mad, none his message hears." There is this marginal note on this: "Only one who can hear the message has bitter tears and this book was written through the tears. On the threshold of the year 1762, the author died, his tears all spent, before the book was completed." The extant early handwritten copies all

contain only the first 80 chapters. It is said that Cao wrote more chapters, but unfortunately they have not survived. The last 40 chapters of the present 120-chapter version were added by a later hand. In the preface to the 1791 edition, Cheng Weiyuan and Gao E say that the last 40 chapters were bought from a second-hand market, and that they merely edited them. However, some scholars are of the opinion that Gao E actually wrote the last 40 chapters, and that the story of the second-hand market was just a smokescreen. Although the last 40 chapters are clearly not up to the standard of the first 80 either philosophically or artistically, they round out the novel, tie up the loose ends of the plot and complete the sense of tragedy. Their creation was a lasting accomplishment; the fact that the 120-chapter version of the novel has been enjoyed by readers for over 200 years amply attests to this. As Cheng and Gao had revised Cao's first 80 chapters when publishing the 120-chapter version, it is necessary to compare the 120-chapter version with the early editions of the novel, before Cao Xueqin's original work can be seen in its true light.

A Dream of Red Mansions charts the course of prosperity and decline of an aristocratic family. It is a tragedy of love and marriage. The hero of the novel is Jia Baoyu, a direct descendant of the Jia family of the Rong Mansion. An intelligent boy of excellent breeding, he is the heir of the Jia family. However, he has no inclination for the aristocratic way of life, which he finds hypocritical, hateful and corrupt. To him, pure beauty is to be found in young girls, including low-born servant girls. He says: "Girls are made of water, men of mud. I feel clean and

refreshed when I am with girls but find men dirty and stinking." Apart from the customary morning and evening salutation to his grandmother and parents, Jia Baoyu does his best to avoid taking part in the pastimes and activities of others of his station, and detests the pursuit of rank and wealth indulged in by other young gentlemen. His sole delight is mingling with the innocent and guileless young girls of the household in the Grand View Garden. He says to them: "In my own case, if I had any luck I should die now with all of you around me; still better if your tears for me were to become a great stream and float my corpse away to some quiet spot deserted even by crows or any other birds, to vanish with the wind, never again to be born as a human being. That's how I should like to die." By nature, Jia Baoyu has a deep aversion to feudal society. He is quite unmoved when his elders castigate him for his heretical inclinations and others consider him mad; on the contrary his rebellious nature becomes more ardent and firm under the impact of constant feudal oppression, culminating in his falling in love with Lin Daiyu and his marriage with Xue Baochai.

Marriage in feudal times was not based on love, but on considerations of family advantage. The Jias, although they have been a distinguished clan for generations, are in decline, not only economically — the income from their estates is no longer sufficient to support their lavish lifestyle — but more importantly, they are in decline morally and spiritually. Nowhere in the whole clan is there a scion who gives them so much hope for their future prosperity as Jia Baoyu. In this situation, the Jias determine to marry him off to Xue Baochai, who comes from a noble and very

proper family. They see her as the very person not only to assist them with money but also to steer Baoyu back onto the road of feudal rectitude. The problem is that Baoyu does not love Xue Baochai, although she is an intelligent and beautiful girl, as her character is the opposite of his, being inclined to the ways of feudal orthodoxy. Baoyu has lost his heart to the frail Lin Daiyu, an orphan being brought up by her maternal grandmother, the matriarch of the household. Lin Daiyu manages to keep her self-respect in the midst of the grand and snobbish Jias, warding off slights and bullying with her candid and carping tongue. Her staunch, defiant character matches that of Baoyu well. The early period of the love between Jia Baoyu and Lin Daiyu has a childish naivete about it, but as they become more aware of their feelings their love ripens. However, as the fortunes of the Jia family worsen, the head of the household grows daily more anxious to correct Baoyu's waywardness so that the boy can restore the situation, hinting time and again that Baoyu and Baochai would make a perfect match and tightening the restrictions on Baoyu's freedom. The bonds of feudal oppression tighten around Baoyu and Daiyu. In this situation, Daiyu's health, always precarious, begins to fail rapidly. Eventually she dies of love and grief. Cao Xueqin's original intention was to have Baoyu marry Baochai immediately after Daiyu's death, only to find that he can not forget his sweetheart. He cannot live with Baochai, and finally leaves the family home. The "perfect match" turns into a tragedy.

