

**REIMAGINING MASCULINITY IN *HONGLOU MENG*:  
THE CASE OF WANG XI-FENG**

**RACHEL MCGEE**

ANS 678H  
Special Honors in Asian Studies  
The University of Texas at Austin  
May 2024

---

DR. CHIU-MI LAI  
Department of Asian Studies  
Thesis Supervisor

---

DR. LUKE WARING  
Department of Asian Studies  
Second Reader

Copyright © 2024 by RACHEL MCGEE

All Rights Reserved

*For my parents, Paula and David McGee.  
Thank you for being a pillar of support  
and for your years of unconditional love.*

# Table of Contents

<b><u>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</u></b>	<i>iv</i>
<b><u>ABSTRACT</u></b>	<i>v</i>
<b><u>PREFACE</u></b>	<i>vi</i>
<b><u>PART I: REIMAGINING MASCULINITY IN <i>HONGLOU MENG</i></u></b>	
<b><u>INTRODUCTION</u></b>	<b>1</b>
<b><u>THESIS OVERVIEW</u></b>	<b>6</b>
<b><u>CONSTRUCTION OF THE AUTHENTIC SELF</u></b>	<b>7</b>
<b><u>MANIFESTATION OF <i>QING</i> AND ILLNESS</u></b>	<b>13</b>
<b><u>PART II: THE CASE OF WANG XI-FENG</u></b>	
<b><u>EMBODIMENT OF MASCULINITY</u></b>	<b>21</b>
<b><u>MANIFESTATION OF EXCESS <i>YANG</i> AND ILLNESS</u></b>	<b>36</b>
<b><u>CONCLUSION</u></b>	<b>44</b>
<b><u>APPENDIX: EDUCATION AND LEARNING IN <i>HONGLOU MENG</i></u></b>	<b>47</b>
<b><u>BIBLIOGRAPHY</u></b>	<b>51</b>

## Acknowledgments

This thesis project could not have been made possible without the supervision of my primary thesis advisor, Dr. Lai. She has supported me over the course of my education at the University of Texas at Austin and has been an incredible mentor for me since my freshman year. Her mentorship has been crucial in my growth as a student and my time with her has given me lifelong lessons that will benefit me long after the conclusion of my undergraduate education. I truly cannot thank her enough for her encouragement of my academic goals. I would like to thank my second reader, Dr. Waring, and for the wonderful courses I had the pleasure of taking with him. I also want to thank Dr. Hurley for being the honors advisor for our thesis cohort and for his guidance in navigating this long journey.

I am deeply grateful to the Bill and Tomiko Kennedy Memorial Endowed Presidential Scholarship in Chinese studies for the support of my undergraduate studies. I am incredibly grateful for the generous support of my thesis from the Kevyn Kennedy and Chien-Yi Kung Endowed Excellence Fund in Chinese Studies.

I want to thank the plethora of professors that helped me grow throughout my academic career. I particularly want to thank Dr. Sung-Sheng Yvonne Chang. I thoroughly enjoyed her courses in contemporary Taiwan and Chinese literature. I appreciate all of my Chinese and Japanese language professors throughout my language journey. They have brought joy and compassion to every class and their enthusiasm for teaching has had a lasting impact on me. I hope to one day follow suit and become a teacher with the same passion.

I would also like to thank my friends and family for believing in me throughout my academic journey. To my best friends, without your constant support and unwavering dedication to seeing me grow, I surely would not have made it this far. And finally, to my parents, Paula and David, your unconditional support and guidance has made my academic goals come to fruition and I am forever grateful to call you my parents.

## Abstract

This thesis is an exploration of how masculinity is reimagined in the 18th c. masterpiece, *Honglou meng* by Cao Xueqin. A significant contributing factor to the enduring appeal of this 120-chapter novel is a presentation of memorable characters that project a wide spectrum of gendered roles. The thesis argument is focused on the reimagining of masculinity in the case of a principal female character, Wang Xi-feng, who is one of the most famous figures in Chinese fiction. The character is an exemplary case study for how the women in *Honglou meng* are not defined by Qing Dynasty gendered expectations. In-depth analysis draws from Maram Epstein's "construction of the authentic self" (2012). This thesis further explores the significant intersection of the embodiment of masculinity and illness, on both physical and metaphysical levels.

## Preface

The road to my particular thesis topic was a long time in the making. Through taking many Asian Studies classes at UT with Dr. Lai, there are many topics I could have pursued, many of which I considered viable before landing on my thesis topic. Because college is a time of discovery, there were many avenues of research I fell in love with throughout my academic career. However, I could never find a topic that I could genuinely see myself exploring in the scope of a thesis. At the time, I was taking numerous history classes that focused on women and gender, such as Dr. Waring's "Female Voices in China" class, and I wanted to incorporate this interest into a thesis topic.

Dr. Lai recommended I read *Honglou meng* and lent me a copy of the first volume of *The Story of the Stone*, the authoritative translation of *Honglou meng* by David Hawkes. I was still unsure about pursuing a pre-modern topic, especially as *Honglou meng* is such a daunting topic with a rich and extensive scholarship. My passion for *Honglou meng* began one fateful night when I could not fall asleep. As I tossed and turned, my mind wandered to my bedside table, where my eyes rested on the first volume. I picked up the book and read the first chapter at 4:00 am. I was intrigued by the complexity of the characters, particularly the women. These 18th c. characters were so vibrant, and I connected to them in a way that was unexpected. I knew I wanted to focus on the women in the novel as a thesis topic. I had found a way to pursue my interest in gender dynamics.

The joy of researching *Honglou meng* is that there is a vast body of scholarship to engage in and I have barely scratched the surface. Finding a fresh perspective on this incredibly well-studied novel is challenging. The challenges aside, researching and writing this thesis has been academically and personally rewarding. My research covered many different fields and in this thesis I tried to incorporate these various areas of study into a topic that I hope will serve as a fresh take on this beloved and enduring novel.

# Part I

## Reimagining Masculinity in *Honglou meng*

### Introduction

The masterpiece, *Honglou meng*, commonly known in English as *Dream of the Red Chamber*, introduces a rich and intriguing world. The memorable characters that span a wide spectrum of gender roles contribute to the enduring appeal of this 120-chapter novel by Cao Xueqin (1710-1765). Cao's *magnum opus* is an iconic literary work in the Chinese tradition that reflects the author's own life as a banner-man and a degree-holding scholar in the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) (Smith 335). Significantly, the novel draws upon the author's relationships with the females in his household, many of whom he respected and admired.

The thesis is an exploration of the reimagining of masculinity in *Honglou meng* (HLM). The thesis argument focuses on a principal female character, Wang Xi-feng (née Wang), who is one of the most famous figures in Chinese fiction. The character is an exemplary case study for how the women in HLM are not defined by Qing Dynasty gendered expectations. In-depth analysis draws from Maram Epstein's "construction of the authentic self" (2012). This thesis further explores the significant intersection of the embodiment of masculinity and illness, on both physical and metaphysical levels.

The authoritative translation of HLM is by David Hawkes and John Minford, titled *The Story of the Stone*, which was taken from the original title of a version of Cao Xueqin's novel in

his lifetime. The core text for this thesis is the five-volume translation by David Hawkes (Volumes I-III) and John Minford (Volumes IV-V), all published by Penguin (1973-1986).<sup>1</sup>

Gender roles in society in the Qing Dynasty were a means to an end to fulfillment of duty as prescribed to roles for men and women. Social roles defined how men and women should conduct themselves. In such a society that placed emphasis on rituals, there was a standard practice for virtually every aspect of life, so it would follow that there would be an equally standard upheld for gendered roles. However, what about those in society who deviate from conventional notions of gendered expectations and how do they seek to reimagine them? I argue that in HLM, the reimagining of masculinity is key to promoting these deviations from conventional notions as options in an array of choices, rather than to be rejected outright. Subverting gendered expectations is a significant factor in the enduring appeal of the novel and it carries an everlasting social commentary to this day.

Qing society at the time when HLM was written did not offer as many opportunities for women as later in modern Chinese society. For example, women had few rights to claim property and wives did not have a right to divorce unless they were physically mutilated by their husband, or were sold into prostitution by their husbands. Alternatively, men could divorce their wives for any number of reasons. Furthermore, chastity was expected of women, whereas it was not expected of men (Smith 343). For men, there were rigid social constructs. To prove

---

<sup>1</sup> Cao Xueqin's original manuscript consisted of 80 chapters. This 80-chapter manuscript was the only version passed around in his lifetime. Thirty years after Cao Xueqin's death, Gao E and Cheng Weiyuan published a 120-chapter completed edition titled *Honglou meng*, *Dream of the Red Chamber*. For the completed edition, Gao E and Cheng Weiyuan collated the remaining chapters from Cao Xueqin that were absent in the original manuscript. Cheng gave Gao E the task of editing and revising the remaining fragments into the 120 chapters. The compiled 120-chapter version is known as the Cheng-Gao edition. Scholars speculate that Gao E was more than just the editor but was probably the author of the remaining 40 chapters. Additionally, it is this Cheng-Gao edition that both David Hawkes and John Minford translated. David Hawkes translated the first 80 chapters and had John Minford translate the remaining 40 chapters. Retrieved from The Library of Congress summary on the catalog entry for *Hong lou meng yi bai er shi hui*. <https://www.loc.gov/item/2021666448/>



themselves adequate to their clan, they would need to excel academically, pass their civil service exams, and serve on the Qing court as an official. Family life was highly structured, with ritual handbooks being a part of every household so that every family had guidance for proper behavior (Smith 345). Of the many points of guidance, filial piety was paramount. Filial piety was regarded as,

... the principle of Heaven and Earth; as the “root of virtue and wellspring of instruction”; as the way to govern all under Heaven; as the foundation of imperial rule; as a means of protecting the state and making the people harmonious; and as a way of honoring the ancestors... (Smith 349).

Analysis of characterization in HLM offers a discussion about gender discourse in Qing society. In a close reading of gendered expectations for the characters, there is a reality of Qing society in HLM that already existed but at the same time, the depiction of characters also went against the grain of what society promoted as virtuous. The analysis of these societal-defying expectations serve as a way for society to reject pre-existing notions about gender roles and embrace new ideas about identity. In HLM, there is a different reality offered, alternatives to living on a virtuous path as strictly dictated by society, especially in the area of filial duties.

With Qing Dynasty expectations of social order in mind, it begs the question — how does a novel such as HLM become popularized despite defying many of the aspects of social order? HLM, even as a provocative novel, became popular because of the realistic nature of the characters and thus how they defy gender-bound stereotypes is compelling. Therefore, it is not the fact that the female characters are in power that establishes HLM as an enduring novel, nor is it the point that there are male characters who exhibit feminine qualities. On the contrary, these ideas are prevalent within Qing society, they are just not promoted as a standard of behavior for how elites should conduct themselves. Therefore, it is not the fact that these characters defy

stereotypes, rather, it is *how* the characters defy gendered expectations that appeal to audiences over time.

HLM is a work of dynamic depiction of gender roles and Wang Xi-feng is one of the most compelling characters that represent the reimagining of these gender roles, insofar as to embody masculinity. In Qing society, docile wives “live in harmony, without jealousy or rancor” (Smith 345). However, Xi-feng is the antithesis of this notion. In "Representations of Women and Social Power in Eighteenth-Century China: The Case of Wang Xi-feng," Louise Edwards analyzes the character of Wang Xi-feng and her natural inclination toward masculine gender norms (Edwards 1993, 37). Symbolism expressing masculinity is rife in characterization of Xi-feng. This symbolism is evident in plot points involving Xi-feng's health, how manifestation of illness is a reflection of her exhaustive need for control. Additionally, Edwards analyzes Xi-feng's behavior within the context of how other characters behave. Edwards argues that the character of Wang Xi-feng challenges Qing Dynasty gender norms through her obtainment of power as well as through her natural inclinations towards masculinity (Edwards 1993, 38).

