

## Tea in *The Story of The Stone*: Meaning and Function

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This article examines tea scenes in the eighteenth century classic *The Story of The Stone* or *A Dream of Red Chambers* (*Hong Rou Meng*). As a novel of manners portraying habits, modes and manners of contemporary life, it provides a panoramic view of Qing Chinese society through depiction of four aristocratic families. Tea features in many scenes, ubiquitous as it was in contemporary Chinese life. Tea serves to switch topics, foretell hints in the development of the plot, and tell stories that words on the pages cannot. Paying attention to the role of tea helps to understand characters in the novel through small details in their lives and provides insight into a deeper world of hidden and suppressed feeling. To know tea gives us a clearer understanding of individual situations. Tea is also an effective medium building invisible bridges to connect segregated groups of people or ideas, and to propel the development of the plot to produce unexpected results and contrasts.

### The Book of *The Story of The Stone* and its Tea Scenes

Cao Xueqin (1715-1763), author of *The Story of The Stone*, is considered to be one of the greatest novelists China has produced, but little is known of his life. An unconventional and versatile man, he came from an eminent and wealthy family which suffered a reversal of fortune in 1728 after the death of the Kangxi Emperor and a power struggle between his sons. Cao seems to have spent about ten years writing and revising his novel, from roughly 1740 to 1750, but the last 40 of the current 120 chapters were completed by a different author, probably after his

death. Cao also worked for a period of time in the Imperial Clan's school for the children of the nobility and bannermen, but eventually settled in the countryside west of Peking. He earned some money by selling his own paintings, but his family seems to have been perpetually in poverty.

*The Story of The Stone*, remained unpublished for nearly thirty years after its author's death in 1763, and exists in several different versions, none of which can be pointed to as definitively 'correct.'

From 1763, till the appearance of the first printed edition in January 1792,<sup>1</sup> *The Story of The Stone* circulated in manuscript copies, at first privately among members of the Cao family and their friends, and then more widely as copies began to find their way on to bookstalls at the temple markets of Peking. One such copy was bought in 1769 by a future Provincial Judge who happened to be staying in Peking at the time to sit for an examination. It was published in Shanghai in a somewhat garbled form a century and a half later.

These manuscript copies included a commentary consisting of the remarks, in many cases signed and dated, of two or three different commentators, evidently made over a period of years, and written, often in red ink, in the manuscripts' margins and in the spaces between the text. They circulated in several different versions, both the commentary and the text differing somewhat from copy to copy, but they all had two things in common: they were all entitled *Red Inkstone's Reannotated Story of the Stone* (*Zhi Yan Zhai Pi Shi Dou Ji*); and they all broke off at the end of chapter 80, just as the plot appeared to be drawing towards some sort of climax.

The appearance of a complete version in 120 chapters in Gao E and Cheng Weiyuan's first printed edition of 1792 did not immediately end the lucrative traffic in hand-written copies because the first printed edition was an expensive one; but its subsequent pirating in cheaper reprints by other publishers did; and

though a dwindling number of cognoscenti still clung to their Red Inkstone's and denounced Gao E's edition as an impudent imposture, the majority of readers were well satisfied with the completed version. No longer was the Stone to be found only in the drawing-rooms of Manchu noblemen. Soon everyone in Peking was reading and talking about it, and throughout the whole of the nineteenth century its popularity continued to grow and spread.

However Cao Xueqin's authorship was gradually forgotten; when Cheng Weiyuan and Gao E introduced the book to the general public in 1792 they told their readers that the author's name was unknown.

In modern times such facts as we know about this novel have had to be laboriously rediscovered. The publication of the Judge's manuscript in 1912 was a beginning. Unfortunately the manuscript itself was burned only a few years later and the printed version was somewhat a garbled one. But since 1927, when an important fragment of *Red Inkstone* came to light, more and more manuscripts have emerged from obscurity, and by studying them and comparing what could be learned from them with such information as could be gleaned from eighteenth-century archives and from the letters and poems of the Caos and their friends, scholars have been able to reconstruct a fairly detailed picture of the novel's background.<sup>2</sup> Much, however, still remains uncertain and mysterious.

The novel we read today, then, is an incomplete novel by Cao Xueqin in eighty chapters with a supplement by an anonymous author in forty chapters which, though in many respects not what the author intended and perhaps inferior to what he would have written, is nevertheless, because of the inside knowledge of the person who wrote it, a vastly better ending than other completed editions.<sup>3</sup>

The English version quoted in this article is translated by David Hawkes, himself a *Stone* critic. This 120-chaptered version is the most faithful and precise translation, both in content and in length. In his introduction, Hawkes explains:

“[t]his translation, though occasionally following the text of one or other of the manuscript in the first eighty chapters, will nevertheless be a translation of the whole 120 chapters of the Gao E edition. The title chosen for it, *The Story of the Stone*, is not, however, the one that Gao E gave to his completed 120-chapter version but the one used by Red Inkstone in the eighty-chapter manuscripts.”<sup>4</sup>

In fact the original book has more tentative titles. In the opening chapter of the novel the author himself mentions no less than five titles which he and the members of his family, who watched the novel grow and helped him with their suggestions, had at one time or another considered using:

1. Shi Tou Ji (The Story of the Stone)
2. Qing Seng Lu (The Passionate Monk's Tale)
3. Fengyue Baojian (A Mirror for the Romantic)
4. Hong Lou Meng (A Dream of Red Mansions)
5. Jinling Shier Chai (Twelve Young Ladies of Jinling)<sup>5</sup>

The book is known by the forth title generally in China and by translation of that title that it is referred to in other parts of the world. However Hawkes decides on the first title, because he thought the translated title of the forth is misleading: “[t]he image they conjure up – that of a sleeper in a crimson-colored room – is highly evocative one, full of charm and mystery; but unfortunately it is not what the Chinese implies.”<sup>6</sup> His title refers to the fiction that the text of the novel started off as an immensely long inscription on a miraculous stone which was copied out by a visiting holy man and taken down into the world for publication.

Apart from authenticity of the different versions of the book and authorship of the latter 40 chapters, another focus of academic debate is the exact relationship existing between the characters of the novel and the various members of the

Cao family. Some scholars like Zhou Ruchang have striven to establish a precise parallelism between the two. Hawkes, basing his study on the writings of Wu Shichang, Zhou Ruchang and Zhao Gang, especially of the latter whom he found more convincing, agrees that many of the characters are portraits of real people, but it does not follow that the relationships between the different characters in the novel were those of the people in real life whom they represent.<sup>7</sup> Evidence shows that Cao Xueqin deliberately mixed the generations up as a means of disguising the facts. But there is no doubt about Cao Xueqin's intention of making the history of his own family's decline and fall the general background of the novel. For example, historical records show that Cao Yin, Xueqin's grandfather who had held an important post (Textile Commissioner) in Nanking for over thirty-six years, acted as host to the Emperor and his vast retinue no less than four times when Kangxi Emperor visited Nanking in the courses of his celebrated Southern Tours. This involved building a special palace with its own gardens in which to receive him – rather like the Separate Residence made for the Imperial Concubine's visit in the novel. There is disguised reference to this in the conversation between Wang Xi-feng and Nannie Zhao in Chapter 16.

