

# A Study on the Intertextuality of the Imagery System and Characters' Fates in the Poem "Dream of the Red Chamber"

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## Abstract

As the pinnacle of Chinese classical literature, "Dream of the Red Chamber" contains a rich and unique system of imagery in its poetry. These images are not only the carriers of the author's emotions and aesthetic concepts but also have a close intertextual relationship with the fates of the characters in the book. This article, through an in-depth analysis of the main images in the poetry of "Dream of the Red Chamber", such as flowers, the moon, and water, explores their intrinsic connections with the characters' destinies, and reveals the significant role played by the image system in shaping the characters' images, hinting at the direction of their destinies, and deepening the themes of the works. This further demonstrates the profound artistic value and cultural connotation contained in the intertextuality between the poetry and the characters' destinies in "Dream of the Red Chamber".

**Keywords:** Dream of the Red Chamber; Poetry; Image system; Character's fate Intertextuality.

## 1. Introduction

With its grand narrative structure, delicate character depictions and profound ideological connotations, "Dream of the Red Chamber" has become an insurmountable peak in the history of Chinese literature. The poems and verses in the book, as an important part of the work, not only possess independent artistic value but are also closely linked to the characters, plots and themes of the novel. Image, as the core element of poetry, is the fusion of the poet's subjective emotions and objective objects. In the poetry of "Dream of the Red Chamber", the image system constructs a unique and rich artistic world, forming a clever intertextual relationship with the destinies of the characters.

The study of the intertextuality between the image system and the characters' destinies in the poetry of "Dream of the Red Chamber" holds significant academic and practical significance. From an academic perspective, this research is conducive to deeply exploring the artistic charm of "Dream of the Red Chamber" and enriching the research perspectives and methods of Chinese classical literature. Through the analysis of the relationship between imagery and the fate of characters, one can better understand the author's creative intention and the profound connotation of the work. From a practical perspective, this research can provide references for contemporary literary creation, inspiring writers on how to use imagery to express characters' emotions and destinies, and enhancing the artistic appeal of their works.

Research on the poetry of "Dream of the Red Chamber" in China has a long history, and many scholars have conducted in-depth discussions from different perspectives. In the field of image research, some scholars have paid attention to the symbolic meanings of specific images in "Dream of the Red Chamber", such as flower images and moon images, etc. [4] They analyzed the application of these images in poetry and the emotions and ideas they conveyed, but conducted relatively few systematic intertextuality studies on these images and the fates of the characters. Some other scholars, however, focus on studying the overall artistic features and creative techniques of the poetry in "Dream of the Red Chamber", and have made certain contributions to the construction and function of the image system, but they are not in-depth or comprehensive enough [5].

## 2. Construction of the Poetic Imagery System in "Dream of the Red Chamber"

### 2.1 Sources and Classification of Images

#### 2.1.1 Sources of Imagery

The imagery in the poetry of "Dream of the Red Chamber" comes from a wide range of sources, including both the capture of natural scenes and the borrowing of traditional culture. Natural scenes are one of the important sources of imagery. The book depicts numerous natural landscapes, such as flowers, the moon, water, snow, etc. These natural scenes not only add beauty to the poetry but are also endowed with specific symbolic meanings by the author. For instance, flowers often symbolize beauty, youth and life in traditional culture, and in "Dream of the Red Chamber", they are closely linked to the destinies of many women.

Traditional culture is also an important source of imagery. The Dream of the Red Chamber is deeply influenced by traditional Chinese culture. The book quotes a large number of myths, legends, historical allusions and images from literary works. For instance, the mythological stories of "Crimson Pearl Immortal Grass" and "Divine Vase Attendant" mentioned in the book add a mysterious touch to the tragic love story of Lin Daiyu and Jia Baoyu, and also become important images running through the entire book.

#### 2.1.2 Classification of Images

According to their symbolic meanings and expressive functions, the images in the poetry of "Dream of the Red Chamber" can be classified into various types. Plant imagery represented by flowers often symbolizes women's beauty, youth and destiny. In the book, different flowers correspond to different characters, such as Lin Daiyu and hibiscus, Xue Baochai and peony, etc. [8] These flowers not only possess external beauty but also hint at the inner character and destiny of the characters.