At the outset of the novel, Xi-feng is given the opportunity to manage both Jia households, the Rong-guo and Ning-guo branches. She married into the clan as the wife of Jia Lian, one the principal males of the Jia clan. Xi-feng has the status that comes with marrying an eldest son in the Jia clan, and significantly, comes with a large dowry. However, the privilege of Xi-feng is complex. For someone of her status, she should technically not be in charge of the household and possess as much power as she does. However, her role was delegated to her by the matriarch, Grandmother Jia. As Xi-feng proved to be competent and skillful, most of her power in the household was earned. The fact that she earned her power implies she earned the respect and admiration of both Grandmother Jia and Lady Wang, who is a pivotal figure as the

mother of the heir, Jia Bao-yu. However, Xi-feng's tremendous responsibility in the household leads to her ambitions to maintain power. This adds a level of self-inflicted pressure and drives Xi-feng's competitiveness in interactions within the household. This will be a focus in Part II.

Understanding the competitiveness of Xi-feng is vital to understanding the depth of her character. Xi-feng is the dominant character in the household, even though others may be of higher status. The power dynamics of the character of Xi-feng is not in her status, but it is within her ability to manipulate every corner of the household. In Angelina Yee's "Counterpoise in *Honglou meng*," Yee characterizes Xi-feng as someone who "is more than masculine. She is a female who conquers men" (Yee 1990, 641). This idea that the character of Xi-feng is "more than masculine" is not limited to a pre-existing notion of masculinity, but rather that her character embodies masculinity.

The character of Xi-feng is strategically depicted with masculine traits of power and patronage. Her character establishes her domain in order to control those around her. Xi-feng is able to surveil the inhabitants of the Prospect Garden as well as managing the rest of the household. This is because she resides on the periphery of the Garden, overseeing provisions for the Poetry Club and other social engagements (Yee 647). Even though Xi-feng is not completely literate, she supports the club financially and plays the role of a traditional patron. By extension, Xi-feng also serves as a patron of the Garden, supporting the younger cousins in their indulgence in poetry and the many forms of entertainment.

## **Thesis Overview**

Part I lays the thesis framework in two sections. The first section introduces the “Construction of the Authentic Self” and the second section discusses the “Manifestation of *Qing* and Illness.” Both concepts draw upon the scholarship of Maram Epstein and are instrumental in framing the thesis discussion on the reimagining of masculinity in HLM.

Part II discusses Wang Xi-feng as a compelling case study for representation of the reimagining of masculinity. In-depth analysis and supporting textual evidence are presented in two sections, “Embodiment of Masculinity” and “Manifestation of Excess *Yang* and Illness.”

## Construction of the Authentic Self

In framing the overall thesis inquiry on how masculinity is reimagined in HLM, I draw upon the work of Maram Epstein. In “Making Sense of Bao-yu: Staging Ideology and Aesthetics,” Epstein discusses the “construction of the authentic self” in HLM as a model for understanding character development and character arcs in HLM.

The construction of the authentic self, while superficially similar to what we might consider modern individualism, such as psychological and emotional interiority, is an exploration of the individual not as an autonomous and self-interested entity but as a dynamic subject who comes into being through intense emotional and aesthetic relationships” (Epstein 2012, 317).

HLM is composed of a cast of characters that subvert gendered expectations on an individual basis. The emergence of their authentic self is a rejection of these expectations. In Qing society, living as a “dynamic subject” is defiant to social order. Analysis of the construction of the authentic self as applied to significant and relevant characters is vital for discussion on the reimagining of masculinity in HLM. Epstein’s theory of the construction of the authentic self is not only applicable to the character of Xi-feng but also relevant to analysis of the principal male character of Bao-yu.

In *Competing Discourses: Orthodoxy, Authenticity, and Engendered Meanings in Late Imperial China*, Epstein defines the aesthetics of authenticity within the context of Ming and Qing Dynasty fiction. HLM is a novel that embraces the “values and aesthetics of authenticity” (Epstein 2001, 9). Significantly, Epstein contrasts orthodoxy and authenticity, defining them both within the context of society.

Orthodoxy is based on the ritually defined self and holds social stability to be an inherently more worthy goal than the pursuit of individual desires; authenticity celebrates the individual’s expression of desires and feelings as the true foundation of identity (Epstein 2001, 60).

The construction of the authentic self in HLM emerges as a form of rejection of societal conventions. In this section, I examine the true identities of both Xi-feng and Bao-yu through the lens of the “intense emotional and aesthetic relationships.”

While the character of Xi-feng as a primary angle of analysis for the reimagining of masculinity, there are other characters of HLM that also exemplify the exploration of these expectations through the lens of the authentic self. One such character that exemplifies this theory is Bao-yu. As heir, he is expected to pursue officialdom which requires devoting years of study for the imperial exams. His character is inclined to reject these expectations and does not adhere to the path laid out by his father, Jia Zheng. (For further discussion on education and learning in HLM, see Appendix A.)

In Qing society, it was normal for boys and girls to spend extensive time together before the age of eight. However, following adolescence, they were separated and mainly lived “divergent ways of life” (Hinsch 89). In the case of Bao-yu, he spends an inordinate amount of time with his female cousins and maids long after the age of eight and into his young adulthood, all of which defies social order.

The construction of the authentic self provides a framework for understanding the character of Bao-yu through his relationships. This is because Bao-yu is a character who “comes into being through his intense emotional and aesthetic relationships.” Bao-yu’s many friendships exemplify this idea that the construction of the authentic self is not shaped by individuality, but rather by relationships that build individuality. Significantly, these relationships are formed in the Garden and flourish through the intellectual and artistic pursuits. Especially with the formation of the Poetry Club, the Garden is a vehicle for cultivation of Bao-yu’s authentic self through female relationships, a factor in shaping the reimagining of masculinity.

The Garden is the counterpoise to the external world. Highlighting the internal world of women, the Garden scenes reveal a more personal narrative with the character of Bao-yu and his female cousins. The Garden provides an idyllic landscape for the characters to live in accordance with the framework of the construction of the authentic self as well as reject societal conventionality. In the context of HLM, the Garden serves as a place of retreat for the elite household members to live without the structure of Qing social order.

In *Honglou meng*, the construction of Grand Prospect Garden as a “naturalistic” space apart from the demands of conventional society, Bao-yu’s appropriation of the feminine, and other playful inversions of gender, as well as the primacy of emotions over ritual, are all emblematic of the authentic (Epstein 2001, 9-10).

The Garden provides a landscape for the exploration of the authentic self. The Garden also serves to present the characters as autonomous, but contingent on cultivating relationships.

Through exploring the dynamics prevalent in the Garden, the relationships of HLM contribute to the reimagining of masculinity. The relationships that are built in the Garden are authentic. The Garden serves as a landscape for harmony among Bao-yu and his female cousins. In the Garden, they have the freedom to pursue their own interests outside of what they should be doing.

Rather than being defined by hierarchical status, relations in the garden are determined by emotional bonds and poetic talent. It is a space in which Baoyu is able to express his “authentic” nature. When Baoyu withdraws into the enclosed world of the garden, he constructs an identity based on spontaneous and unrestrained emotive responses rather than prescribed protocol (Epstein 2001, 156).

The episodes in the Garden reflect what his life would look like without socially defined expectations. The nature of Bao-yu’s character is truly illustrated in his dynamic with everyone and his infatuation with femininity. In the Garden, Bao-yu is not bound by social order and conventional expectations of masculinity. This is especially evident following Jia Zheng’s

terrifying punishment of Bao-yu (II.148). Following the aftermath of the beating, the Garden acts as a safe space for the character of Bao-yu and his exploration of his authentic self.

The characters in the Garden all coexist without regard to social order. This is because there is a clear distinction in the novel between the household and the space of the Garden. The Garden is associated with femininity and escape from traditional notions of maleness.

There the girls in the Garden are further insulated from the deleterious effects of the male world, as they are led by the widowed Li Wan rather than the married Xi-feng. The Ning household, over which Jia Zhen reigns, is obviously the stronghold of masculine excess. The distinction between the two households is evident when Grandmother's birthday celebration is split into two parties, the female at Rong and the male at Ning (Chap. 71); (Yee 1990, 616).

The Garden serves as a place of retreat from conventional social order. Analyzing this contributes to the understanding of Bao-yu as a dynamic subject that is shaped by his emotional relationships, particularly his relationships. Through this exploration of the construction of the authentic self in the character of Bao-yu, a perspective of masculinity is reimagined through embracing feminine-leaning traits, a concept that does not align with conventional notions of masculinity.

The fact that Bao-yu is the only male living with a group of women would initially be obscene. When Bao-yu is residing in the Garden, Aroma points out the impropriety of the Garden dynamic. She is concerned about his status and she is worried about the upkeep of his status and his reputation.

She [Aroma] fears that outsiders will misconstrue the unusual arrangements in the Jia household and assume the worst. The author uses her words to anticipate once again how orthodox opinion would view Bao-yu's presence in the garden as scandalous (Sommer 202).

Aroma acts as a character for the external world to exert conventional notions of masculinity onto the dynamic of the Garden. In this sense, the audience can tell that the Garden bends the



laws of social order because he is living with cousins who “are not members of the Jia lineage and therefore should be barred from direct contact with Bao-yu” (Sommer 201). However, despite the impropriety of the situation, the Garden scenes prove important for establishing the construction of the authentic self.

When Bao-yu is with his female cousins, he is not inherently judged by them. There may be moments when a female cousin may point out what Bao-yu should be doing by taking his studies more seriously. However, the character of Bao-yu is perceived as useful by his female cousins. This is juxtaposed with his relationship with his father, who only knows how to perceive Bao-yu as useless for his inability to act in accordance with his filial duties. However, from the perspective of the character of Bao-yu, the definition of usefulness is not defined by Qing societal standards of masculinity. This is seen even in the very beginning chapters of the novel when Bao-yu and Dai-yu first meet. Bao-yu inquires if Dai-yu also has a similar jade to him. However, when Dai-yu responds that she does not possess one and his jade is rare, he says:

“None of the girls has got one,” said Bao-yu, his face streaming with tears and sobbing hysterically. “Only I have got one. It always upsets me. And now this new cousin comes here who is as beautiful as an angel and she hasn’t got one either, so I know it can’t be any good” (I.104).

The fact that he says a woman not possessing a jade “can’t be any good” means that Bao-yu’s character correlates the ideal standard of usefulness with women. This directly opposes the ideal standard of usefulness in Qing society as it says that what is useful is what supports each person’s role in society. The character of Bao-yu is disappointed with the fact he has to act in a certain way to appease society and his clan. Furthermore, the nature of the status of Bao-yu deems him irresponsible for prioritizing his female relationships that do not align with social convention. However, it is when he is with his female cousins that he comes to a place without perceived judgment and becomes a version of himself that is the authentic self.

In essence, the Garden represents the hidden lives of talented women. These women who live with talent are free to carry on writing poetry even though there is not an inherent “usefulness” to their poetry in Qing society. Then, there is the character of Bao-yu who deems that anything feminine is superior to anything masculine. The character of Bao-yu in the Garden idealizes how he would exist without the constraints of conventional notions of masculinity. Thus, the relationships in HLM serve as an understanding for how the construction of the authentic self is explored and lends itself to a discussion on how masculinity is reimagined in HLM through the embracing of an unconventional social paradigm.