After all these issues are comparatively settled, recent academic writings began to focus on the text, from both views of literary and cultural studies. It is almost a new publication rash after the ice age of Cultural Revolution; books like *Eating and Drinking Culture in Hong Lou Meng* (*Hong Lou Meng De Yin Shi Wen Hua*), *Medical Practice, Medicine, Tea and Flower in Hong Lou Meng* (*Hong Lou Meng Si Hua: Yi, Yao, Cha, Hua*), *Tragedy Consciousness and Rhythmic Aesthetics in Hong Lou Meng* (*Hong Lou Meng De Bei Ju Yi Shi Yu Xuan Lu Mei*), *Important Women in Hong Lou Meng* (*Hong Lou Meng De Zhong Yao Nu Xing*) and *The Psychological World of Hong Lou Meng* (*Hong Lou Meng De Xin Li Shi Jie*),<sup>8</sup> all elaborate on specific aspects and approach the text in their unique ways. In a way, this study is inspired by such new approaches.

In his introduction, Hawkes raises a new question: why one of the main commentators, Odd Tablet (Qi Huo Sou) who outlived Cao Xueqin, didn't try to patch up the remaining drafts somehow or other, which would not have been beyond his competence. Hawkes' hypothesis is that he deliberately suppressed it, because the old man believed that the original harrowing denouement that clues found in the commentaries and in the text pointed to, would cause a confiscation.<sup>9</sup> And it was precisely during the seventies and eighties of the century (Cao Xueqin died in 1763) that the prolonged literary witch-hunt occurred which is generally referred to as 'Qianlong's literary Inquisition'.

This article, however, will concentrate on the text of the first 80 chapters, with very few references to the problematic last 40 chapters. I am going to examine tea scenes in the novel, which are numerous and varied, to see how through these scenes Cao Xueqin allowed us an insightful glimpse into Qing Society, but more important we will see that Cao turned tea into a literary device in the more subtle depiction of that society. He not only borrows certain tea customs from contemporary life that reflect and highlight the cultured life of the Jia clan in general, but also employ them in a more metaphorical way that livens up the narrative, by giving more interpretative space that makes reading more pleasurable.

By the time of Qing, tea has grown into an important aspect of civilized Chinese life, for both wealthy and poor. Implied meaning in tea scenes can be caught without much difficulty. One literary critic, writing on *The Story of The Stone* made the following generalization of the role tea plays in this novel of one hundred and twenty chapters: "tea is marriage."<sup>10</sup> Indeed, love and marriage is one of the novel's main themes. This is not an abstract comment, but based on the historic connections between tea and marriage, including the custom of giving tea as an engagement gift. Dozens of tea scenes in the book actually footnote the comment,

as an example, in Chapter 118, “Lady Wang knew that Li Qi had been promised to Zhen Bao-yu, and that the betrothal had already been sealed with the customary gift of tea.”<sup>11</sup> Other tea scenes, unlike the above one, have hidden meanings that demanded careful interpretation; likewise, a close look at these scenes is rewarded by a greater depth yield by the story and its characters.

In *The Story of The Stone*, tea is a graceful pastime; the aristocratic youth drinks brewed tea in order to draw inspiration while composing poems; the prize for puzzle games may be an old-fashioned bamboo tea whisk. This business with tea can be traced back to Tang China, when tea-making was keenly cultivated by the high-born and those with high pretensions to culture.<sup>12</sup> Though tea-making changes fundamentally in the following centuries, making a good cup of tea has always been an admired skill.

By the Qing Dynasty, the porcelain, ceramic and lacquer craft has reached such a heights that along with the exquisite taste of tea, tea-drinking produces a cultivated, poetic moment for the leisured and wealthy class.<sup>13</sup> Tea-drinking, is not merely an activity to gratify physical needs, but grow into a systematic theory of creating beauty and uniting sensual and spiritual enjoyment of beautiful objects in poetic atmospheres.

The paradox in tea and tea-drinking is that, tea is polite and respectable, however, under the contemporary social circumstances that forbid direct contact between the two sexes outside marriage, tea provided a rare chance to meet, and is therefore use in disguised gestures to communicate the unspeakable, and those that have to be left unspoken.

Ciao Xueqin, an aristocrat himself, knows the place of tea too well not to include tea scenes as they would inevitably occur. Subtle and ambiguous feelings, like the fume and fragrance of the herb, permeate and linger throughout the scenes.

Throughout the one hundred and twenty chapters, the various tea scenes produce a new dimension, in which the characters are to be observed and their actions to be read with some particular cultural meanings related to the ceremonies of tea; this dimension helps the reader, especially the native reader, to understand the characters and their situation and their relation to each other effectively and conveniently with the help of a shared cultural knowledge, while real feelings, which underlie surface behavior, are revealed in small gestures associated with tea etiquette.

*The Story of The Stone* has been completed during the reign of Emperor QianLong (1736-1795), which is an opulent period of Qing Dynasty. The refined and highly civilized emperor of QianLong, was a connoisseur of tea, for he was recorded giving forty-three annual court tea banquets during his reign of sixty years. Tea with plum flower, Buddha's hand (a kind of fruit) and pine nuts brewed with snow water, the so called San-Qing tea (tea of three delicacies),<sup>14</sup> featured in the civilized gathering of the ministers and high rank officials headed by the emperor himself, and odes to the precious tea were composed and recorded at these celebrated events.

*The Story of The Stone*, portraying the upper-class society of its time, naturally reflects this cultural aspect. Having a place in Chinese lives for thousands of years, tea built various, subtle, multi-layered connections with religion, art and literature, and to be more specific with, the rituals and customs of everyday life. *The Story of The Stone*, with its incomparable length and scale, provides a chance to observe the various tea rituals and tea-etiquette of its time.

## Tea and Class

Tea at the Green Bower Hermitage, is probably the most extravagant tea-scene in the book; its refinement is almost equivalent to that of the emperor, QianLong's

tea banquets.

The Green Bower Hermitage is a private convent in the park of Jia Family, and the nun, Adamantina, is unusually beautiful. Born in a rich family, she is highly cultivated and ranked with the two heroines and the Jia girls as 'twelve beauties'. She becomes a nun at a young age to escape doom – a blind, superstitious belief, by renouncing worldly desire, however her fabulous tea-scene with the hero and the two heroines, uncovers her secret heart.

In a tour of their park, to show it to the distant relative, Grandmother Jia leads her train to the hermitage to have a good cup of tea, after an entertaining banquet. Adamantina, presents a welcome tea to Grandmother Jia; the exquisite, special tea equipage is observed to show the prestigious status of the old woman in the Jia family.

It was a little cinque-lobed lacquer tea-tray decorated with a gold-infilled engraving of a cloud dragon coiled round the character for 'longevity'. On it stood a little covered tea-cup of Cheng Hua enameled porcelain. Holding the tray out respectfully in both her hands, she offered the cup to Grandmother Jia.

'I don't drink Lu-an tea,' said Grandmother Jia.

'I know you don't,' said Adamantina with a smile. 'This is Old Man's Eyebrows.'

Grandmother Jia took the tea and inquired what sort of water it had been made with.