Love Stories of talented young scholars and beautiful girls abounded in the Shunzhi and Kangxi reign periods, such as *The Cold Swallow of Pingshan* (*Ping Shan Leng*

Yan) and *The Story of the Soulmate* (*Hao Qiu Zhuan*). How does *A Dream of Red Mansions* differ from them? First of all, the author places the convoluted love and marriage plot in a realistic, complex and concrete social setting, which is not merely a stage and backdrop for the tragedy; the Jia family and its mansion also has an intimate connection with the birth, development and conclusion of this tragedy of love and marriage. The novel traces the roots of the emotional tragedy by means of describing the interactions between the love and marriage aspect of the plot and the social environment, including the mansion and its inhabitants. Secondly, Cao Xueqin treats the love affair between Jia Baoyu and Lin Daiyu differently from the way such matters are treated in the traditional genre of novels featuring talented young scholars and beautiful girls. In the latter novels the characters are one-dimensional — the girls are invariably beautiful, intelligent and cultured, and the young men are invariably masters of poetry and other literary accomplishments, and are eager to gain fame. Moreover, even though literary talent is prominent in these novels, in the end it is the young men's winning rank and honor which is the key to his union in marriage with the girl of his heart. The love affair between Jia Baoyu and Lin Daiyu is certainly not from this typecast mold. Baoyu is a talented person, but he scorns fame and fortune, and refuses to pursue an official position through the imperial examination system, resolutely rebuffing all — even intimates like Shi Xiangyun and Xue Baochai — when they urge him to be ambitious. In the eyes of most other people, Baoyu is a dullard. Of all the young ladies in the household, only Lin Daiyu understands him, sym-

pathizing with his straightforward nature, and his loathing of hypocrisy, affectation and worldly calculation. Lin Daiyu and Xue Baochai are equally charming physically and intellectually, and Baoyu was attracted to both of them at first. In fact, for a while he clung to Xue Baochai, putting aside Lin Daiyu. But as he gains more experience of life, especially after he underwent the painful clash of feudal contradictions in his surroundings, the real objective of his love becomes clear, and he gradually distances himself from Xue Baochai, who has been urging him to adapt himself to the feudal mores, and he cleaves once more to his true soulmate Lin Daiyu. The foundation of their love is their mutual opposition to feudal thinking. The heroes and heroines of the other popular novels too have their struggles to exert control over their own lives, but their opposition is to the marriage conventions of the time, and certainly not to the basic principles of feudalism. In actual fact, the heroes of these novels are all paragons of what promising young men in feudal society were supposed to be like. There is in them no real opposition to the feudal system. They mostly excel in the imperial examinations, and when they do so their families become reconciled to their unconventional choices of marriage partners, and in the end harmony reigns. The love between Baoyu and Daiyu, on the other hand, represents a fundamental challenge to the interests of the feudal family. As an orphan, Lin Daiyu has no family connections who can help the Jia family financially; more importantly, she aids and abets Baoyu in his rebellion against feudal mores, leading him down a path that spells ruin for the family. So the Lady Dowager, the head of the Jia family, despite lov-

ing her sickly young relative dearly, regards her as completely unsuitable as a marriage partner for Baoyu. The tale of love and marriage in *A Dream of Red Mansions* is an account of the burgeoning of a trend toward pursuit of personal freedom and opposition to the feudal system as a whole as the feudal period was entering its closing phase in China. The tragedy produced by this antagonism clearly reveals the irrationality of feudal society and conveys to the reader a sense of its looming demise.

A Dream of Red Mansions is the peak of the art of the novel in ancient China. Its artistic achievement is displayed first of all in its dazzling array of characters. Jia Baoyu, Lin Daiyu, Xue Baochai, Wang Xifeng, Shi Xiangyun, Tanchun, Second Sister You, Third Sister You, Xiren, Qingwen, Yuanyang and the others all have their distinct personalities and are as true to life as if they were living amongst us. These richly complex characters with their different stations in life and divergent views and philosophies act out an intricate pattern of human relationships and conflicts within the Jia family mansion. Apart from their distinct ways of acting and speaking, and the peculiarities of their appearances, dress and living arrangements, these people all have clear character traits. The reader knows who is who just by their manner of speaking or the layouts of their rooms. Such character delineation is a rare accomplishment not only in Chinese literature but in the whole field of world literature.