## Manifestation of *Qing* and Illness

This section discusses the manifestation of *qing* that greatly shapes the construction of the authentic self. The manifestation of *qing* as a concept serves as a vehicle for understanding the reimagining of masculinity in contrastive examples in character development, that of Wang Xi-feng and Jia Bao-yu. This section further explores the intersection of manifestation of *qing* with *yin* and *yang* dynamics, and significantly, how this manifestation of *qing* is correlated with illness, on both physical and metaphysical levels.

Illness is manifested through *qing* 情, a term encompassing the concept of “emotion” for purposes of discussion in this thesis. While there are many definitions of *qing*, the term overall encompasses interactions with social order, as “*Qing* are simultaneously the basis for ideal social interactions and the selfish urges that threaten to destroy the social order” (Epstein 2001, 65). The term *qing* has changed throughout the course of history, however, for purposes of this thesis, *qing* is defined in terms of the physiological and cosmological definitions as defined by Epstein (2001).

The manifestation of *qing* of the characters can be understood in the context of *yin* and *yang*. *Yin* and *yang* are cosmological terms, referring to the complementary energies every person possesses. There is a gendered association with these terms, *yin* referring to feminine energy and *yang* being associated with male energy. The description of these energies illustrates the characters in HLM and the gendered characteristics through this lens. These terms provide an interesting view of the characters due to the fluid nature of *yin* and *yang*.

In Chinese biological thinking, based as it was on yin-yang cosmological views, there was nothing fixed and immutable about male and female aspects of yin and yang... In medicine yin and yang permeate the body and pattern its functions, and here as elsewhere they are interdependent, mutually reinforcing and capable of turning into their opposites. This natural philosophy would seem to lend itself to a

broad and tolerant view of variation in sexual behavior and gender roles (Furth 1988, 3).

This description provides context as a plethora of characters in HLM exhibit this “tolerant view of variation in sexual behavior” through the description of *yin* and *yang*. Thus, these energies become a tool to reimagine the masculinity of the characters in HLM.

In the case of Wang Xi-feng, the embodiment of masculinity can be discussed within the context of *yin* and *yang* cosmological principles in medicine. Within the narrative, Xi-feng preferably would be a man (Edwards 1993, 38). The overall sense of imbalance amongst the cast of HLM is skewed. For instance, just as Xi-feng possesses masculine traits, the main character Bao-yu possesses feminine traits. Arguably, Bao-yu is seen as more feminine than Xi-feng. This is because the behavior of Bao-yu leads the audience to believe that he is naturally inclined to femininity, such as toying with cosmetic rouge, spending time solely with the female cousins, and ignoring the duties that are required of his position as heir.

Where Bao-yu lacks ambition for power, Xi-feng makes up for it in every sense. Xi-feng resumes responsibility for the household finances as well as for the status-empowering tasks of organization of social engagements. In other words, the feminine inclinations of Bao-yu directly contrast with the inclinations towards masculinity for Xi-feng.

The Garden is one of the few places that allow Bao-yu and his female cousins to truly live in harmony. The *yin* and *yang* imbalances of the characters provide usefulness and an opportunity to appreciate *yin* itself. This contrasts with the external world, which views the activities of the Poetry Club as without purpose and, therefore, there is no need for it to be continued. Bao-yu laments the Poetry Club in a tearful monologue to Lady Wang:

“Why is it that the minute they’re grown up, girls are married off and have to suffer so? When I think of the happy times we all had together when we first started the Crab-flower club, always inviting each other round for parties and

holding poetry contests – there seemed no end of wonderful things to do. And now? Bao-chai has already moved out, which means Caltrop can't come over either, and with Ying gone as well, our band of kindred spirits is being broken up, everything is being spoiled!" (IV.32).

It is significant that Bao-yu would refer to his female cousins as “kindred spirits,” directly stating that his character relates more to them than he does to anyone else in the novel. This example analyzes Bao-yu as a character whose *qing* is evident and finds solace in others in the Garden who also live by their *yin* energy.

The metaphysical definition of *qing* refers to it as “the true and real inner spirit, always positive, contrasted to external artificiality” (Epstein 2001, 65). Applying this definition, one can discuss the magical jade that Bao-yu was born with as a representation of his *qing*. With this in mind, the *qing* of his character is an extension of the construction of the authentic self and creates the space for him to become a “dynamic subject” whose relationships form the individuality of his character. After he loses his jade, he becomes another person, almost as if he is Zhen Bao-yu. Zhen Bao-yu acts as his doppelgänger, a projection of an idealized Jia Bao-yu. Except, Zhen Bao-yu follows social order whereas Jia Bao-yu acts as the antithesis of it. Both characters are necessary and balance each other out.

The incessant troping on *zhen/jia*, particularly in the narrative treatment of the two Bao-yu's, is used to highlight the choice between Confucian conformity and meeting social expectations on the one hand, and the desire for personal salvation on the other. As we have seen, Cao Xueqin uses the complimentary opposition of *zhen/jia* to blur distinctions between truth and falsity, waking and dreaming, and in this manner points to the interrelated nature of these and other pairs of opposites. Nothing is wholly one thing or the other, but rather each participates in each other (Ferrara 387-388).

In the narrative, different versions of the same characters are presented in different perspectives. Both Zhen Bao-yu and Jia Bao-yu serve different functions, where the behavior of Zhen Bao-yu perfectly aligns with the conventional idea of masculinity.

Manifestation of *qing* is evident with Bao-yu in the loss of his jade. He becomes mentally ill and cannot string together a coherent sentence. He lacks emotions and loses cognitive functions, barely operating as he did before the loss of his jade.

When Grandmother Jia asked him a question, he could only repeat whatever Aroma said. It soon became clear to them all that so far from being his normal self, he was no little more than a halfwit (IV.314).

Bao-yu's addled condition can be analyzed as a result of the manifestation of *qing*. This is seen in his illness, which occurs because of his emotions, such as his "bad blood." The loss of the jade explores who the character of Bao-yu becomes without his jade. When his character is without his jade, he becomes a shell of himself and his personality is gone. Throughout the rest of the novel, Bao-yu never becomes the same again. Therefore, the loss of the jade signifies an excess of *qing*. However, despite the loss of his jade, Bao-yu retains his true identity.

The character of Jia Bao-yu represents the road to self-cultivation, which is seen in his manifestation of *qing*. Both versions of Jia Bao-yu and Zhen Bao-yu represent usefulness and uselessness. There is no correct way to view these characters. However, through characters, such as Jia Zheng, the audience understands that Bao-yu is viewed as useless in the context of Qing societal expectations. His manifestation of *qing* reflects a rejection of adherence to social order, and the loss of his jade signifies that he cannot exist without sacrificing the authentic self.

After the decline of the Jia fortunes and Bao-yu's subsequent marriage to Bao-chai, he becomes more aligned with the authentic self. Karmically, the debt between the stone (Bao-yu) and flower (Dai-yu) had concluded as symbolized by Dai-yu's death. The next step in the construction of the authentic self for Bao-yu is monkhood, an eventuality that had been foreshadowed long before in Volume II when Bao-yu tells Dai-yu that if she died he would

become a monk (II.95). However, before Bao-yu could truly pursue the path of becoming a monk, he had to settle his familial ties in the form of his societal debt.

“Pull yourself together from now on, and work as hard as you can. Do well in the examination, and even if you never achieve anything else in your entire life, that will at least be some return for Heaven’s favour and for your ancestor’s virtue” (V.330).

As his wife, Bao-chai understands that Bao-yu cannot move on because of his ties to the external world. Bao-yu still had to fulfill his filial duties as heir, and sever the attachments with the external world before he could pursue the path of authenticity in monkhood.

As with many of the HLM characters, Bao-yu is prone to illness. However, in his case, there is no discernible cause until the loss of his jade. There are noteworthy examples that reflect the ambiguity of his illness. Description of Bao-yu’s episodes of illness is more than a physical diagnosis. Instead, the illness of his character reflects the intersection of his physical, metaphysical, and emotional symptoms with a manifestation of *qing*.

Other aspects of Bao-yu’s character are revealed through episodes of illness as a result of the manifestation of *qing*. One of these instances does not have to do directly with Bao-yu, but rather with Skybright, one of Bao-yu’s favorite maidservants. Skybright falls ill in volume II and, upon receiving a prescription from the doctor, Bao-yu claims that her prescription is too strong because the medicine should have been intended for a man to consume, saying “He’s prescribing for her as if she were a man. However bad the congestion is, you can’t expect a young girl to stand up to drugs like thorny lime and Ephedra” (II.527). This scene is a reflection on reimagining masculinity in HLM through illness. This is because the prescription that the doctor gives Skybright is so masculine that Bao-yu physically cannot handle it himself. He states, “Well, if my constitution won’t stand up to those drugs, I’m quite sure that yours or Skybright’s wouldn’t” (II.529).

Bao-yu's constitution is framed in a similar way to Skybright's. His character exhibits that his own body would not be able to handle medicine that is intended to calm down the inflammation. Bao-yu experiences an abundance of *yin* that makes him seem more feminine. This analysis implies that when his character does break social order, he is doing so not just on a societal level, but also a physiological level. Because the physiology of Bao-yu is dependent upon cosmological and emotional factors, his illness acts as a segue into the reimagining of masculinity.

The diagnosis of "bad blood" of Bao-yu signifies his societal constraints. In the scene after Bao-yu is brutally beaten by his father, Jia Zheng, he is in terrible condition. When Bao-chai comes to heal his wounds, she comes with a decongestant that will "take away the inflammation by dispersing the bad blood in his bruises" (II.155). The notion of "bad blood" is a term relating to *yin* and *yang* in the body.

Once again yin blood is divided into the good and bad, passing through cyclical phases of growth and decay, where the ideal pattern includes both cleansing and renewal...To be ruled by blood is to be subject to be ruled by one's emotions" (Furth 1986, 58).

Here it is understood that blood reveals about the intersection of physical ailments as well the emotional and metaphysical aspects. The whole reason he is being treated is because of the beating from Jia Zheng.

The root cause of the accident with Bao-yu was that his character was blamed for having relations with Golden which led to her suicide. It is not the fact that Bao-yu may have done something to harm Golden, but the fact he may have done something that inhibited social order that caused Golden to kill herself. By Golden killing herself, the clan loses face as a suicide in the household is inhibiting to their reputation. Therefore, whenever the character of Jia Zheng disciplines Bao-yu it comes from a place of social taboo.



The character of Bao-yu does not fit into the mold Jia Zheng wants him to abide by. Because of this, Jia Zheng orders his servant to beat him nearly to death to be punished for not what he did to Golden, but what he did to the clan. The notion that Bao-yu would cause the clan to lose face, whether he did so or not, is reflected in his condition. After the beating, Aroma notes his prescription.

“...he’d just had a beating and not been allowed to cry out during it, a lot of hot blood and hot poison must have been driven inwards and still be collected round his heart, and if he were to drink some of that stuff [plum bitters], it might stir them up and bring on serious illness, so I talked him out of it. After a lot of persuading, I got him to take some rose syrup instead” (II.161).

Interestingly, Aroma states that “he had not been allowed to cry out” because it implies that part of his condition is built-up emotion. He could not cry and for that reason his blood became “bad” on the basis of his emotions. Because Bao-yu’s blood became inflamed around his heart, he needed a cooling treatment, which is signified by the rose syrup as it is an anti-inflammatory substance.