'Last year's rain-water,' said Adamantina.

After drinking half, Grandmother Jia handed the cup to Grannie Liu.

'Try it,' she said. 'See what you think of it.'

Grannie Liu gulped down the remaining half.

‘Hmn. All right. A bit on the weak side, though. It would be better if it were brewed a little longer.’

Grandmother Jia and the rest seemed to derive much amusement from these comments.

The others were now served with tea in covered cups of ‘sweet-white’ eggshell china.<sup>15</sup>

Detailed descriptions are duly paid to tea utensils and tea-presenting manners. The matriarch’s supreme status is observed not only by the tea cup of special design that engraved with the character of “longevity”, but also by the fact that the nun presents tea herself, while the others are by servants. The observation of manners tells the hierarchy and cultured life of the Jia family, and reflects the characters. The nun is cautious in preparing tea for the matriarch, noticing her tea habit and chose the right type of tea with an auspicious name (which again means longevity) and stored rain water. Of course, all these are waste on the philistine Grannie Liu, who dismisses the tea as too weak. A remote relative and a poor villager who has come for help, her ignorant and straightforward comments on aristocratic life are entertaining to the group. The clownish old woman serves as a foil to the extravagant life of the Jia’s.

Adamantina then secretly invites the two heroines, Dai-yu and Bao-chai, whom she regards as equals, to her own room to share her supreme tea. The hero, Bao-yu, who has always admired the mysterious nun, stealthily slips out after them and is just in time to see Adamantina making tea for his two cousins.

...Adamantina busied herself at the stove, fanning the charcoal until the water was boiling vigorously and brewing them a fresh pot of tea. Bao-yu stepped softly into the room and made his presence known to the two cousins.

‘So you get the hostess’s special brew?’

‘Yes,’ they said laughingly. ‘And it’s no good your gate crashing in here after us, because there’s none for you.’

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

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

Bao-yu understood immediately. It was because Grannie Liu had drunk from it. In Adamantina’s eyes the cup was now contaminated. He watched her as she got cups out for the girls.<sup>16</sup>

The nun served the two girls with rare, priceless antiques jewelled cups, inscribed with poems by famous scholars in early times, which reflect her cultivation and taste. But she is also shown as biased, revealed in her decision to disown the cup Grannie had drunk from. Bao-yu plays a reflecting role in this episode: we see the cups through his eyes who is a connoisseur enough to appreciate them; again it is him who read the nun’s mind and would try to save the unfortunate cup for Grannie Liu.

One of them, a cup with a handle, had

THE PUMPKIN CUP

carved in li-shu characters on one side and

Wang Kai his Treasure

in little autograph characters on the back, followed by another column of tiny characters:

Examined by Su Dong-po in the Inner Treasury

Fourth month Yuan-feng era anno 5

When she had poured tea into this cup she handled it to Bao-chai.

The other cup was shaped like a miniature begging-bowl and was inscribed with the words

THE HORN LINK GOBLET

in 'pearl-drop' seal script. Adamantina filled it and hand it to Dai-yu.<sup>17</sup>

Besides the material value of the cups, what makes them extraordinary is the elegant design and the fact that they were formerly owned by an admired literary figure, which adds cultured and poetic atmosphere to this 'intimacy tea' among equals. Then Adamantina chooses an even more special tea cup for Bao-yu,

She poured tea for Bao-yu in the green jade mug that she normally drank from herself. Bao-yu commented jokingly on the choice:

'I thought your religious were supposed to treat all earthly creatures alike. How comes it that the other two get priceless heirlooms to drink out of but I only get a common old thing like this?'

'I have no wish to boast,' said Adamantina, 'but this "common old thing" as you call it may be more valuable than anything you could find in your own household.'<sup>18</sup>

Although she has renounced as a nun, Adamantina doesn't relinquish worldly material values. She then finds Bao-yu another "priceless" drinking bowl "carved from a gnarled and ancient bamboo root in the likeness of a coil-up dragon with horns like antlers." Bao-yu is delighted with the huge bamboo bowl, but then find himself mocked again: "'One cup for a connoisseur, two for a rustic, and three for a thirsty mule'. What sort of creature does that make you if you drink this bowlful?" The serious nun shows a rare moment of girlish vivacity, but then finds herself needs a self-clarification:

'You realize, of course,' said Adamantina seriously, 'that it is only because of the other two that you are drinking this. If you had come here alone, I should not have given you any.'<sup>19</sup>

Adamantina has suddenly realized her inappropriateness; at the age of complete segregation between the two sexes, to serve tea with one's own cup and in one's inner chamber to the other sex, is dangerously scandalous.

The youngest of the four, Dai-yu, then asks "'Is this tea made with last year's rain-water too?" which caused Adamantina "looked scornful".

'Oh! Can you really not tell the difference? I am quite disappointed in you. This is melted snow that I collected from the branches of winter-flowering plum-trees five years ago, when I was living at the Coiled Incense temple on Mt Xuan-mu. I managed to fill the whole of that demon-green glaze water-jar with it. For years I couldn't bring myself to start it; then this summer I opened it for the first time. Today is only the second time I have ever used any. I am most surprised that you cannot tell the difference. When did stored rain-water have such buoyant lightness? How could one possibly use it for a tea like this?'<sup>20</sup>

The nun's practice and theory of tea water shows her deep knowledge in tea-making. According to her theory, 'the stored rain-water' can not produce a tea of 'buoyant lightness,' but to the poor Grannie Liu, who shared the first cup of tea with Grandma Jia, the rain-water tea is already 'on the weak side'. Grannie Liu didn't understand the aristocratic tea, but the others "understand" her ignorance perfectly; that is where they find her comments on the tea entertaining.

Before leaving the hermitage, Bao-yu begs for the cup the old woman drank

from. The expensive cup, which is to be discarded can make the poor old woman “probably live for quite a long while on the proceeds” if she sells it. In response to this benevolent idea,

Adamantina reflected for some moments and then nodded.

‘Yes, I suppose so. Fortunately I have never drunk out of that cup myself. If I had, I should have smashed it to pieces rather than give it to her. If you want her to have it, though, you must give it to her yourself. I will have no part in it. And you must take it away immediately.’<sup>21</sup>

This is where her snobbishness makes her unsympathetic. The poor old woman, Grannie Liu, who is received by the others warmly and benevolently in spite of being a distant relative and having come for help, is despised and considered a source of contamination. On the other hand, the aristocratic young man of Bao-yu, is able to enter her inner room and enjoy her precious tea from her own cup without being offensive. For Adamantina, the peasant woman’s lowly social status is more polluting than the masculinity of a member of her own class. The nun, who is supposed to be benevolent and transcendent in observance of the doctrine that all creatures should be treated equally, proves to be an unsurpassed snob and preoccupied with maintaining her own personal purity.

The mocking contradiction so subtly created is the seed of Adamantina’s tragedy and becomes the cause of her final transformation from the pure nun to the polluted whore. Each time Adamantina is subsequently mentioned in the novel, it is in relation to Bao-yu. The reader quickly gains the impression that the young nun is becoming infatuated with him. It is not long before her ability to meditate is hampered by the suppression of her feelings for Bao-yu. She becomes delirious during meditation and imagines herself surrounded by young suitors and

manhandled by ruffians. This event causes lewd rumors around town and leads to the burglary of the hermitage and her ruin.