Celestial images represented by the moon often symbolize the impermanence, loneliness and yearning of life. The waxing and waning of the moon symbolize the ups and downs of life, echoing the fates of the characters in the book. For instance, in his "Thirty-five Rhymes on the Scene of the Grand View Garden on the Mid-Autumn Night", Jia Baoyu wrote, "The crane's shadow crosses the cold pond, and the soul of the flower is buried under the cold moon." Here, the "cold moon" creates a cold and lonely atmosphere, alluding to the tragic fates of Daiyu and others.

The fluid image represented by water often implies the passage of time, the transformation of emotions and the ups and downs of fate. Water is flowing and impermanent, symbolizing the unpredictability of life. In the book, the ponds and rivers in the Grand View Garden often appear as backgrounds, complementing the ups and downs of the characters' destinies.

### 2.2 Overall Characteristics of the Image System

#### 2.2.1 Integrity

The imagery system of the poems and verses in "Dream of the Red Chamber" has an overall characteristic. Numerous images interweave and complement each other, jointly forming an organic artistic whole. For instance, in the poems depicting the Grand View Garden, images such as flowers, the moon and water often appear simultaneously, forming a beautiful picture. These images not only each have independent symbolic meanings, but also reflect as a whole the complex social life and the inner world of the characters depicted in the work.

#### 2.2.2 Correlation

The correlation of the image system is manifested as the intrinsic connection between the same image or related images in different poems. They echo each other in terms of plot development and theme expression. For instance, the image of "flower" appears many times in the book. In different scenarios and poems, the symbolic meaning of "flower" varies, but it is always associated with the fate of women. In Lin Daiyu's "Poem of Burying Flowers", "flowers" symbolize her youth and life. In Xue Baochai's poems and verses, "flowers" more often represent her dignity and wealth.

#### 2.2.3 Symbolism

Symbolism is the core feature of the imagery in the poetry of "Dream of the Red Chamber". The author conveys the ideological emotions and life philosophy of the work implicitly and profoundly by endowing the imagery with specific symbolic meanings. For instance, "Crimson Pearl Immortal Grass" symbolizes Lin Daiyu's previous life and her purity and kindness. The "Spiritual Jade" symbolizes Jia Baoyu's special status and the constraints of his fate. The application of these symbolic images endows the work with a deeper connotation and a stronger artistic appeal.

### 3. The Intertextual Relationship between the Main Imagery and the Characters' Destinies

### 3.1 Flower Imagery and Women's Destinies

In "Dream of the Red Chamber", the image of flowers runs through the entire story and is closely linked to the fates of many women in the book. Take Lin Daiyu as an example. The lotus flower divination she drew, "Don't blame the east wind; instead, you should lament yourself," implies her noble yet unfortunate fate like a lotus. Although the hibiscus is beautiful, it withers easily, just as Daiyu's body is delicate and her life is short. In her "Poem of Burying Flowers", she compared herself to flowers, saying, "Flowers fall, flowers fly, flowers fill the sky; when the red fades and the fragrance fades, who will pity?" Through her lament over the fallen flowers, she expressed her feelings about her own life and her helplessness towards fate. For instance, the peony flower stick that Xue Baochai drew, "Even if it is heartless, it is still charming", the peony symbolizes wealth and dignity, which is in line with Baochai's background and personality. However, the word "heartless" also implies her restraint and rationality in emotions. Although she eventually married Baoyu, she failed to find true love, and her fate was full of helplessness.

The flower imagery also presents the tragic fates of numerous women through group portrait depictions. In the 63rd chapter, "The Night Banquet of Longevity and Red Flowers", everyone drew flower sticks to play the drinking game, and each flower stick corresponded to the fate of different characters. The poems and images on these flower sticks are like prophecies of fate, foreshadowing their future directions. The blooming and withering of flowers symbolize the passing of a woman's youth and the end of her life, expressing the author's deep sympathy for the fate of women and her criticism of feudal ethics.