The beating of Bao-yu signifies the inability of his character to fit within the expectations of the household. Furthermore, the illness of his character reflects his inability to fit within the conventional notion of masculinity as exemplified by Jia Zheng. This is because Jia Zheng’s punishment for Bao-yu was built-up over time as Bao-yu had defied social order and acted without care to his responsibilities to the household. However, the physiology of Bao-yu suggests that Bao-yu, on both an emotional and metaphysical level, embodies femininity. The fact that the physical response of Bao-yu to the beating ended in the inflammation around his heart as well as his “bad blood” signifies that his character does not live up to his masculine gender role. Through his illness, the aversion of traditional notions of masculinity for the characters in HLM are explored.

A further analysis of the *qing* of Bao-yu and manifestation of illness suggests that his illness is manifested through the suppression of *qing*. This is particularly pertinent in the context of Bao-yu and Jia Zheng's relationship. Following the beating of Bao-yu, the women of the household see the emotional harm to Bao-yu and are horrified by the actions of Jia Zheng.

Grandmother Jia berates Jia Zheng for his cruel actions to him:

“... How do you think Bao-yu could bear your cruel rod? And you say you've been punishing him for the honour of the family, but you just tell me this: did your own father ever punish you in such a way? – I think not” (II.151).

Grandmother Jia is acting as a surrogate for the audience on how to react. The intention was not to side with Jia Zheng. Instead, based on the reactions of the characters, the audience is urged to question his actions. Additionally, it is interesting that Grandmother Jia and Lady Wang are not only protecting Bao-yu, but ridiculing Jia Zheng for the lengths he will go to in order to “honor” the clan. It is symbolic that it is his relationships with women that protect Bao-yu from his father. This relates back to the Garden where the internal world of women and the relationships established there exemplify the theory of the construction of the authentic self.

## Part II

### The Case of Wang Xi-feng

#### Embodiment of Masculinity

This section discusses the embodiment of masculinity in the case of Wang Xi-feng and thus serves as the most compelling example of the reimagining of masculinity in HLM through the construction of the authentic self. This section also includes a discussion of Jia Bao-yu as a contrastive character that embodies femininity. In counterpoise to Xi-feng, analysis of Bao-yu provides another layer of reimagining masculinity through a principal male character. To understand the reimagining of masculinity through the character of Xi-feng, it is imperative to define masculinity in the context of HLM. The basic understanding of masculinity asserts that masculinity is simply the expression of traits associated with males, or “maleness.” However, because this thesis aims to not just define what masculinity is, but seeks to reimagine it, the definition of masculinity deviates from conventional ideas of masculinity. Masculinity in HLM is defined as a nuanced term. In HLM, “it is the potential for conflict and rejection of social norms that distinguish the masculine” (Edwards 1990, 412). Therefore, in HLM, masculinity cannot simply be defined based on what is male and what is not male.

As the only woman in the Jia household who successfully *strives* to hold and maintain power, the character of Xi-feng embodies masculinity. Other women in HLM may possess power but do not have the same ambition to have more power than their station allows. It is Xi-feng’s true masculine identity that emerges in power dynamics that shapes her authentic self.

Xi-feng’s character is not villainous, despite her having villainous tendencies. Xi-feng is ruthless, however, her loyalty to the household is unwavering. Based on her status, it is

surprising that her character possesses as much power and influence as she does within the household. This is not because she is of lower status, as she married into the household with a large dowry. However, Lady Wang delegated her responsibilities to Xi-feng. These responsibilities were delegated to Xi-feng based on successful competence. The characteristics of Xi-feng are wit, competence, and mastery of power dynamics. It is these characteristics that are intrinsic to her character arc and are what make her reputable in her position of management in the household.

The character of Xi-feng possesses masculine traits, however, these traits do not make her solely “masculine.” In the context of HLM, the character of Xi-feng is not defined by the archetype of a woman in power. The introduction of Xi-feng as a character unveils her status and the grandeur of her presence to the audience. Xi-feng is intimidating, coming into the room to introduce herself to Lin Dai-yu with full confidence.

A beautiful young woman entered the room behind the one they were sitting in, surrounded by a bevy of serving women and maids. She was dressed quite differently from the others present, gleaming like some fairy princess with sparkling jewels and gay embroideries (I. 91).

Upon the arrival of Xi-feng, Dai-yu characterizes her as “brash and unmannerly,” which introduces her as a character who is not conventionally feminine (I. 90). Xi-feng comes in laughing loudly into the room, making everyone “go about with bated breath,” as characterized by Dai-yu. Dai-yu recognizes the confidence of Xi-feng and how everyone in the household changes when she enters the room. Without physically seeing her, Dai-yu categorizes Xi-feng as someone who is “unmannerly,” revealing to the audience that Xi-feng does not adhere to social order. While she does possess high status, Xi-feng stands out as a woman in power who has earned her standing in the household.

The behavior of Xi-feng has further implications for the gendered associations of her character, which are more aligned with Qing societal ideas about masculinity. The characterization of Dai-yu towards Xi-feng reveals the reactions of the characters in response to the behavior of Xi-feng. After Xi-feng's introduction, Grandmother Jia refers to her, saying "She's a holy terror this one. What we used to call in Nanking a "peppercorn." You just call her "Peppercorn Feng" (I. 90). The "Peppercorn Feng" is a nickname given to Xi-feng, which is meant to refer to her "pungent temperament and aggressive behavior" (Jung-Palandri 44).

The response of Grandmother Jia to the behavior of Xi-feng reveals she embodies masculine characteristics in order for her character to maintain power dynamics in the household. The stereotypic traits of her character unveil her inclination toward a strong sense of masculinity. The narrative explains that "She has been brought up from the earliest childhood just like a boy, and had acquired in the schoolroom the somewhat boyish-sounding name of Wang Xi-feng" (I. 91). This moment is vital in the characterization of Xi-feng as it unveils her distinct, masculine traits.

The competitive nature of Xi-feng with characters is a framework for understanding her dynamic gender identity. This is because her character does not discriminate between men and women in engaging in power dynamics. Xi-feng is highly competent and she uses her skills to compete with anyone. When Qin-shi dies, Xi-feng is eager to assume her responsibility in taking care of the funeral proceedings (Edwards 1993, 44). Throughout the novel, she maintains control of the household and only relies on herself for success. She makes sure to know everything going on in the household, which is an incredible feat considering the size of the clan as well as the maidservants. Alongside her being in charge of the finances and Lady Wang's affairs, she helps establish the Poetry Club (Edwards 1993, 45). Despite her character possessing certain traits that

are villainous in nature, her talents are never questioned by the characters or the audience. Even though her tendency to assume power is seen as unnatural, as exemplified by her illnesses, she is regarded positively in the sense that she does her job better than anyone else can.

The behavior of Xi-feng can be seen as a way for her to assert her power in a male-centered society. This is because if she did not act this way, there is a definite possibility that she would not have been granted the opportunity to control the household as she does. This is because her status alone would not have granted her the power of the household. By behaving in this dominating manner, she asserts herself so that everyone around her understands what she is capable of when they do not take her seriously. This works in the favor of her character, as she is able to get what she wants through competitiveness and competence. Her strategy is highly effective and produces loyal connections, such as with her principal maid, Patience.

The character of Xi-feng does not form any deep, close relationships. The relationships of Xi-feng revolve around her character's locus of control and are never symbiotic where both parties get equal benefits. Instead, the relationship style of Xi-feng is more parasitic. Her character chooses specific people who can be in her world and benefit her needs to maintain status and power. With this in mind, her character does maintain relationships, such as her relationship with Patience, her trusted, loyal maid servant. However, even with Patience, the character of Xi-feng only consults Patience to delegate her responsibilities, never for emotional relief. This is very interesting because, despite this type of relationship, Patience understands the nature of her character and empathizes with her. This is significant because the character of Patience understands that Xi-feng only views her as a pawn.

Patience is a unique character because she is a maid who is thoroughly loyal to Xi-feng, but is still independent of Xi-feng as her subordinate. Patience is willing to stand up to Xi-feng

on certain occasions. This occurs when she stands up to Xi-feng when she assumes Jia Lian and Patience are having an affair. The gravity of someone of Patience's status to be doing this by saying how "unusual" it is for a maid to use such a "scornful tone toward her mistress" (Lupke 289). However, just as much as Patience stands up for herself she also defends Xi-feng. When the other maids give a hard time to Xi-feng about not distributing enough funds for their salary, Patience remains loyal to Xi-feng. Patience sacrifices her belongings to make enough cash to give Xi-feng a funeral (Lupke 290).

The character of Patience complements Xi-feng as a manager of the household. Xi-feng is put in charge of a plethora of responsibilities, many of them having to do with financial duties. Xi-feng manages the finances perfectly well and it is clear that Patience also has an aptitude for the management of the finances. Patience's competence as Xi-feng's trusted servant does not go unnoticed within the household. Everyone is aware of her abilities and regards her as a valuable asset for the good of the household stability. When dining with the members of the Garden, Li Wan tells her that, "... You can't imagine a Wang Xi-feng without a Patience alongside helping her. You are your mistress's master-key" (II.260). Everyone is emphatic about the value of Patience to the clan and Li Wan continues to say,

"Even though she [Xi-feng] is a regular Tyrant King, she still needs her Patience in order to be so efficient, just as much as the real Tyrant King needed his two strong arms in order to be able to lift up those hundredweight tripods" (II.261-262).

Patience is humble in her responses. She also continues to protect Xi-feng when the members of the Garden question her about the finances of the clan. Patience defends how Xi-feng handles the money and continues to protect her until the end of the novel, even when everyone turns against Xi-feng.

Xi-feng's parasitic nature is seen in her relationship with Grannie Liu. Although Xi-feng is kind to her on the surface, beneath it she uses Grannie Liu to establish a good reputation with Grandmother Jia (Yee 1990, 643). This starkly contrasts with Bao-yu, who is almost painfully non-competitive towards his status in the household. Therefore, Xi-feng exhibits masculinity because in contrast to Bao-yu. The fact that she is significantly more ambitious than he is and shoulders more than her share of responsibility makes Xi-feng stand out as one of the most masculine characters in the novel.

Xi-feng is the only woman in the Jia household who strives to maintain power. Other women in the clan who possess power and command respect do not have the same ambition and thus do not embody masculinity. Due to their status, Grandmother Jia and Lady Wang retain power and respect. However, some characters derive power in spite of being from a different class. This is true of the maids of the household who are given power based on their competence. Aroma, Patience, and Faithful are pertinent characters who are maid servant status. Furthermore, the characters, despite being maids, have an amount of power and responsibility that is comparable to the clan members. For instance, when talking about Aroma and Bao-yu, Aroma is a "a stabilizing force in his life" (Lupke 287). She is incredibly wise for her age. Her given power is the power that Lady Wang bestows upon her to take care of Bao-yu and to steer him in the right direction. Even though she is a conduit through which Lady Wang can control Bao-yu, she genuinely cares for him and holds up to her responsibility in protecting him.

Power does not reside only with women of status. There are notable cases of women in the household who maintain power in spite of being of lower status. For instance, there are household rituals that show how the maidservants hold certain privileges based on status that is earned. An example of this can be seen in Volume II.



It was customary in the Jia household to treat the older generation of servants – those who had served the parents of the present masters – with even greater respect than the younger generation of masters, so that in this instance it was not thought at all surprising that You-shi, Xi-feng, and Li Wan should remain standing while old Mrs Lai and three or four other Old nannies... seated themselves on the stools (II.346).