The tea-making, tea-drinking scenes depicted her as a fastidious “over-pure nun” to such an extreme that her fall into prostitution, surrounded by dirt and pollution, is ironical but predictable in reference to the stated themes: Truth becomes fiction when the fiction’s true; Real becomes not-real when the unreal’s real.<sup>22</sup> The nun is thus turned into a thematic exemplary figure.

What lies beneath the over-fastidious purity about her chastity is her lack of true renunciation of the world, which her snobbishness betrays. By joining a nunnery she has avoided marriage and, most importantly, shown through her vows of life-long chastity that she renounces participation in a patrilineal society, but her relationship with Bao-yu breaks her vows, and brings about her own fall. Her tragedy is that the renunciation forced on her has been shallow and false, and it finally distorts and destroys her.

The beautiful and poetic tea scene serves as a treacherous trap that reveals the deep turbulence in her young and depressed heart.

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Another example of encounters between the poor and the wealthy and powerful at tea is between Grannie Liu and Wang Xifeng. Grannie Liu is firstly received by Wang Xifeng who was in charge of Jia family’s affairs. The poor old peasant woman, is intimidated by the fabulous wealth of the Jia family and has mistaken Xifeng’s maid, Patience, as her hostess. She becomes stiff and confused; finally she is to meet the powerful and manipulative Xifeng:

She was dressed in a sprigged peach-pink gown, with an ermine-lined skirt of dark-red foreign crepe underneath it, and a cloak of slate-blue silk with woven coloured insets and lining of grey squirrel around her shoulders.

Her face was exquisitely made-up. She was sitting on the edge of the kang, her back straight as a ramrod, with a diminutive pair of tongs in her hand, removing the spent charcoal from a portable hand-warmer. Patience stood beside her carrying a covered teacup on a tiny inlaid lacquer tray. Xi-feng appeared not to have noticed her, for she neither reached out for the cup nor raised her head, but continued picking absordedly at her hand-warmer. At last she spoke:

‘Why not ask them in, then?’

As she did so, she raised her head and saw Zhou Rui’s wife with her two charges already standing in front of her. She made a confused movement as if to rise to her feet, welcomed the old lady with a look of unutterable benevolence, and almost in the same breath said rather crossly to Zhou Rui’s wife, ‘Why didn’t you tell me?’

By the time Grannie Liu was already down on her knees and had touched her head several times to the floor in reverence to her ‘Aunt Feng’.<sup>23</sup>

Xi-feng’s skill in handling such complicated situation is vividly shown in this small tea scene. Grannie Liu, though elderly and belonging to an older generation, is from a lower class and has come for help. Xi-feng, to show her prestige of a female head of the family, and at the same time not to be imprudent, designed this reception. The tea, carried by Patience who is waiting by her, indicates her superior position; all the others are motionless and noiseless: ignoring the tea, she holds everything in suspense. The atmosphere is totally in control of the hostess.

To rise to receive Grannie Liu, will make her curtsey inevitable; it is not appropriate for Xi-feng’s status, but not to pay any curtsey will be imprudent as Grannie Liu is of an elder generation. So the ‘unintended negligence’ is designed.

Their short meeting is interrupted by Jia Rong, a nephew in law to Xi-feng,

who has come to borrow an expensive glass screen. When the young master leaves after successfully begging the screen, he is called back; “Xi-feng, however, sipped very intently from her teacup and mused for a while, saying nothing. Suddenly her face flushed and she gave a little laugh: ‘It doesn’t matter. Come back again after supper. I’ve got company now, and besides, I don’t feel in the mood to tell you.’”<sup>24</sup>

Whatever it is, is never mentioned in the book, but the meaningful sipping of tea and the unexplained suddenly flushing of Xi-feng’s face, tells something. Anyway, Xi-feng is only in her mid twenties, and the boy is only a couple of years younger than her. Simple as a cup of tea, in the hand of Xi-feng, gives very different messages. The tea, is not the usual hospitable drink, but the symbol of her power; a maid serving her tea, the others waiting at her, there is a clear line separates the people there in the room. When a younger master come to beg a very expensive furniture, though he gets through the ceremonious ‘half-kne[ing] on the kang,’ Xi-feng gives out an inviting and sexual message through the same cup of tea. Her gesture of sipping the tea “intently” and getting suddenly “flushed” seems to be an answer to his flirtatious ‘half-kneeing’. Tea reveals the dynamic of Xi-feng’s inner world, and the hierarchy of the huge Jia family. The author, is using such a small prop to convey a much larger and deeper meaning.

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A more pathetic tea is between Skybright and Bao-yu. Skybright is a maid known for her beauty in Jia family, and unfortunately she is a maid of Bao-yu, the apple of Grandma Jia’s eye, and of Bao-yu’s mother, Lady Wang. Skybright is sent home to die by Lady Wang because she is dangerously sick, after being accused of being a fox fairy, and leading Baoyu astray. Bao-yu goes to visit the orphaned girl secretly in her cousin’s house where he found her isolated and that she “[dozes] off into a fitful sleep”. In danger of being found, Bao-yu has to wake her up to exchange probably the last words between them.

After recognizing Bao-yu in her delirium, Skybright asks for “a cup of tea”, after coughing most of the day.

Bao-yu looked at the brick-and-mud-built stove against the wall. There was only a sort of blackened earthenware skillet on it that bore no resemblance to a tea-pot. He found a teacup on the table whose greasy, rancid odour reached his nostrils even before he picked it up. Having located some water, he washed it twice, rinsed it twice, dried it with his handkerchief, sniffed it (it still smelt) and half filled it with a dusky, reddish liquid from the skillet. Was it tea? He tasted it dubiously. It had a bitter, acrid taste with only a slight suggestion of tea about it.

‘That’s tea,’ said Skybright, who had raised herself on the pillow. ‘Please let me have it. You can’t expect it to be as good as ours.’

Bao-yu handed it to her and she gulped it down greedily as if it were the most delicious nectar. He watched her with tears running down his cheeks, suddenly ashamed of his own fastidiousness.<sup>25</sup>

This pathetic tea fathoms the fall of the girl from her earlier life she had shared with Bao-yu as a maid. There are several places in the book where Bao-yu’s fastidious tea is mentioned; for example his water-cooled tea: “To cool his tea they plunged the tea-pot into a basin of water freshly drawn from the well. The water was changed several times until the tea inside the pot, though not chilled, had reached a pleasant freshness.”<sup>26</sup> Another example will be the special Fung Loo tea: one day when Bao-yu returns to his own rooms, the maid serves him tea. “After drinking about half a cupful, Bao-yu suddenly thought of the tea he had drunk early that morning. ‘When you made that Fung Loo this morning,’ he said to Snowpink, ‘I remember telling you that with that particular brand the full flavor doesn’t come

out until after three or four waterings. Why have you given me this other stuff? This would have been just the time to have the Fung Loo.'"<sup>27</sup> This refined tea is only one facet of the extravagant life of the aristocratic youth. In this scene, Bao-yu who has treated his maids as equals, sees the misery of the girl in the cup of tea.