### 3.2 Moon Imagery and Life Insights

The image of the moon frequently appears in the poetry of "Dream of the Red Chamber", often embodying the author's insights into life and thoughts on fate. The waxing and waning of the moon symbolize the ups and downs of life, echoing the fates of the characters in the book. For instance, in his "Thirty-five Rhymes on the Scene of the Grand View Garden on the Mid-Autumn Night", Jia Baoyu wrote, "The crane's shadow crosses the cold pond, and the soul of the flower is buried under the cold moon." Here, the "cold moon" creates a cold and lonely atmosphere, allusion to the tragic fates of Daiyu and others. The line "The cold moon swallows the soul of the flower" combines the flower and the moon, using the coldness of the moon to set off the withering of the flower, expressing the sadness over the disappearance of beautiful things and the sigh over the impermanence of life.

The image of the moon also resonates with the character's lonely state of mind. In the book, many characters wander and ponder alone in the moonlit night. For instance, in Lin Daiyu's "Autumn Window Rainy Night", "I have felt that the autumn window never ends; how can the wind and rain add to the desolation!" How fast will the autumn wind and rain come? The autumn window is shattered, and the autumn dream is green. Embracing the autumn sentiment, I can't bear to sleep; I shed tears and candles on the autumn screen. The candle of tears wanders 爇 short 燐, evoking sorrow and hatred, stirring the feelings of parting. Whose autumn courtyard is free from the wind? Where is the autumn window without the sound of rain? The silk quilt cannot resist the autumn wind, and the sound of the dripping water urges the rapid autumn rain. The night has been filled with a continuous murmur, and before the lamp, it seems as if a parting person is weeping. Cold smoke small hospital turn depression, thin bamboo window dripping. I don't know when the wind and rain will end, but I have already shed tears that wet the window screen. Although the moon is not directly described, the desolate and lonely atmosphere created throughout the poem is similar to the mood of a moonlit night. And some other poems in "Dream of the Red Chamber", such as "Crossing the Shadow of the Crane over the Cold Pond", are also set on moonlit nights. The coldness of the moonlight adds to the characters' sense of loneliness, reflecting their inner pain under the constraints of feudal ethics and their longing for freedom and true love.

### 3.3 Water Imagery and the Unpredictability of Fate

The water image in "Dream of the Red Chamber" has rich symbolic meanings and is closely linked to the unpredictable fate of the characters. Water is flowing and impermanent, symbolizing the unpredictability of life. In the book, the ponds and rivers in the Grand View Garden often appear as backgrounds, complementing the ups and downs of the characters' destinies. For instance, after experiencing the destruction of his family and the loss of his life, Zhen Shiyin heard the "Song of All Is Well" sung by a lame Taoist priest. The life philosophy contained in it, "All is well, all is good; if not, it is not good; if it is good, it must be," is like the flow of water, everything is in a state of change, and there is no eternal wealth and happiness.

Lin Daiyu's fate was also intricately linked to water. In her previous life, she was the Crimson Pearl Immortal Herb, nourished by the Divine Guardian. In this life, she repaid the debt with tears. Tears flowed like water, ceaselessly,

symbolizing her deep love for Jia Baoyu and her helplessness towards fate. In her "Elegy for Burying Flowers", the lines "purity comes and goes, better than filth and sink into a ditch" express her unwavering commitment to purity and her unyielding attitude towards fate. However, in the end, she still could not escape a tragic ending, just like flowing water, her fate was beyond her control.

#### **4. The Intertextuality of the Image System and the Fate of Characters**

##### **4.1 Create Character Images**

Through the intertextuality between the imagery system in poetry and the characters' destinies, the author can shape the characters' images more delicately and profoundly. Imagery, as the externalized carrier of a character's emotions, can directly present the inner world and personality traits of the character. Take Lin Daiyu as an example. The image of flowers runs through her poetry and life. In "The Song of Burying Flowers", "Flowers wither, flowers fly, flowers fill the sky; when red fades and fragrance fades, who will pity?" Here, flowers are not only a natural scene but also a reflection of Daiyu's own fate. She was as sensitive and fragile as a delicate flower. Under the suppression of feudal ethics, her heart was filled with loneliness and sorrow. The image of the moon is no different. The coldness and loneliness of the moon are just like Daiyu's sentimental personality. She often composed poems and expressed her feelings under the moonlight. The falling of the moonlight seemed to be the spread of her inner sorrows, highlighting her outstanding talent yet sensitive and delicate qualities.