This instance shows that the rules of status change to accommodate those who earn their power through a competence. With this in mind, the characters of Aroma, Patience, and Faithful gain power through merit. They are also revealed to be talented at what they do and prove to others that they are the only ones who can do their jobs.

The character of Aroma and her relationship with Bao-yu is important because she is a protector of Bao-yu. When Bao-yu gets brutally beaten upon the command of his father after Golden's death, Aroma becomes worried because of how much time he spends in the Garden. She states,

“We just have to be on guard against that sort of thing happening — especially when Master Bao has such a peculiar character, as your ladyship knows, and spends all his time with girls. He only has to make the tiniest slip in an unguarded moment, and whether he really did anything or not, with so many people about—and some of them no better than they should be—there is sure to be scandal” (II.165).

With this in mind, Aroma becomes a protector of Bao-yu. Aroma pleads with Lady Wang to have him moved out of the Garden to save face on behalf of Bao-yu and also on behalf of the clan. This appeals to Lady Wang, who views Aroma's loyalty as valuable to keeping Bao-yu out of trouble. This urges Lady Wang to tell Aroma to that she is going to “place Bao-yu entirely within your [Aroma's] hands” (II.165).

Aroma does her job well and is recognized in the household. Through her efforts to watch over Bao-yu, Aroma gets a raise from Xi-feng after Aunt Xue urges her to pay her more for what she does for the household. Lady Wang speaks highly of Aroma, saying

“I don’t think the rest of you realize just how good she is. Ten times better than my Bao-yu, that’s quite certain. If Bao-yu can keep her with him always, he’ll be a very lucky boy” (II.199).

They entertain the idea of her becoming the chamber wife of Bao-yu, which would further increase her status and power within the household. Ultimately, Aroma remains Bao-yu’s maid, out of Lady Wang’s suggestion since she believes she will be “less free to tell him what she thinks of him when he is being silly” (II.199). However, Aroma continues watching over Bao-yu throughout the story and maintains her sense of power despite her status as a maidservant.

Furthermore, the character of Faithful is yet another maid who is given responsibility based on competence and loyalty. The only aspiration of Faithful is to serve Grandmother Jia. She is incredibly “faithful” to Grandmother Jia and vows to continue to serve her until the day she dies. Her loyalty is challenged when Lady Xing requests that she become a concubine for Jia She. In response, Faithful asserts herself and makes sure that no one can force her into marriage.

“As long as Her Old Ladyship lives, I shall stay with Her Old Ladyship... If I get really desperate, I can always shave my hair off and become a nun; or failing that, there’s always suicide. I don’t mind going through life without a man. Glad to keep myself clean” (II.416).

This moment is vital in understanding Faithful’s character. She potentially could live a better, more stable life by becoming a chamber wife. However, she actively chooses to remain by Grandmother Jia’s side even though there is nothing in it for her. Not only that, but she says that she explicitly does not mind living without a man, pursuing her own life even if the only solace she finds in life after the passing of Grandmother Jia is death. The attitude of Faithful towards being a maid for Grandmother Jia reflects her unwillingness to conform to the standards of Qing society.

The relationship between Patience and Xi-feng provides an interesting framework for understanding how Xi-feng is viewed within the household. Patience, who is Xi-feng’s most

trusted and loyal servant, both fears and respects her. This seems to reflect much of the consensus between Xi-feng and the other members of the household where everyone understands her position as an invaluable member of the clan, and yet her behavior is often questionable. Patience, although technically only a maid, maintains a certain level of respect and power that is given to her through her relationship with Xi-feng. Patience also provides a different female perspective of someone who is in power and yet she has “subtle” power. In other words, she is highly respected within the household and is delegated many responsibilities, but she still maintains her maid status.

The women in the novel cannot be defined strictly by virtue or talent. If they were defined by virtue, then the behavior and motives of the female characters would be played out in a completely different way. This is because these women would be adhering to the Qing societal principle that characterized “a woman without talent is a woman of virtue” (Smith 136-37). Therefore, the women in the novel, though talented, would not be conventionally viewed as virtuous women. Although by Qing standards these women are not necessarily virtuous, in HLM they are competent and maintain power, thus rejecting stereotypes. In this sense, these women take a hold of their lives in the household and are not restricted by conventional social order.

The character of Bao-yu redefines what it is to be a male in Qing society. Arguably, if Bao-yu had been a girl, no one would question his behavior because he embodies many of the traditional feminine qualities that were ideal of the time. Whether it is being naturally drawn to pretty objects and makeup, spending time with his female cousins, or regarding his male friends in romantic ways, he is not the stereotype of what the son of a prominent clan should look like. Bao-yu vastly prefers to spend time with his female companions, whether they be his cousins or his maidservants. This becomes the focal point of the novel, where the character development of

Bao-yu is illustrated within the context of his relationships with his female cousins and maidservants.

The identity of Bao-yu is shaped by his relationships. The relationships of his character illustrates how his character arc is not aligned with social conventionality. This rejection of social convention is seen in a moment between Er-jie, San-jie, and Jia Lian's servant, Joker, when they discuss San-jie as a potential wife for Bao-yu. San-jie mentions Bao-yu, saying:

“I suppose you could call him effeminate. Whether he is eating or talking or moving about, there is certainly something rather girlish about his manner. That comes from spending nearly all his time in the women's quarters with nearly no other males around” (III.294).

The behavior of Bao-yu goes against what is expected of him as the heir to a prominent clan. However, because of his relationships with females in the household, it is not unnatural for his character to act in a more feminine way within the context of the novel.

The language that San-jie uses to describe Bao-yu can be characterized as “effeminate.” Referring to Bao-yu as “effeminate” implies multiple aspects about the speaker's attitude towards Bao-yu's status and solidarity. Ideally, in Qing society, Bao-yu would not be spending nearly as much time with his female cousins as he does. This notion is especially evident when he moves into the Garden, the inner circle of women in the household. Based on Qing society's expectations,

That Bao-yu lives with his unmarried female cousins in Grand Prospect Garden is a fantasy possible in literature but shockingly transgressive in practice. The reputations of families and individuals were tied to how well these social rules were observed (or how the appearance of their being observed was kept up), but in addition maintaining proper ritual order was linked to the preservation of the political and cosmic order (Epstein 319).

Based on the standard of behavior in Qing society, Bao-yu does not maintain “proper ritual order.” Instead, he disrupts the social order by living with his unmarried female cousins and

slacking off on his studies. When a character in the novel calls him “effeminate,” there are further implications for what that means. Even though San-jie is not outwardly negative towards Bao-yu, her character is simply reflecting the overarching attitude of social convention towards the character of Bao-yu. This is because Bao-yu is seen as more effeminate than usual because he should be maintaining a certain sense of masculinity. Therefore, “effeminate” calls into question not just the sexuality of Bao-yu, but also his status as the heir.

The femininity of Bao-yu’s character on the surface level is reflective of conventional gender roles in Qing society. Qing societal illustrations commonly portrayed men as having a certain feminine aesthetic. Portraits of respectable men often portrayed them as “delicate” and “passive” (Hinsch 112). While Bao-yu is depicted as feminine, he can be viewed as having androgynous characteristics.

The novel’s protagonist Jia Bao-yu implicitly challenges the idea of static and discrete gender identity by exhibiting many androgynous characteristics. Despite his male gender, he often behaves in a way that readers considered typically feminine. Significantly, the novel does not portray Jia as abnormal or a failure. To the contrary, the author holds him up as a generally positive fusion of male and female characteristics. By willingly embracing both masculine and feminine, Jia Bao-yu embodies a complete and perfected human being (Hinsch 112).

The embracing of femininity of Bao-yu does not prove that he is completely feminine. Instead, in the narrative, Bao-yu’s character is portrayed as having no qualms about embracing femininity just as he has no qualms about embracing masculinity. His androgyny is further illustrated through his sexuality, as Bao-yu is attracted to both women and men. In this sense, in this nuanced definition of masculinity, the character of Bao-yu explores masculinity as something that has “the potential for conflict and rejection of social norms” (Edwards 1990, 412).

A recurring conflict within the novel is the relationship of Bao-yu and his father. In HLM there are many relationships that highlight contrast between the characters. The character of Bao-

yu and his father, Jia Zheng, are a dynamic that exemplifies this notion as they directly oppose one another. For Bao-yu, his father is the epitome of conventional masculinity. The narrative makes this very clear as well that Jia Zheng has fulfilled his duty to his clan by producing an heir as well as holding a seat on the Qing court. For Jia Zheng, Bao-yu could not be any more disappointing. This is because Bao-yu is a male heir that has no aptitude for studying or taking life seriously. Even during the Poetry Club, Bao-yu is constantly ranked last, outshined by the other female members. An example of this is when Bao-yu produces a piece of poetry that makes everyone else laugh. He replies in a rueful tone, “I seem to be bottom again,” making it seem that it is normal for him to play second string to everyone else (II.255).

Jia Zheng is harsh to Bao-yu to the point of physically harming him. When Bao-yu’s brother, Jia Huan, blames Bao-yu for the death of Golden saying that he raped her, Jia Zheng berates Bao-yu. When Lady Wang attempts to calm Jia Zheng down, he replies,

“Merely by fathering a monster like this I have proven myself an unfilial son; yet whenever in the past I have tried to discipline him, the rest of you have all conspired against me to protect him. Now that I have the opportunity at last, I may as well finish off what I have begun and put him down, like the vermin he is, before he can do any more damage” (II.149).

Jia Zheng beats him half to death, and his clothes become soaked in blood. Believing he has done his duty, Jia Zheng says, “What I did to the boy I did for the honor of the family” (II.151).

With this in mind, the character Jia Zheng is perpetuating a conventional gender norm towards Bao-yu about the notion of being a “filial son.” It is also interesting that Jia Zheng would believe the word of Jia Huan over Bao-yu, despite Jia Huan being the son of a concubine, and not the heir, which is Bao-yu. It is also important to note that Grandmother Jia and Lady Wang believed Bao-yu did not commit the crime. Rather, it is only the perception of Jia Zheng towards Bao-yu that makes his character believe he committed the crime.

By the standards of Qing society, his father, Jia Zheng, is justified in being disappointed. His eldest son who died was supposed to be heir to the clan. However, after his passing, it was Bao-yu who replaced him and is now expected to become the virtuous, filial son of the clan. However, Bao-yu was not born with these expectations in mind since the responsibility was always supposed to be placed upon his brother. Therefore, Bao-yu is not worried about pursuing his civil service exams and producing an heir because he did not have to worry about it before. This is why Bao-yu was able to explore himself in other ways outside of the traditional definition of masculinity since he was originally allowed that exploration. However, he has different expectations placed on him now that he is required to be something he is not.

The inability of Jia Zheng to accept his son's feminine-leaning traits reflects the overarching notion that men who do not align with a certain image of masculinity are not deemed useful. It is understandable why the character of Bao-yu would seek solace in his female cousins and maidservants because they do not view him with a critical eye. Instead, they embrace him and view him as one of their own. In a way, Bao-yu becomes more a part of the in-group of the Garden residents than he is a part of his immediate familial dynamic in the main household. Within the Garden's in-group, there is a mutual sense of femininity with one another, including Bao-yu (Edwards 1990, 75).