To return to Brightsky's sickbed, after the cup of "nectar," the girl is able to talk;

... 'I am living now from day to day and from hour to hour. I know I'm done for: it can't be more than four or five days now at the most. If it weren't for one thing, I could die content. I know I'm a bit better-looking than the others, but I've never tried to make up to you. Why will they insist that I am some sort of vampire? It's so unfair. And now I have so little time left. I ought not to say this, but if I'd known it in advance that it would be like this, I might have behaved rather differently.'<sup>28</sup>

Skybright is an artless and straightforward girl; her unaffected personality and extraordinary beauty stand out against the more obedient, mediocre maids, so that in the eyes of Lady Wang, she is a threat to the young master. She is also a victim of the upper maid's secret gossip to Lady Wang, by which the upper maid secures her favor from the mother. The poor girl, trapped by the ungrounded accusations, which are to cost her life, decides to do the daring thing - to exchange her chemise with Bao-yu's shirt and to die in it, an indirect, literal "skin intimacy" - the Chinese metaphor for sexual intercourse - thus to 'deserve' her reputation as a seductress.

Skybright's cousins are also servants of Jia family; seeing the girl fallen from her high perch, the snobbish cousins leave her to her own fate. The poor utensils and poor tea here present a strong contrast with that at the nun's and at Bao-yu's, which shows the huge gaps between the life of the rich and the poor (also the

sloth of the wife of the house, who later takes the chance to seduce Bao-yu). This poignant tea scene reveals the innocent intimacy and care between the two young people, free from sexual desire and experience. Bao-yu's consistency in his feeling for the girl, which shows in his visiting her under danger and his sincere care for her needs, give the wronged girl her last consolation, and gives her the courage to make the daring exchange of shirts. The polluted and polluting adult sexual conception destroys the innocent love of the young and pure. Nevertheless their sharing tea before Skybright's death echoes that of a traditional wedding night, when the newly-wedded share a cup of tea or wine before going to bed.

### **Tea and Marriage**

As has been mentioned earlier, tea is a formal and customary gift of engagement; a contemporary commentator also appositely pointed out that tea acts as a general metaphor for marriage in the narrative. Indeed we find in places tea as a topic naturally leads to marriage, or sometimes it acts as a hidden indicative of marriage and love. In chapter 25, when the cousins gather around Bao-yu's sickbed to keep him company, they chat about a tribute of tea from a Southeast Asia country.

'Have you tried it?' said Xi-feng. 'What did you think of it?'

'I wouldn't ask, if I were you,' said Bao-yu, chipping in. 'I thought it was rotten. I don't know what the rest of you thought about it.'

'I thought the flavour was all right,' said Bao-Chai. 'The colour wasn't up to much.'

'That was tribute tea from Siam,' said Xi-feng. 'I didn't like it at all. I thought it wasn't as nice as the tea we drink every day.'

'Oh, I quite like it,' said Dai-yu. 'Your palates must be more sensitive than

mine.'

'If you really like it,' said Bao-yu, 'you're welcome to have mine.'

'I've still got quite a bit left,' said Xi-feng. 'If you really like it, you can have it all.'

'Thank you very much,' said Dai-yu. 'I'll send someone round to fetch it.'

'No, don't do that,' said Xi-feng. 'I'll send it round to you. There's something I want you to do for me. The person I send round about it can bring the tea as well.'

Dai-yu laughed mockingly:

'Do you hear that, everybody? Because she's given me a bit of her old tea, I have to start doing odd jobs for her.'

'That's fair enough,' said Xi-feng. 'You know the rule: "drink the family's tea, the family's bride to be".'

Everyone laughed at this except Dai-yu, who turned the head away, blushing furiously, and said nothing.

'Cousin Feng will have her little joke,' Li Wan observed to Bao-chai with a smile.<sup>29</sup>

Xi-feng is well-known for her eloquence and tact; though unlike her younger cousins who are literate, she is equipped with worldly knowledge. It is not difficult for her to pick up the ready and convenient tea topic to tease her little cousins.

Without naming the bridegroom, the cousins at the scene know perfectly who it is. Li Wan, being a widower, feels it is immoderate to discuss marriage before her maiden cousins, and tries to blur it by calling it a "joke". Besides it is not proper for her to show interests in such affairs. However this doesn't stop Xi-feng, she goes on to make it clearer:

‘What’s so irritating about it? Look at him!’ – She pointed at Bao-yu – ‘Isn’t he good enough for you? Good looks, good family, good income. There are no snags that I can see. It’s a perfect match!’

Dai-yu rose and fled.

‘Oh, Frowner’s in a rage! Come back Frowner!’ Bao-chai called out after her. ‘If you go, it will spoil all the fun.’<sup>30</sup>

Xi-feng, the powerful and capable cousin and sister-in-law to Bao-yu, is actually running family affairs for the whole Jia Family. She is adored for her wit and resented for her calculation. Her flattering jokes to her elders make her a favorite of the Grandmother. Her status as a married woman and house-manager, make her free to make fun of unmarried cousins.

The long-standing and accepted intimacy from childhood between Bao-yu and Dai-yu, gives Wan Xifeng the motive to make the above joke. The two are the beloved grandchildren of Grandmother Jia, who has herself nurtured this well-acknowledged intimacy. The calculating Xi-feng doesn’t make such “serious” joke for nothing; she considers this far-reaching joke to be flattery to both of the cousins, who obviously share an affection, and to the matriarch, who might be planning and expecting the union.

Dai-yu is honest and inexperienced; she “[blushes] furiously” at the mention of tea and marriage. Being a maiden mistress, she is not supposed to talk about her own marriage - it is a matter of family arrangement. But being an orphan, she has no parents to manage it for her. Xi-feng speaks what is good for her, but when Xi-feng goes on to point at Bao-yu, it is too embarrassing to any girl of high birth who is usually supposed to see her husband’s face not before the wedding day.

The reactions of the other two cousins show their personalities. Li Wan, being a model widow of Bao-yu’s dead elder brother who decides to maintain her

chastity by living a life-long widowhood, tries to not to take any notice of the joke, so as to make clear her lack of interest in the marriage market, by saying “[c]ousin Feng will have her little joke”. So is Bao-chai, who grows to be a rival to Dai-yu for Bao-yu as the story goes on; Bao-chai, the model maiden mistress of all womanly virtues: obedient, considerate, understanding, generous, knowledgeable, beautiful, (ostensibly) benevolent, competent in house-running and secretly intelligent (as intelligence is not considered as a female virtue at the time), calls the fleeing Dai-yu back by “[i]f you go, it will spoil all the fun.” She, in her own way, refuses to take the joke seriously.