The literary merit of *A Dream of Red Mansions* is also displayed in the grandness and exquisiteness of its artistic structure. The novel is a microcosm of the world of its time, revolving around the love between Jia Baoyu and Lin

Daiyu and Xue Baochai. The host of personages and events converge on, link and restrict each other to make the plot develop smoothly in a chain of cause and effect, as the tragedy moves dramatically and inexorably to its climax. The world of *A Dream of Red Mansions* is as rich, complicated, deep and natural as life itself. Though created by Cao Xueqin, the novel betrays no trace of craftsmanship, but presents itself as a natural and spontaneous entity, and it is this aspect that marks it as a sublime work of art.

A Dream of Red Mansions is an encyclopedic novel. Centered on an aristocratic family, it unrolls a panorama of social history. Every grade and station of Chinese society of that time — from an imperial consort to peddlers and messenger boys — are presented in a true-to-life fashion. In addition, all the social contradictions which emerged toward the end of the feudal period are threaded through the plot: for instance, the conflict between master and slave, that between the master of the house's legal wife and his concubines, the economic crisis in a noble clan in the absence of an heir, and that between feudalism and the newly sprouting spirit of democracy. The novel also provides a wealth of details concerning aristocratic households in those days — garden architecture, the equipage of carriages, clothing and ornaments, customs and etiquette, food and drink, medicines, etc. Indeed, the cultural reference content of *A Dream of Red Mansions* is of a kind rarely seen in the history of world literature.

A Dream of Red Mansions attracted the interest of a wide range of readers as soon as it began to circulate in hand-copied form. In his "Preface to *A Dream of Red*

Mansions,” Cheng Weiyuan says, “At that time, people would place a copy in a market place and charge an exuberant price for it. In no time, the novel got a great fame.” Following its publication in moveable type in 1791, *A Dream of Red Mansions* spread like wildfire, even beyond the borders of China. The novel had a particularly profound impact on young people, with young women weeping, swooning and being driven almost to distraction while reading the poignant love story of Baoyu and Daiyu. The tragedy of *A Dream of Red Mansions* resonated in the hearts of young people in feudal society, who were ardently yearning for freedom, with the result that the guardians of feudal morality regarded the novel with horror and several times banned it or destroyed copies. Some orthodox literary figures even slandered Cao Xueqin himself, and for a long time it was said that “young people must refrain from reading ‘Red Mansions’.” Despite the bans, the novel spread. Though they frowned upon the novel, feudal literati were fascinated with it in spite of themselves. From the Jiaqing reign period on sequels appeared, such as *The Later Dream of Red Mansions*, *Sequel to A Dream of Red Mansions*, *Dreaming Again Among Gorgeous Mansions*, *More Red Mansion Dreams*, *A Dream of Red Mansions Supplement*, *The Expanded Dream of Red Mansions* and *A Red Mansions Fantasy*. These imitations were written under the inspiration of Confucian ethics and the outlook that believed in retribution for sin and rewards for virtue. They tried to change the nature of the tragedy by getting Lin Daiyu to come back to life and concocting all sorts of happy reunions, representing an ideological tide of reaction to *A Dream of Red Mansions*.

Criticism and studies of *A Dream of Red Mansions* started with Zhi Yanzhai (a pseudonym). The title of the novel when it first appeared in handwritten copies was *The Tale of the Stone with Commentary by Zhi Yanzhai*. In fact, Zhi Yanzhai was not the only commentator; others were Ji Husou, Tang Cun, Mei Xi and Song Zhai (all pseudonyms). However, Zhi Yanzhai was the most prolific commentator. Few details are known about Zhi Yanzhai's life, but from the content and language of his comments we can surmise that he knew Cao Xueqin well, was very familiar with the circumstances of the writing of *A Dream of Red Mansions* and had participated in its revision. But Zhi Yanzhai's ideological standpoint was not as progressive as Cao's; he did not fully appreciate *A Dream of Red Mansions* and there are many places where his appraisal goes astray. Nevertheless, his comments are of value: He confirms that Cao Xueqin was the author of the novel, and gives some clues to his life and family background; he provides some details concerning the birth of the novel and the process of its creation. He also sheds light on some essential points of the plot in Cao Xueqin's additional chapters to the original 80-chapter version of the novel, and makes some unique literary analyses of it.

Zhi Yanzhai was followed by a host of other critics and commentators in a field which came to be called "Redology." Prior to the May 4th Movement of 1919, the two most influential schools of Redology were the Pingdian (commentating) and Suoyin (Tracing Out the Hidden) schools. The former were represented by Zhi Yanzhai, who was followed by "Guardian of the Flowers" Wang Xuexiang, "Gentleman of Leisure" Zhang Xinzhi and