The feminine identity of Bao-yu is tied to his status. If he is perceived as more feminine than masculine, his clan will judge him as being unable to carry on the responsibilities as head of the clan. Bao-yu, in contrast to his father, stands out as a son who does not possess the aptitude for becoming a head of the clan and it leads his father to question the masculinity of his son. This attitude is reflected in Jia Lian's own servant, Joker. Joker views him as useless because Bao-yu

does not prioritize his education and solely spends time with his maid servants and female family members. This attitude is seen when Joker remarks,

“Everyone in the family since his great-grandfather’s time, including the Master, had to do their ten years in the family school; but not him. Bao-yu doesn’t *like* study; so because he is Her Old Ladyship’s darling, that’s that... He doesn’t study, he doesn’t care for physical training, and he doesn’t like meeting people. He just spends all his time hanging around with a pack of maids. He’s soft, too” (III.293-294).

This moment reflects that even the male servants believe that the feminine leaning traits of his character are damaging to his education and, therefore, damaging to his status. This is because education and status are interrelated within Qing society. Therefore, the idea that Bao-yu would forfeit his studying, physical activity, and social engagements to spend time with women, is looked down upon by other men in the novel.

While the character of Bao-yu possesses feminine qualities, they do not outweigh his masculine ones. Putting the sexual characteristics of Bao-yu in the context of *yin* and *yang*, “human males are not ‘pure yang’ or females ‘pure yin’” (Furth 1988, 4). When Bao-yu does lean into his femininity, it seems he is sometimes denied for expressing himself in such a way. For example, when he attempts to put on rouge, Xiangyun slaps his hand away and says it is a nasty habit (II.417). Bao-yu does have male friends whom he confides in, however, it is interesting that the character of Bao-yu is attracted to them. This is evident in his relationship with Qin Zhong, whom he was particularly close to at the beginning of the novel before his imminent death (II.178). Additionally, upon meeting the Prince of Beijing, Bao-yu describes him as extremely good-looking. Despite these homosexual inclinations, he is also sexually attracted to the women in his cohort.

The character of Bao-yu explores his sexuality with women. His escapades into the Land of Illusion are graphic and lustful, and were partly why the book was proscribed due to Qing



authority (Sommer 192). The novel's licentiousness tendencies aside, despite Bao-yu experiencing sex with his female companion Aroma, Bao-yu does not move to the Garden as an ulterior motive to pursue his carnal desires. Rather, he was put in the Garden because he had spent his life surrounded by women. Therefore, even though Bao-yu has a sexual relationship with Aroma and has his sexual awakening in the Land of Illusion, it does not become a defining point of his sexuality.

The femininity of Bao-yu serves as another example of the reimagining of masculinity in HLM. The androgynous nature of his character reimagines masculinity in a distinct way from Xi-feng. The character of Bao-yu represents the balance of both masculinity and femininity, thus reimagining conventions of masculinity.

## **Manifestation of Excess *Yang* and Illness**

This section discusses the significant intersection of the embodiment of masculinity and illness, on both physical and metaphysical levels. Striving and maintaining power produces a metaphysical imbalance of excess *yang* male energy in the case of Wang Xi-feng. This section argues that the manifestation of excess *yang* male therefore is a catalyst for illness and is a correlating factor in Xi-feng's ultimate loss of power and eventual death.

Masculinity in HLM is not defined in terms of conventional notions of "maleness." The character of Wang Xi-feng serves as an example that masculinity is reimagined in HLM as a nuanced term, one that is not limited by archetype, expectation, or stereotype. However, while the novel serves as an exploration of this reimagining of masculinity, there is a deeper understanding of masculinity that is explored in HLM. This deeper layer of masculinity encompasses the manifestation of *qing* and how the exploration of masculinity reflects the intersection of *yin* and *yang* dynamics that develop into physical symptoms.

How the character of Xi-feng handles these responsibilities is present in her blood flow, as her manifestation of *qing* unveils her authentic self with all of her competitiveness. She champions her competitiveness and ability to maintain power over her societal duties, which include producing heirs and being a virtuous wife to her husband, Jia Lian. On the surface level, Xi-feng is seen as incredibly useful to the household by the other characters. However, her prioritization of maintaining power, although useful to the family, is not ultimately deemed useful to society. This is especially evident as she is not technically fertile since she has not given birth to a son. Therefore, although the character of Xi-feng provides usefulness to the family, then the end result of her desire for power leads to her downfall.

The health of the character of Xi-feng plays a major role in expressing her masculinity. Women's health in the Qing Dynasty is an interesting study. Menstruation in particular can dictate a lot about women's health and has other implications, such as how crops grow and how social order is conducted (Furth 1986, 43). Menstruation and blood flow are deemed so important, that blood is regarded as "the ruling aspect of women" (Edwards 1993, 39). This notion is reflected in the novel as characters are portrayed as having blood issues such as Xi-feng with her miscarriage due to her excessive blood flow. Her blood flow is a result of her ambition to maintain power in the household, which she prioritizes over her virtuous duties as a wife. The descriptions of the blood loss of Xi-feng are a symbol of her "inappropriate connection to yang" (Edwards 1993, 40) meaning that she has an unnatural amount of masculine energy. Therefore, her blood loss is a result of her imbalance of *yin* and *yang* as well as her need for control.

The irregular blood flow of Xi-feng leads to depletion fatigue. Depletion fatigue is a blood condition that can be triggered by grief, worry, or striving (Schonebaum 183). In the gynecological version of this disorder, it "usually implicated a root pathology affecting functioning of the primal energy associated with Blood" (Furth 1986, 80). The depletion fatigue of her character has to do with striving and is caused by her manifestation of *qing*. Therefore, the illness of the character of Xi-feng is manifested from her fear of losing power and not being able to lead the household.

The emergence of her illness is displayed through her competitiveness, which acts as her driving force to get household operations accomplished. However, after the miscarriage of Er-jie, her drive to maintain power interferes with social order. Xi-feng, just like Bao-yu, becomes ill because of the manifestation of *qing* of her character. The *qing* of her character leads to the desire to live in accordance with her authentic self. Although Xi-feng does well in managing the

household, she inhibits social order by latching onto this desire and getting in the way of the family producing another son in the form of Jia Lian and Er-jie's marriage.

Most of the characters in HLM fall ill frequently. However, this does not necessarily mean that they are conventionally ill because of their physical symptoms. Instead, most of the characters' illnesses manifest as a result of their mental and emotional states. In Chinese medicine, emotions are the cause of illnesses. In this sense, one's emotions and physical symptoms are seen in the same realm. The illnesses of the characters are important to understand as they reflect their manifestation of *qing*.

The illnesses of Both Jia Bao-yu and Wang Xi-feng are a focal point for understanding the reimagining of masculinity in HLM. In Xi-feng's case, her illness reflects her ability to maintain power through competence, as seen through her competitiveness and excessive *yang*. However, her illness subsequently reflects the consequences of defying social order despite her competence in managing the household. Paralleling Xi-feng, the illness of Bao-yu signifies the consequences of his rejection of conventional notions of masculinity in Qing society. This is exemplified through his description of 'bad blood' as well as his loss of essence in the fourth volume.

The health of Xi-feng is not only a statement about her masculinity, but also about how she deals with money. Xi-feng is affected by the economic state of the household and the blood loss of her character is a metaphor for how she deals with the household finances. For instance, later on in the novel when the financial decline of the household becomes evident, Xi-feng suffers a miscarriage. Not only can this be a sign of her *yang* energy that makes her blood flow excessively, but it also mimics the emptiness of the financial stability of the household. Her miscarriage is also a sign of how she deals with money. One could go as far as to say that her

miscarriage was retribution for her poor financial planning as well as her inability to secure a proper future for the household (Schonebaum 182). Regardless, her competitiveness results in a “fatigue from striving.”

In this capacity, Xi-feng goes as far as to compete with her husband, Jia Lian. The dynamic between Xi-feng and Jia Lian is a power struggle that diverges from the Confucian principles of family life (Edwards 1993, 45). Although there is a power struggle, it is a battle that Xi-feng wins the majority of the time and has the presence of mind to remind her husband of their hierarchy. The nature of their relationship contrasts with the standard Confucian practices of a husband and wife relationship. For instance, Jia Lian is characterized by his inability to stand up to Xi-feng, making him appear weak in comparison to Xi-feng's dominance. Xi-feng even tries to compete with Jia Lian, which is observed when she tries to take credit for his obtainment of a new jade to replace Bao-yu's lost pendant (Edwards 1993, 46). They are in constant arguments with one another, both struggling to assume control and responsibility for the household. Xi-feng attempts to control Jia Lian sexually, by isolating the mistresses he sees outside of their marriage. Xi-feng does her best to control whom he sees, however, the hold she possesses over her husband is shaken when she finds out about Jia Lian's love, Er-Jie.

Xi-feng toward Jia Lian's marriage to Er-jie can be described as a “veritable termagant” (Yee 1990, 641). Xi-Feng views any mistress that Jia Lian sees as a threat. This is because Xi-feng already maintains a certain amount of clout within the household by being Jia Lian's wife. However, Xi-feng has yet to produce a male heir, which could jeopardize her position within the household if her husband were to take up a chamber wife and have a son. Therefore, when Jia Lian takes up Er-jie as a chamber wife, it becomes a bigger deal than if he were to have a mistress. This is because Jia Lian falls in love with her, divulging the secrets of the household to

her, along with the secrets about his wife. He also starts to take care of Er-jie financially. His devotion to her starts to rival his marriage to Xi-feng, which is displayed in the passage,

On days when he [Jia Lian] was there, he and Er-jie would dine together and Mrs. You and San-jie would eat separately in their own room. Besides paying Er-jie the allowance, Jia Lian handed over all his private savings to her to look after for him. He told her everything about Xi-feng, down to the most intimate bedroom particulars, and promised her that as soon as Xi-feng died, she should move into the mansion and live there openly as his wife. It cannot be said that Er-jie found any of this displeasing (III.275).

Xi-feng soon finds out about the relationship between the two from Patience, who is ever loyal to her. Xi-feng then goes to interrogate the servants, trying to find out any information she can about Jia Lian. She probes Jia Lian's servant, Brightie, about the mistress her husband has been seeing. However, when Brightie is not forthright about the mistress, Xi-feng exclaims to him and the rest of the staff saying, "Black-hearted, worthless scum the lot of you! You are all in league against me, do you think I don't know?" (III.325). After saying this, the servants come forward with the truth of the affair.

After understanding the situation, Xi-feng does not confront her husband about it. Instead, she befriends Er-jie, who at this point is already married to Jia Lian as his chamber wife. Xi-feng convinces her that she is a good woman who is simply misunderstood by her husband. She vouches for herself and appeals to Er-jie's kindness, which Xi-feng is more than willing to take advantage of. It is at this point that Xi-feng attempts to paint Jia Lian in a bad light, stating that "Only Heaven above knows what a great injustice he has done for me" (III.334). After slandering Jia Lian, Xi-feng goes a step further to invite Er-jie to live in the Gardens with her and the other women. After suggesting this, Xi-feng persuades Er-jie that she cannot possibly continue living "outside" and that it will affect their reputations, as well as Jia Lian's reputation, if she does. Xi-feng continues to victimize herself to Er-jie, protesting to her that,

“I expect the servants say all sorts of nasty things about me behind my back. It is their way of having their revenge on me for being strict. I suppose it is only natural. You know the proverb. The woman who runs a household is like a water butt: all the dirt washes off on her” (III.334).

The passage shows that Xi-feng understands her position as a woman in power.

Additionally, her character knows what to say to garner sympathy so she can get what she wants.