Unfortunately the talk of marriage and tea turns out to be just an empty “joke,” an echo of the theme of real and unreal. While Xi-Feng, the usually successful observer and executor of the Matriarch’s intentions, leads the readers to hope for an union of Bao-yu and Dai-yu, the readers, however witness the process whereby Dai-yu gradually loose the Matriarch’s favor to Bao-chai, and are caught up in the growing suspense of whom Bao-yu is to marry. When the expectation withers away, and Dai-yu dies of desperation and a broken-heart at the moment that Bao-yu is cheated into marriage with Bao-chui in a delirium, the tragedy gains its ultimate depth. Quoted in *Rereading the Stone, Desire and The Making of Fiction in Dream of the Red Chamber*, Er-Zhi-Dao-Ren, a contemporary critic, pointed out, ‘Bao-yu and Dai-yu were certainly fated to marry, and yet this certain marriage turned out to be unreal; Baoyu and Baochai were certainly not fated to marry, but in the end this marriage turned out to be real. The unreal marriage was broken by death; can the real marriage therefore not be separated in life?’<sup>31</sup> The death of Dai-yu brings about Bao-yu’s disillusion, which leads to his abandonment of the earthly world.

In chapter 62, the author gives a hint of the denouement of the triangular relationship, again through a tea scene. When a talk between Dai-yu and Bao-

yu accidentally leads to the question of the economy of the huge Jian family, the unworldly Dai-yu unexpectedly said,

‘...If we go on in this way without economizing, the time will surely come when our credit is exhausted.’

‘Even if it does,’ said Bao-yu gaily, ‘I don’t suppose you and I will have to go short.’

Dai-yu turned away from him somewhat impatiently and began walking towards the summerhouse, intending to seek Bao-chai’s company inside. Bao-yu would have gone too, but just at that moment Aroma came up carrying a little varnished wooden ‘tea for two’ tray, in each of whose rounds nestled a cup of freshly made tea.

‘Well, where’s she gone?’ said Aroma. ‘I brought this out specially, because I could see the two of you standing here all this time without anything to drink; but now she’s not here.’

‘That’s her, over there,’ said Bao-yu, removing one of the cups for himself. ‘You can take it to her inside.’

Aroma did so, but by the time she had reached her, Dai-yu was already standing talking to Bao-chai.

‘Here you are,’ said Aroma, ‘whichever of you is the thirstier had better take this while I go and fetch another.’

‘I’m not thirsty,’ said Bao-chai. ‘I only want enough to wash out my mouth with.’

She lifted the cup to her lips, drank a mouthful of tea from it, and handed the remainder to Dai-yu.

‘Let me get you another cup,’ said Aroma.

‘Oh, you know me,’ said Dai-yu smilingly. ‘I can’t drink much tea because

of my illness. The doctor says it's bad for me. This half cup will be quite enough for me. Thank you very much, though. It's very kind of you.'

Having drained the cup, she put it back on the tray, whereupon Aroman went off to collect the other cup from Bao-yu.<sup>32</sup>

Dai-yu's comment on the family economy shows her genuine concern, while the boy's unconcerned attitude and straightforward intimate words reveal his innocent nature and strong feeling for the girl: he sees and cares about nothing but a shared future with the girl. But in her situation, Dai-yu can not afford to comment on such a confession of Bao-yu, so she chooses to leave without a word which could mean acquiescence. But in the following scene this acquiescence is quickly shadowed by a third's disruption: the two cups of tea that are prepared for Bao-yu and Dai-yu, is accidentally and ominously taken and drunk by Bai-chai. She takes the tea intended for Dai-yu, and passes the left-half to Dai-yu. This is one of many foretelling hints in the text; if tea is a metaphor for love, this episode foreshadows the tragic ending of this love-triangle. The two girls have to share Bao-yu though he is devoted to Dai-yu; he will be have to be trapped into a marriage with Bao-chai, and Dai-yu, who claims here that "I can't drink much tea because of my illness", has unwittingly claimed her doom: she will die young with a broken heart, knowing that Bao-yu was to marry Bao-chai.

\* \* \* \* \*

Apart from this central plot of love between the young cousins, tea also witnesses adult men in Jia family seeking sexual adventures unashamedly. For example, Jia Lian, uses an occasion of tea to seduce Er-jie in chapter 64. Their flirtation revolving around tea table leads to a secret marriage, but it is a marriage of infamy and dreadful results.

The profligate Jia Lian desires the beautiful Er-jie, who is a step-sister to the

wife of his older cousin, Jia Zhen. When the family is preparing the funeral after the sudden death of Jian Zhen's father, Er-jie come with her mother and sister to help her older step-sister. Jia Lian, counseled and designed by Jia Rong, his nephew and Zhen's son, manages to meet Er-jie, alone.

As cousins and intimates having no secrets from one another, Cousin Zhen and Jia Lian had always felt free to come and go in each other's apartments without formality, and so, when Jia Lian approached the main sitting-room of Cousin Zhen's apartment, the old women at the door simply raised the portiere for him and let him go in unannounced.<sup>33</sup>

Jia Lian then finds Er-jie alone 'with a couple of maids sewing together on the kang at the southern end of the room'. Then,

The maids now went outside to fetch tea, leaving the two of them alone together. Jia Lian ogled Er-jie meaningfully, but she merely smiled, keeping her eyes demurely downwards, and pretended not to notice. At this stage, he judged, a physical advance would be premature. He noticed that as he sat there her hands were continuously playing with a length of silk handkerchief to which a tiny embroidered bag was attached. To fill in the embarrassed silence that was developing, he pretended to be feeling for something at his waist.

'Oh, I've come out without my betel! Give me some betel, my dear, if you've got any.'

'I have got some,' said Er-jie, 'but it's not for other people.'

Jia Lian laughed and made a movement towards her, as if he intended to snatch the handkerchief and its little pouch from her by force, whereupon

Er-jie, rather than risk someone coming in and finding them in the midst of an unseemly tussle, threw it across to him with a little laugh. Jia Lian caught it in mid-air, emptied the contents into the palm of his hand, selected one single half-eaten nut which he popped into his mouth and began chewing, and stuffed all the rest back into the bag. He was just going to hand it back to her when the two maids came in again with the tea. Jia Lian took a cup from one of them and began sipping it. While the maids were not looking, he contrived to unfasten a Han jade girdle pendant in the form of nine tiny interlocking dragons that he wore attached to his belt, tie it onto the handkerchief and toss it back for Er-jie to catch. But Er-jie pretended not to have noticed. She allowed the handkerchief with the two small objects attached to it to fall beside her on the kang and went on calmly sipping her tea.

Just then there was a rattle of the portiere and old Mrs You and San-jie came into the room from the back, attended by two little maids. Jia Lian signaled with his eyes to Er-jie that she should pick the handkerchief up, but Er-jie continued to ignore him. In somewhat of a panic by now and wondering what Er-jie could be at, he rose to his feet and advanced to meet San-jie and the old lady. When, after exchanging courtesies with them, he glanced back behind him, Er-jie was standing unconcernedly in the same place, with the same inscrutable smile on her face; but the handkerchief had vanished. He breathed a sign of relief.<sup>34</sup>

This audacious flirtation reveals personalities of the couple. Jia Lian is experienced and strategic, knowing when to advance and when to retreat. Er-jie's meek reaction is taken as acquiescence; she could have thought Jia Lian as a proper suitor who is young and of good family, even he is formally established in marriage, because in an age of polygamy it is not a big problem. But still she will be compromised,

to allow a man to approach her in such a manner, and to be consequently married during a national mourning. In spite of all these, the two reached an adultery contract. The man ate the half-bitten betel, which is a bold courting gesture with lurid sexual meanings; the woman, not showing any feeling of being offended, accepted it by eventually picking up and hiding the jade pendant. Her gesture decides their relation, and leads to a secret and indiscreet marriage, which has to be carefully kept away from his first wife. After being married, Er-jie tries to be a virtuous wife, but before long, Xi-feng - the first wife, discovers the secret and tricks her into entering the Jia Mansion and bullies her into suicide. Her tragedy lies in her indetermination and inability in knowing people; in assisting Jia Lian overturning a polite tea into an adulterous liaison she gears herself into doom, and seals that doom in trusting her fate into Xi-feng, a hypocritical and self-serving woman in nature.