Looking at Xue Baochai again, her flower images are mostly related to peonies. The peony symbolizes wealth and dignity, which is in line with the image that Xue Baochai presented in the Jia Mansion. She was elegant in her manners, erudite and well-versed in the norms of feudal ethics and strictly adhered to them. In her poetry creation, she seldom reveals the sorrowful emotions like Daiyu did, but instead faces life with a rational and steady attitude. The use of this flower image enables readers to clearly perceive Xue Baochai's dignified, steady and rational personality traits. Through these images, readers can better understand the behavioral motives and emotional changes of the characters, making the character images more three-dimensional and full, as if these characters were truly living before the readers' eyes.

##### **4.2 Hint at the Direction of the Character's Fate**

The imagery system also plays a role in suggesting the direction of characters' destinies in works. The author ingeniously employs various images to lay the groundwork for the characters' fates in advance, evoking a sense of fatalism and tragedy in the readers during the reading process. Flower sticks are a typical example. At Baoyu's birthday party, everyone drew flower sticks to play the drinking game. Daiyu drew a flower card for the hibiscus, which read, "Don't blame the east wind; instead, lament yourself." Although the hibiscus is beautiful, its flowering period is short, which hinted at Daiyu's early death. The peony flower card that Baochai drew read, "Even if heartless, it is still charming." Although the peony symbolizes wealth and honor, the word "heartless" also subtly implies that although she eventually married Baoyu, she failed to find true love and could only spend the rest of her life in loneliness, leading to a tragic ending.

Metaphors in poetry also have the function of hinting at fate. For instance, in Daiyu's "Autumn Window, Rainy Night", "I feel that the autumn window never ends; how can the wind and rain add to the desolation?" The images of the autumn window and the wind and rain create a desolate and bleak atmosphere, hinting that Daiyu's illness worsened in the autumn night and her life was gradually coming to an end. These images are like the codes of fate, gradually unraveled as the plot unfolds. While readers marvel at the author's ingenious conception, they also gain a deeper understanding of the characters' fates, as if they could sense the ups and downs of their destinies in advance.

##### **4.3 Deepen the Theme of the Work**

The intertextuality between the imagery system and the characters' destinies in the poetry of "Dream of the Red Chamber" deepens the theme of the work. Through the depiction of the tragic fates of numerous women, the work reveals the oppression and destruction of human nature by feudal ethics and norms. The image system, as an important means of expressing the theme, incorporates this kind of criticism and reflection into specific objects, making the theme more implicit and profound. The withering of the flower image symbolizes the passing of a woman's life. The daughters in the Grand View Garden are as beautiful as delicate flowers, but they are gradually withering under the constraints of feudal ethics. Their youth, love and dreams were all ruthlessly stifled. The process of flowers blooming and fading is a portrayal of their life journey.

The impermanence of the moon image implies the unpredictability of life. The moon has its phases of waxing and waning, just like the ups and downs of a person's fate. The rise and fall of the Jia family and the joys and sorrows of its characters all appeared even more desolate and helpless under the moonlight. The flowing image of water represents the unpredictability of fate. The pools and rivers in the Grand View Garden, surging ceaselessly, symbolize that the destinies of the characters cannot be controlled by themselves and can only drift along with the torrent of the feudal society. These images jointly convey the author's profound thoughts on life and society, endowing the work with higher artistic value and cultural connotation. While readers savor the poetry and feel the fate of the characters, they can also have a clearer understanding of the essence of the feudal society.

## 5. Conclusion

There is a close intertextual relationship between the imagery system of the poems in "Dream of the Red Chamber" and the fates of the characters. As an artistic treasure of the work, the imagery system not only constructs a unique and rich aesthetic world, but also plays a significant role in shaping the characters' images, hinting at the direction of fate and deepening the theme of the work through mutual reflection and suggestion with the characters' destinies. This intertextuality reflects the author Cao Xueqin's superb artistic skills and profound ideological insight, making "Dream of the Red Chamber" a classic with eternal charm in the history of Chinese literature. Through the research on this subject, we can have a deeper appreciation of the artistic charm of "Dream of the Red Chamber" and feel the profoundness and vastness of traditional Chinese culture. At the same time, it also provides beneficial references and inspirations for future literary research and creation. In future research, we can further expand the research perspective and deeply explore more connotations of the intertextuality between the poetic imagery system and the characters' destinies in "Dream of the Red Chamber", so as to promote the continuous in-depth study and development of "Dream of the Red Chamber".

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