Er-jie completely falls victim to Xi-feng’s manipulations. After she goes to live in the Garden, she eventually becomes pregnant. However, after Xi-feng recommends a doctor to her, Er-jie suffers a miscarriage. All this is the doing of Xi-feng, which even her most trusted maid,

Patience, realizes. Patience goes as far as to apologize to Er-jie for Xi-feng’s behavior, as she understands that every misfortune that Er-jie falls victim to comes from her mistress (III.369).

This is an interesting moment where the person whom Xi-feng has the strongest relationship with even recognizes that others should be protected from their eventual demise at the hands of Xi-feng. With this instance in mind, it exemplifies what the character of Xi-feng is willing to do to maintain power.

Where Xi-feng has excess *yang*, Patience makes up for through her subtle *yin*. Xi-feng is referred to as a “Tyrant King” in the novel. However, even though Xi-feng has this reputation, it does not project onto Patience, despite being Xi-feng’s right-hand woman. This is because Patience understands on some level that Xi-feng *is* a tyrant. Patience looks up to Xi-feng and admires her to a degree, but she also understands the lengths that Xi-feng is willing to go through in order to maintain power. Patience repeatedly covers up for Xi-feng and makes sure that certain information about how Xi-feng manages the money is kept secret.

“Mrs Lian has already put the money for this week’s allowances out at interest. She’s waiting for the interest on some other loans to pay your allowances with. It’s alright for me to tell you this, but whatever you do, don’t let anyone else know about it!” (II.263).

Patience covers up for Xi-feng and handles her dirty work. This is key to how Patience achieves power through maintaining her relationship with Xi-feng.

However, Patience is not devoid of criticism for her superior. When Xi-feng causes Er-jie to have a miscarriage, Patience understands the karmic debt she had put herself in by complying with Xi-feng. After her miscarriage, Patience goes to comfort Er-jie.

“All these things that have happened to you – it’s all my fault. I was so stupid. I always told myself that I’d never deceive my mistress, and so when I heard about you and Mr Lian living together outside, I thought I had to tell her. I never thought it would all turn out like this” (II.369).

Patience realizes the error of Xi-feng as well as her own error in forfeiting her humanity for the sake of loyalty. Patience was compliant in Xi-feng getting in the way of ritual order and the bearing of a new heir for the clan.

The authentic self of Xi-feng is dynamic in the sense that it simultaneously enables her competitiveness while also defying conventional social order. Because of her competitiveness, her character benefits from the innate ambition to maintain power. However, her competitiveness becomes the catalyst for Er-jie’s miscarriage and part of the downfall of the household. Despite the fact that the competitiveness of Xi-feng caused Er-jie to have a miscarriage, her competitiveness interferes with the household’s production of another heir. HLM notes that Er-jie would have had a son, which would increase the potential that Xi-feng could have been cast aside by Jia Lian in favor of a wife who is viewed by society as “fertile,” as in being able to produce a son. The character of Xi-feng is more than a woman in power. Instead, her character supersedes the stereotype of a woman who will do what is necessary to maintain power, despite not fulfilling the responsibilities as a virtuous wife.

Initially, it is the competitiveness of Xi-feng that helps her build her reputation as a powerful and fearful leader. The embodiment of masculinity created a desire to access and



maintain power. In the case of Xi-feng, power and status was attained through the construction of the authentic self. It is noteworthy that there are instances in elite society where women can achieve power through competence.

## Conclusion

The enduring appeal of HLM is a timeless narrative that presents characters in a wide array of gender roles. The thesis explores the reimagining of masculinity through the character of Wang Xi-feng who provides a lens to understanding the gender dynamics in HLM. Xi-feng is unique and strong without becoming a stereotype of a powerful woman.

The thesis analyzes Xi-feng through the embodiment of masculinity and manifestation of *qing*. Xi-feng's competitiveness in rising to power and her desire to maintain power reveal her true identity in the construction of the authentic self. Xi-feng's excess *yang* male energy counters gendered expectations. Through this exploration of the authentic self, Xi-feng emerges as a character who cannot be stereotyped. In essence, her defiance against traditional notions of what it means to be a woman in 18th c. Qing society as well as her competitiveness establishes the reimagining of masculinity in HLM.

HLM is important because it displays an alternative version of reality that existed at the time, yet went unseen. There was a plethora of women in Qing society with talents and competence. In this manner, HLM displays characters that are unique and embrace their authentic self. The characters in HLM are compelling not for what they do to defy gendered expectations, but *how* they defy them. The emergence of illness in the novel is a result of how these characters defy social convention through embracing the unique quality of their characters. Illness thus reflects the intersection of metaphysical and emotional symptoms.

While the thesis touches on the topic of illness in the context of the manifestation of excess *yang*, further analysis would extend to an in depth discussion on Chinese medicine in HLM. In this scope, more nuanced questions relating to the field of Chinese healing can be addressed. What are the healing practices in HLM, and how do their symptoms reflect their

cosmological conditions? This thesis did not delve into an in depth discussion on *yin* and *yang* excess and deficiencies, however, a further analysis of these concepts would address questions about illness in HLM as it relates to gender dynamics.

The character of Xi-feng is a highly divisive character amongst readers and scholars alike. In comparison to the other major characters, Xi-feng does not have the same following and interest. Many readers of HLM find her character morally questionable and the nature of her character has spurred a plethora of discourse about her likability. However, the character of Xi-feng should not be analyzed within the confines of morality. This is because judging her character on the basis of what is good and what is bad diminishes her character arc. The only way to understand Xi-feng is through a perspective where her character is simply reimagining what it means to be a woman in power. Whether her character is morally questionable for how she maintains power is a discussion that can potentially reaffirm conventional social norms that seek to judge the character of Xi-feng in the first place. While this thesis explores her character in the midst of her infamy, the analysis of Xi-feng is best explored through a neutral perspective.

Xi-feng does not discriminate against men or women in maintaining power. However, this is not to say that her character advocates for equality. Rather, her character promotes inequality amongst the members of the household. Despite this, her character goes beyond all social conventionality and should continue to be discussed in how her character reimagines masculinity.

The thesis explores Wang Xi-feng as a case study for the reimagining of masculinity. However, her character is simply a case study implying that there are other characters who explore the reimagining of masculinity through the construction of the authentic self. One such character is Jia Bao-yu who in many ways counterposes the reimagining of masculinity of Xi-

feng. Bao-yu is a character who is a significant example in reimagining masculinity. The exploration of his feminine leaning traits as well as his emotional relationships establish his character as another example of how masculinity is reimagined in HLM.

Many characters in HLM reimagine masculinity in varying ways. It is my hope that this thesis has made a persuasive argument for Wang Xi-feng as the most vibrant and intriguing case of masculinity reimagined.

## Appendix

### Education and Learning in *Honglou meng*

Owing to the wide range of topics and social discourse in HLM, there were many avenues of study that my analysis could have incorporated if given more time. However, because of the scope of this thesis, there were topics that I was not able to fully incorporate for this thesis. One avenue of interest I had during the research process was education and learning in HLM.

Education was a signifier of one's social status, the more highly educated someone was, the higher they were situated within the Qing social hierarchy. This idea is perpetuated throughout HLM because of the status of the clan. For example, it is important for the main character, Jia Bao-yu, to study because if he is not educated to a certain degree, he cannot pass his civil service exams. By not passing his exams, he would fail the expectations placed upon him by his clan and he would be labeled "unfilial."

Although Bao-yu does not embody the ideal picture of a filial son by being interested in his education, this does not mean that he does not show any sign of intelligence. Rather, it seems that the novel highlights that intelligence is not defined by one's level of education. Bao-yu is supposed to be educated and learned, and yet, his competence in his studies continuously falls short. This is pointed out by the other characters, such as his father Jia Zheng, who constantly questions his self-worth, and Jia Lian's servant Joker who out-right calls him "stupid."

Jia Zheng is depicted as the model of educational success. In Volume II, he is appointed to become the Commissioner for Education (II.213). This heightens the standard of who Bao-yu is to become if he is to be seen as successful. However, even though Jia Zheng is the standard of education and learning, this does not necessarily imply that Jia Zheng is interested in learning. Instead, his interest in studying is depicted as a means to an end. There is no sense of enjoyment

or pleasure that he indulges in when he mentions learning. Everything has a purpose to further one's own career or status and education. By being appointed as an Education Commissioner and yet his own son does not show any interest in studying raises questions and brings embarrassment to the reputation of Jia Zheng. Despite the character of Bao-yu exhibiting a prowess with writing poetry, his skills are minute if he cannot pass his civil service examinations (Epstein 321).

The learning of Bao-yu is portrayed in a different light that does not conform to social order. The capabilities of his character in poetry have no purpose outside of the leisure of the writing. Because of this, his intellectual capabilities are looked down upon. However, it is only the elite male characters in the novel who look at Bao-yu through a critical lens. All of the female characters do not view Bao-yu like Jia Zheng does. This is because they do not associate his self-worth to his learning. In fact, they protect him from outside forces who deem him as useless. It would only make sense that Bao-yu would use the Garden and its inhabitants as his emotional support, despite the fact that his living situation with a group of unmarried women was transgressive for the time (Epstein 318-319).

The aversion from his studies reflects the stance of learning for the character of Bao-yu and is worthy of further study. The fact that the novel does not center around a character more akin to Jia Zheng than to Bao-yu is reflective in the nature of the novel. None of the major characters are presented as perfectly following social order, especially as it relates to learning. Despite this, the characters refrain from becoming something that they are not. Instead, their actions and behaviors are framed within the narrative as something useful despite their defying of social order.

Within a similar lens to Bao-yu and his education, the women in the novel can be discussed in terms of their learning. Within this ritualistic Qing society, there were long-standing beliefs about the roles of men and women and where their talents lie. For instance, men were inclined toward higher education to pursue officialdom, whereas women were encouraged to pursue more domestic activities in the household, away from the public eye. Through explaining this, it would only make sense that women writers would be somewhat controversial since Qing society is bound to question the purpose of their scholarly pursuits.

While many women were not explicitly encouraged to pursue education, this facet of society did exist. Instead, there were many women concerned with poetry, calligraphy, and landscape, just as much as men were (Mann 1997, 77-78). However, these activities were to not inhibit the ultimate goal of marriage. The scholarly pursuit of women was not unheard of, but it was not a public affair and it was certainly not meant to inhibit their ability to pursue domestic activities and their marriages.

Education was an important matter within Qing society. However, if it is the man's responsibility to be educated, then what about women's learning within Qing society? Throughout history, there is a common attitude about men and women that can be applied to education towards men and women. This attitude is reflected in the saying,

“A man with virtue is a man of talent, a woman without talent is a woman of virtue” was popularized at this time, defining male talent as the highest form of public service and essential to the reproduction of the political order, while female talent was a distraction from familial service and inimical to the reproduction of the social order. The virtue/talent binary continued to be used to structure disputes over the scope and objectives of women's learning from the late sixteenth through the early twentieth century... (Smith 136-137).

This saying reveals the attitudes towards talented women and men in Qing society. These attitudes regard learning as a necessary discipline for men to follow if they are to follow social

order. Alternatively, learning was not seen as a necessity for elite women and the pursuit of domestic disciplines was viewed as a higher priority.

It is not that women's learning was forbidden. Elite women were oftentimes encouraged to be learned and many elite fathers in particular liked for them to be educated (Mann 1997, 77). However, the overarching theme that is prevalent in HLM reveals that women were going beyond what was socially acceptable for them. They practiced poetry and calligraphy to a greater degree than they were credited for because their talents were not supposed to be overshadowed by their societal responsibilities, such as marriage and having children.