### **Manners and Rituals**

Tea occupies a significant place in cultural life of Chinese people, and plays important roles in etiquettes and social manners. Tea-making has been regarded as an accomplishment in earlier periods; in *The Story of The Stone*, it associates with cultural activities and personal cultivations. In the life of a prestigious clan as the Jia's, there are also rituals involving tea in public and daily life to be observed.

Dai-yu's first meal in the Jia Mansion finishes with tea. The meal is not described but the etiquette and atmosphere are fully depicted. The high status and prestige of the Jia clan are reflected by the strict familial hierarchy and etiquette involved in an ordinary meal. The luxury and wealth was only to be epitomized by the rinsing tea – a tea served immediately after meal, to wash the mouth and be spat out:

When they had finished eating, a maid served each diner with tea on a little tray. Dai-yu's parents had brought their daughter up to believe that good health was founded on careful habits, and in pursuance of this principle, had always insisted that after a meal one should allow a certain interval to elapse before taking tea in order to avoid indigestion. However, she could see that many of the rules in this household were different from the ones she had been used to at home; so, being anxious to conform as much as possible, she accepted the tea. But as she did so, another maid proffered a spittoon, from which she inferred that the tea was for rinsing her mouth with. And it was not, in fact, until they had all rinsed out their mouths and washed their hands that another lot of tea was served, this time for drinking.<sup>35</sup>

Daiyu, a young girl who has recently lost her mother (her father passes away several years later), was sent to the distant mansion of the Jia family to live with her maternal grandmother, the aged matriarch of Jia clan. With neither brother nor sister, she is reduced to the status of solitary dependent in a large, strange household where the observance of proper etiquette toward her elders requires constant vigilance.

This small detail of tea, prepares the readers for Daiyu's precocious sensibility and sentimentality. Apparently living in luxury and protected by the Grandmother, the sensitive girl never forgets her delicate situation. Her intimacy with Bao-yu is the true warmth, so fatal that she grows more fastidious toward him as they grow older, when marriage remains ambiguous. The gnawing and self-destructive suspicion of the poor girl escalates and ends in her suicide after learning of Bao-yu's marriage.

The tea to wash the mouth after meal - a luxurious detail of a wealthy life-style - is focused on here to indicate the Jia family's wealth and social position. This

seemingly casually chosen detail of the Jia's, can be traced into the tea treatises of a earlier time. In the chapter of 'Tea's Effect' from *Zhi Cha Xin Pu*<sup>36</sup> by a Ming tea expert in early sixteenth century, Qian Chunnian, it says a cup of tea to rinse the mouth after meal help to erase the heavy feeling of the stomach and the lingering greasiness in mouth, and protect teeth from early decaying. This is one of those that reveal not only the luxurious and elegant life of the aristocrats, but the cultural subtext, in a household that has experienced generations of wealth and prestige. Luxury is not only realized by the material richness, but the cultural accumulation and beneficial application to daily life. This rinsing tea is like the egg plant dish in a banquet, which the poor peasant wife of Grannie Liu fails to recognize after two tries; Xi-feng explains that the cuisine took chicken, mushrooms and others expensive spices to draw out the exquisite taste of that simple and elegant vegetable. These details, seems inconsequent, but are able to achieve sufficient perspective.

\* \* \* \* \*

Through the eyes of Dai-yu, on her first day in Jia mansion, we also have a chance to see the inner reception room of Lady Wang, and her scholar bureaucratic husband, Jia Zheng. One of the furnishings that repeated is the tea things: "There were also narrow side-tables on which tea things and vases of flowers were arranged....,"<sup>37</sup> and in 'a reception room at the side of the courtyard,' 'a long, low table' on the kang where the couple usually sit, "piled with books and tea things."<sup>38</sup> Tea things, together with the 'arranged flower' and books, indicated the aesthetic taste and literary inclinations of their owner. Different from his profligate and useless older brother, Jia Zheng is a scholar, and has earned his fortune and titles through his success in the civil service examination. The decoration of his inner rooms and private space, reflects his habits and pretension to literati cultivation. His son, Bao-yu also names his first groom 'tealeaf'. Well read in poets and plays,

Bao-yu likes to name his maids and servant with words from poems.

The aristocratic Jia family, as shown in earlier episode of tea and meals, observes proper rituals of Confucianism. Similarly, a birthday ceremony - an important occasion for Chinese people - shows the place of tea in Confucianism rituals, and the general Confucian atmosphere of the family.

On the morning of his birthday Bao-yu rose at dawn, and after completing his toilet, put on his most formal clothes and went out to the main front courtyard of the mansion, where Li Gui and three other of his grooms were waiting for him by a table they had made ready with an incense burner and candlesticks and offerings as an altar to Heaven and Earth. Bao-yu lit some sticks of incense and made his prostrations, poured out a libation of tea, and burned the paper offerings and offertory scrolls.<sup>39</sup>

## Conclusion

*The Story of the Stone*, is a detailed and episodic record of the lives of the extended Jia family. Semi-autobiographical as it has been proved to be, Cao Xueqin attempts to recall the glittering, luxurious world of his youth that had vanished so utterly by the time he came to write it. Apart from other artistic accomplishments, the book values as a vivid and full-scaled record of people's lives of the time, which is absent from official archives and historical writings. Within this panoramic view, tea is important in cultural activities, indispensable as social etiquettes and religious rituals. In the narrative, Cao Xueqin's inventive use of tea transforms tea scenes into self-contained episodes, almost a subplot in itself, as tea is so closely connected with the themes of love and marriage.

In the huge household of Jia, which constituted of the aristocratic family, their relatives and the large number of their servants, tea is given an active role in

different life styles from the wealthy to the poor, the powerful to the depressed. It is such an effective reflector that it cut cross diversified spheres and layers of life. It reveals the sophistication of upper-class people against their social inferiors, which points to the insurmountable gap between classes. Tea is hardly a luxury by the time except for some rare brands, yet as a drink used by all classes, tea classifies people. The cultural content it carries is so huge and sophisticated that it naturally becomes a marker that measures people's education and backgrounds. Furthermore, with the rituals involved in tea-serving and tea-drinking, tea virtually defines people in their immediate surroundings.

The narrative has adroitly associated tea with the themes of love and marriage, through the convenient Chinese custom of giving tea as an engagement gift. Tea swiftly switches topics to marriage that raises and drops readers' expectations, and repeatedly dips hints to future development of relations between main characters. All is done so easily and naturally thanks to tea's far-reaching associations with contemporary life. Through depiction of small details in tea-taking scene, things extraordinary is fished out and traced to hidden layers, in this way tea underlines the underlying pathos, worries, desires and yearnings that have to be kept beneath proper manners. Tea is such a beneficial device that crafted the novel: it is not only economic, saving Cao from 'psycho-analysis' descriptions, but also gives free interpretations that made reading of this extraordinarily long book more pleasurable.

In many places in the narrative, tea is a detail of the characters' lives, as it occurred in reality, and some of the small tea details carries a far-reaching significance in the way that it reflect some traits of the characters that decides their fates. Tea helps building up characters, like the sharpest blade that cut the thinnest yet the most showing lines.

Throughout the novel, in the more ordinary tea scenes, tea carries its general

cultural meaning as a symbol of civilization and cultivation. The aristocratic Jia family, though going down-hill, maintains the cultural distinction of an elite society – people that drink a lot of tea. Whether the tea things are in the masters' rooms, or whether it is tea-making before the poem-composing parties, or simply the maiden-mistress playing Go while being served with brewed tea, or the health-maintaining after-meal mouth-washing tea: tea, puts aristocratic life under a microscope.

### Notes

- 1 Chinese authorities mostly refer to this as 'the 1791 edition,' though in point of fact it was not published until January of the following year.
- 2 Hu Shi, is especially important in restoring these facts. See his *Hong Lou Meng Kao Zheng*, Xueqin Cao and Gao E, *Hong Lou Meng* (Jilin: Jilin Wen Shi Chu Ban She, 1995) pp. 1-31
- 3 Gao E is generally regarded as the author of the latter 40 chapters, but in his *Introduction to The Story of The Stone*, Hawkes draw his own conclusion that Gao was only the editor, while the author was unknown.
- 4 David Hawkes, *Introduction to The Story of The Stone* (Penguin Books, 1973), p.18
- 5 Translation of the titles is Hawkes's.
- 6 Hawkes, p.19
- 7 Hawkes, pp. 31-32
- 8 Chen Zhao, *Hong Lou Meng De Yin Shi Wen Hua* (Taipei: Taiwan Shang Wu In Shu Guan, 1995). Zhenda Gao, *Hong Lou Meng Si Hua: Yi, Yao, Cha, Hua* (Zhongzhou: Zhongzhou Gu Ji Chu Ban She, 1989). Fuling Tang, *Hong Lou Meng De Bei Ju Yi Shi Yu Xuan Lu Mei* (Wuhan: Wuhan Diaxue Chu Ban She, 2000). Yuan Mei, *Hong Lou Meng De Zhong Yao Nu Xing* (Taipei: Taiwan Shang Wu In Shu Guan, 1992) Jinghua Du, *Hong Lou Meng De Xin Li Shi Jie* (Beijing: Beijing Yanshan Chu Ban She, 1993). English translation of the titles is mine.
- 9 Hawkes, pp.39-40
- 10 *Hong Lou Meng San Jian Ping Ben* vol.2 (Shanghai: Shanghai Gu Ji Chu Ban She, 1997) p. 1090. English translation is mine.
- 11 Cao Xueqin, *The Story of The Stone*, 5 vols. trans. David Hawkes, (Penguin Books, 1973) p.327 vol.5
- 12 Qing Zhongshu, *Guan Zhui Pian*, vol.4 (Beijing, Zhonghua Shu Ju, 1999) p.1489

- 13 Detailed descriptions of tea utensils are often in tea scenes in *The Story of The Story*, for the visual beauty of tea utensils in Qing China, also sees *Chugokunobijutsu Kougeihen*, 12 vols. (Kyoto Shoin, 1996) and *Kokyuhakubutsuin NihonHoso ShuppanKyokai* (Tokyo: NihonHoso Shuppan Kyokai, 1998)
- 14 Xu Hairong *Zhong Guo Cha Shi Dai Dian* (Beijing: Huaxia Chu Ban She, 2000) p.43
- 15 Cao, p.312, vol. 2
- 16 Cao, p.313, vol. 2
- 17 Cao, p.313, vol. 2
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- 20 Cao, p.315, vol. 2
- 21 Cao, p.315, vol. 2
- 22 Cao, p.130, vol. 1
- 23 Cao, p.161, vol. 1
- 24 Cao, p.163, vol. 1
- 25 Cao, p.544, vol. 3
- 26 Cao, p.251, vol. 3
- 27 Cao, p.198, vol. 1
- 28 Cao, p.544, vol. 3
- 29 Cao, pp.499-500, vol. 1
- 30 Cao, p.500, vol. 1
- 31 Anthony C Yu, *Rereading the Stone, Desire and The Making of Fiction in Dream of the Red Chamber* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2001) p.87
- 32 Cao, p.207, vol. 3
- 33 Cao, p.267, vol. 3
- 34 Cao, pp.267-268, vol. 3
- 35 Cao, pp.99-100, vol. 1
- 36 Tyohu Nunome and Takashi Nakamura. *Chugokunochasho*, (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1976) p.279
- 37 Cao, p.96, vol. 1
- 38 Cao, p.97, vol. 1
- 39 Cao, p.187, vol. 3

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## 紅樓夢におけるお茶の場面

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貴族生活と文化を中心に描写した紅樓夢において、お茶の場面は多い。紅樓夢が完成した当時、著者である曹雪芹は落魄の身であったが、清王朝は全盛期を迎えていた。一つの文化・特色としての茶場面は当時の上流社会の文化生活、洗練された貴族の生活スタイルを反映している。大観園にある櫳翠庵の茶会での献茶の礼儀にはじまり、普段食事後洗口用のお茶と飲むお茶の違いのような生活細節から儒教主導な家庭倫理、貴族の養生方法まで様々なことが分かる。また、同時に茶場面を一種の文学手段 (literary device) として使っている。書中の茶場面はしばしば男女の喫茶場面に通じており、細部の描写によって「非礼勿言」の時代に生きる高い教養の持つ貴族人物たちの、抑えられた明言の出来ない感情、気持ち、そして関係を提示する (時には放蕩な男女の戯れの場にもなる)。また当時の「定婚の茶礼」という習俗により、お茶と婚姻を結びつけて、お茶は愛と婚姻の暗喩になったりし、茶会での人物の会話や動きなどで主人公である宝玉、黛玉、宝釵と三人の将来の結婚についても暗示している。

また貴族の贅沢なお茶と違い、庶民の茶場面もある。貧乏で助けを求めに来た劉姥姥 (洗練した貴族テストを知らず) の大観園での茶化した喫茶場面がありながら、冤罪を着せられ、大観園から追放されたメイドである晴雯のような死前の悲惨な茶場面もある。

このように曹雪芹は実際に日常生活に溢れる喫茶習慣、習俗を一つの生活細部または文学手段として幅広く作品に活用している。貴族文化を反映しながら、階級社会の実質を暴露しながら、私的な喫茶場面には当時の儒教倫理に抑えられた男女の愛情を変った形で浮上させ、またお茶を暗喩的に使い、同時に禁じられた、若い主人公たちの自由恋愛の悲劇的な結果を繰り返し暗示している。