## Bibliography

### Core Translation of *Honglou meng*, also known as *The Story of the Stone*

Cao, Xueqin, translated by David Hawkes. *The Story of the Stone Volume I*. Penguin, 1973.

Cao, Xueqin, translated by David Hawkes. *The Story of the Stone Volume II*. Penguin, 1977.

Cao, Xueqin, translated by David Hawkes. *The Story of the Stone Volume III*. Penguin, 1980.

Cao, Xueqin and Gao E, translated by John Minford. *The Story of the Stone Volume IV*. Penguin, 1982.

Cao, Xueqin and Gao E, translated by John Minford. *The Story of the Stone Volume V*. Penguin, 1986.

### Sources

Bech, Lene. "Fiction That Leads to Truth: "The Story of the Stone" as Skillful Means." *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews (CLEAR)*, Vol. 26, 2004: 1-21.

Brown, Tristan Gerard. "The Metaphorical Dimensions of Symbolic Prices and Real-World Values in Hong Lou Meng." *Tsing Hua Journal of Chinese Studies*, Vol. 41 No. 4, 2011, 795-812.

Chen, Zhinan. "Knowledge of Things in Early and Early Medieval China and its Implications for Cultural Continuity." *Journal of the Pacific Association for the Continental Tradition*, Vol. 4, 2021: 61-75.

Cooper, Eugene, and Zhang, Meng. "Patterns of Cousin Marriage in Rural Zhejiang and in *Dream of the Red Chamber*." *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 52, No. 1, 1993, 90-106.

Dragojevic, Marko. "Language Attitudes." *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Communication*. Oxford University Press, 2017.

Edwards, Louise. "Gender Imperatives in *Honglou meng*: Bao-yu's Bisexuality." *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews (CLEAR)*, Vol. 12, 1990: 69-81.

Edwards, Louise. *Men and Women in Qing China: Gender in The Red Chamber Dream*. University of Hawai'i Press, 2001.

- Edwards, Louise. "Representations of Women and Social Power in Eighteenth Century China: The Case of Wang Xi-feng." *Late Imperial China*, Vol. 14, No. 1, 1993: 34-59.
- Edwards, Louise. "Women in Honglou meng: Prescriptions of Purity in the Femininity of Qing Dynasty China." *Modern China*, Vol. 16, No. 4, 1990: 407-429.
- Epstein, Maram. "Making Sense of Bao-yu: Staging Ideology and Aesthetics." *Approaches to Teaching The Story of the Stone (Dream of the Red Chamber)*, edited by Andrew Schonebaum and Tina Lu. The Modern Language Association of America, 2012.
- Epstein, Maram. *Competing Discourses: Orthodoxy, Authenticity, and Engendered Meanings in Late Imperial Chinese Fiction*. Harvard East Asian Monographs, Vol. 197. Harvard University Press, 2001.
- Fan, Shengyu. *The Translator's Mirror for the Romantic: Cao Xueqin's Dream and David Hawkes' Stone*. Routledge, 2022.
- Ferrera, Mark S. "True Matters Concealed: Utopia, Desire, and Enlightenment in *Honglou meng*." *Mosaic: a Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature*, Vol. 38, No. 4, 1005: 191-205.
- Furth, Charlotte. "Androgynous Males and Deficient Females: Biology and Gender Boundaries in Sixteenth and Seventeenth-Century China." *Late Imperial China*, vol. 9, no. 2, 1988: 1.
- Furth, Charlotte. "BLOOD, BODY AND GENDER: Medical Images of the Female Condition in China 1600-1850." *Chinese Science*, vol. 7, 1986: 43-66.
- Furth, Charlotte. *A Flourishing Yin: Gender in China's medical history, 960-1665*. University of California Press, 1999.
- Ge, Liangyan. "The Mythic Stone in Honglou Meng and an Intertext of Ming-Qing Fiction Criticism." *The Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 61, no. 1, 2002: 57-82.
- Hawkes, David. *The Story of the Stone – A Translator's Notebooks*. Edited by Liu Ching-chih et al. Centre for Literature and Translation, Lingnan University, 2000.
- Hong lou meng yi bai er shi hui*. Retrieved from the Library of Congress catalog entry, <https://www.loc.gov/item/2021666448/>
- Hinsch, Bret. *Women in Qing China*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Incorporated, 2022.
- Huang, Martin. "Male-Male Sexual Bonding and Male Friendship in Late Imperial China." *Sexuality in Imperial China*, Special Issues of *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, Vol. 22, No. 2, 2013: 312-331.

- Huang, Martin. "Readership and Reading Practices: The Story of the Stone in Premodern China." *Approaches to Teaching The Story of the Stone (Dream of the Red Chamber)*, edited by Andrew Schonebaum and Tina Lu. The Modern Language Association of America, 2012.
- Ji, Xiaoxia. "An Analysis of The Story of the Stone by David Hawkes from the Perspective of Prophecies." *International Journal of Arts and Commerce*, 2020.
- Jung-Palandri, Angela. "On the Art of Characterization in *Dream of the Red Mansions*." The University of Oregon, 1987.
- Lee, Haiyan. "Love or Lust? The Sentimental Self in *Honglou meng*." *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews (CLEAR)*, vol. 19, 1997: 85–111.
- Levy, Dore J. "The Garden and Garden Culture in *The Story of the Stone*." *Approaches to Teaching The Story of the Stone (Dream of the Red Chamber)*, edited by Andrew Schonebaum and Tina Lu. The Modern Language Association of America, 2012.
- Li, Xiaodong, and Yeo, Kang Shua. "The Propensity of Chinese Space: Architecture in the Novel *Dream of the Red Chamber*." *Traditional Dwellings and Settlements Review*, vol. 13, no. 2, 2002: 49–62.
- Lian, Zhangjun. "A Parallel Corpus-based Study of Interpersonal Metaphors in *Hong Lou Meng* and Their Translations." *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, Vol. 4, No. 6, 2014: 1155-1161.
- Liang, Yan. "Reflections on a Braised Pig's Head: Food and Vernacular Storytelling in *Jin Ping Mei*." *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. 34, No. 2., 2014: 51-68.
- Lo, Vivienne. "Chinese Traditional Medicine and Diet." *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Food Issues*. Edited by Ken Albala. Vol. 1. Thousand Oaks,: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2015: 217-21.
- Lu, Tina. "Dreams, Subjectivity, and Identity in *Stone*." *Approaches to Teaching The Story of the Stone (Dream of the Red Chamber)*, edited by Andrew Schonebaum and Tina Lu. The Modern Language Association of America, 2012.
- Lupke, Christopher. "The Capillaries of Power: Hierarchy and Servitude in *The Story of the Stone*." *Approaches to Teaching The Story of the Stone (Dream of the Red Chamber)*, edited by Andrew Schonebaum and Tina Lu. The Modern Language Association of America, 2012, 283-295.
- Mann, Susan. "Grooming a Daughter for Marriage: Brides and Wives in the Mid-Qing Period." *Chinese Femininities/Chinese Masculinities: A Reader*, 2012.
- Mann, Susan. *Precious Records: Women in China's Long Eighteenth Century*. Stanford University Press, 1997.

- Meyer-Fong, Tobie. "A Question of Taste: Material Culture, Connoisseurship, and Character in *The Story of the Stone*." *Approaches to Teaching The Story of the Stone (Dream of the Red Chamber)*, edited by Andrew Schonebaum and Tina Lu. The Modern Language Association of America, 2012.
- Milburn, Olivia. "Aromas, Scents, and Spices: Olfactory Culture in China before the Arrival of Buddhism." *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. 136, No. 3, 2016: 441-464.
- Moyer, Jessica Dvorak. "Reframing the Boundaries of Household and Text in Hou Honglou Meng." *Late Imperial China*, vol. 36 no. 1, 2015: 53-87. Project MUSE, doi:10.1353/late.2015.0002
- Naquin, Susan, and Rawski, Evelyn S. *Chinese Society in the Eighteenth Century*. Yale University Press, 1994.
- Naquin, Susan. "Three Questions about Stone: Men, Riches, and Religion." *Approaches to Teaching The Story of the Stone (Dream of the Red Chamber)*, edited by Andrew Schonebaum and Tina Lu. The Modern Language Association of America, 2012.
- Park, Nancy E. "Corruption in Eighteenth-Century China" *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 56, No. 4, 1997: 967-1005.
- Schonebaum, Andrew. "Medicine in *The Story of the Stone*: Four Cases." *Approaches to Teaching The Story of the Stone (Dream of the Red Chamber)*, edited by Andrew Schonebaum and Tina Lu. The Modern Language Association of America, 2012.
- Schonebaum, Andrew and Tina Lu, eds. *Approaches to Teaching The Story of the Stone (Dream of the Red Chamber)*. The Modern Language Association of America, 2012.
- Shahar, Meir. "Religion in *The Story of the Stone*." *Approaches to Teaching The Story of the Stone (Dream of the Red Chamber)*, edited by Andrew Schonebaum and Tina Lu. The Modern Language Association of America, 2012.
- Smith, Richard J. *The Qing Dynasty and Traditional Chinese Culture*. Rowman and Littlefield, 2015.
- Sommer, Matthew H. "Scandal in the Garden: *The Story of the Stone* as a Licentious Novel." *Approaches to Teaching The Story of the Stone (Dream of the Red Chamber)*, edited by Andrew Schonebaum and Tina Lu. The Modern Language Association of America, 2012.
- Unschuld, Paul U. *What is Medicine?* University of California Press, 2009.
- Wells, Carina. *Authorial Disputes: Private Life and Social Commentary in the Honglou meng*. 2007. University of Pennsylvania, Undergraduate Honors Thesis.

- Wu, I-Hsien. “‘Enlightenment through Feelings’: Poetry, Music, and Drama in The Story of the Stone.” *Approaches to Teaching The Story of the Stone (Dream of the Red Chamber)*, edited by Andrew Schonebaum and Tina Lu. The Modern Language Association of America, 2012.
- Yang, Michael. “Naming in *Honglou meng*.” *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews (CLEAR)*, vol. 18, 1996: 69–100. JSTOR, <https://doi.org/10.2307/495626>. Accessed 10 Sept. 2023.
- Yee, Angelina C. “Counterpoise in *Honglou meng*.” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, Vol. 50, No. 2, 1990: 613-650.
- Yee, Angelina C. “Self, Sexuality, and Writing in *Honglou meng*.” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, Vol. 55, No. 2, 1995: 373-407.
- Yi, Jeannie Jinsheng. *The Dream of the Red Chamber: An Allegory of Love*. Homa & Sekey Books, 2004.
- Yim, Chi-hung. The “Deficiency of Yin in the Liver”: Dai-yu's Malady and Fubi in "Dream of the Red Chamber." *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews (CLEAR)*, vol. 22, 2000: 85–111.
- Zhao, Xiaohuan. “Court Trials and Miscarriage of Justice in *Dream of the Red Chamber*.” *Law and Literature*, Vol. 23, No. 1, 2011: 129-156.
- Zhou, Yiqun. "Honglou Meng and Agrarian Values." *Late Imperial China*, vol. 34 no. 1, 2013: 28-66.
- Zunshine, Lisa. “From the Social to the Literary: Approaching Cao Xueqin’s The Story of the Stone (*Honglou meng*) from a Cognitive Perspective.” *The Oxford Handbook of Cognitive Literary Studies*, Oxford University Press, 2015: 176-196.