



A Mysterious Woman in *A Dream of Red Mansions*: Qin Keqing

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Abstract

Written in the mid-eighteenth century during the reign of Emperor Qianlong of the Qing Dynasty, *A Dream of Red Mansions* is regarded as one of the greatest Chinese classical novels. It has been popular throughout the last two hundred years and more. The whole work through which is full of mysteries not only about the book, but also about the author. Among many characters in *A Dream of Red Mansions*, Qin Keqing is the most mysterious. Some researchers claimed that she was the key to all the mysteries in *A Dream of Red Mansions* and the huge secret hidden behind the book are attached to her. This article tries to explore and analyze these mysteries about Qin Keqing, revealing the great mysteries hidden in the book.

Key words: Qin Keqing; *A Dream of Red Mansions*; Mystery

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INTRODUCTION

A Dream of Red Mansions is one of the most outstanding and influential novels written by Cao Xueqin in the mid-eighteenth century during the reign of Qing Dynasty. It is one of the greatest Chinese works and occupies an incomparable position in Chinese literature. As a novelistic monument, it revives the 18th-century China in many aspects. The four great families of the Jias, Shis,

Wangs and Xues described in the novel were typical political interconnected families of feudal society. Such families were linked to the royal court and the local officials, forming a network of control with the feudal autocratic state power as its centre. Revolving around a tragic love between Jia Baoyu and Lin Daiyu with Xue Baochai, *A Dream of Red Mansions* mainly charts the course of prosperity and decline of an aristocratic family — the Jias. Taking as its main theme the tragic love between a couple of young aristocrats, Jia Baoyu and Lin Daiyu, the novel describes the decline of the social milieu of this well-known feudal aristocratic household.

A Dream of Red Mansions is a microcosm of the world of its time and provides a panorama of lives of people of various levels in the degenerating empire. It is the peak of the art of the novel in ancient China. Its artistic achievement is displayed in its dazzling array of characters. Jia Baoyu, Lin Daiyu, Xue Baochai, Wang Xifeng, Shi Xiangyun, Tanchun, Second Sister You, Third Sister You, Xiren, Qingwen, Yuanyang and the others all have their distinct personalities and are as true to life as if they were living amongst us. These richly complex characters with their different stations in life and divergent views and philosophies act out an intricate pattern of human relationships and conflicts within the Jia family mansion. Apart from their distinct ways of acting and speaking, and the peculiarities of their appearances, dress and living arrangements, these people all have clear character traits.

The author managed to extend his touches to the various aspects of the practical life in this given historical period during which the feudal society was moving toward corruption and decline. Every grade and rank of the Chinese society of that time—from an imperial consort to peddlers and messenger boys are presented in a true-to-life fashion. This great work exhibits profound artistic values. And its artistic achievement is displayed first of all in its dazzling array of more than 400 characters.

“Qin, is love, which weighs light but can not fall on others. This is the key theme of the whole book”. (Yi, 1963) Qin Keqing was a mysterious woman in *A Dream of Red Mansions*, who draws out a lot of big events of Qing Dynasty. She was a wild infant adopted from Yang Shengtang, but became the wife of the grandchild who came from Ningguo Mansion. At first, the author said Qin Ye do not have reproductive ability. If he has no reproductive ability, he should never regain that ability. But when he was 50 years old, he gave birth to a son named Qin Zhong, Who turned out to be Qin Keqing’s younger brother. Brother in the name as a matter of fact, for they had nothing to do in terms of blood. Reading here, we may all feel that Cao Xueqin-the author, has a special purpose and he wanted to write Jia’s family is different from other aristocratic families, regardless of origin, beyond wealth and vision. Cao Xueqin is afraid the readers misunderstood, hurriedly wrote at the end of Chapter 8, “Qin Ye is a very poor minor official, while Jia’s families all have rich eyes”. In other words, they like to be associated with the rich, but dislike the poor or rather look down upon the people from the lower class. For fear that the readers may misunderstand it, he quickly remind that Jia’s families have rich eyes, including Jia Baoyu, who is the head of his class, his family as well as his time. Jia Baoyu treats his maids equally, and in daily life he can understand and care for them. It is an amazing character in the feudal society, which goes beyond his time and his class.

But sometimes he can be evil as a nobleman from a big noble family. Jia Baoyu has rich eyes too. Once in a rainy night, Baoyu reached his house Yihongyuan and knocked at the door, waiting for his maid Xi Ren to open the door for him, but after a few minutes, Xi Ren still didn’t appear. Upon opening the door, Baoyu kicked her on the chest and this is “rich eyes”. Sometimes he would do things like that, *wo* the readers can know that people in Jia’s family all have rich eyes to some extent. This plot is also written in Chapter 8, and it is very strange all the more that how Qin Keqing could become the daughter-in-law of Jia’s family with such a humble origin. It is a mystery to break.

1. MYSTERIES IN A DREAM OF RED MANSIONS

“Literature is different from reality and fiction is not equal to history.” (Zhang, 2006) There are full of mysteries in the book *A Dream of Red Mansions* from the very beginning. Jia Baoyu was born with jade, Lin Daiyu is a purple strains immortality. The design of Qin Keqing with mysterious appearance and origin, in fact, is the key to all the mysteries of the novel, which will push the story to a climax, not only add to the readability of the article, but also leave readers more room for imagination. Some

researchers claimed she was the key to all the mysteries in *A Dream of Red Mansions* and the huge secret hidden behind the book are attached to her.

2. THE MARRIAGE

“Literature is different from reality and fiction is not equal to history.” (Zhang, 2006) Jia’s family has great status in the society. Jia consists of two branches. One is Ningguo Mansion, and the other is Rongguo Mansion. Ningguo Mansion has higher status than Rongguo Mansion, because the heads of Ningguo Mansion and Rongguo Mansion are brothers, and Ning Guogong is elder than Rongguogong, so Ningguo Mansion is of great importance. Of course, at the beginning of the novel, we can find that the author designed the plot like this: There is an old granny living in Rong Guo, that is Jiamu, who is admired as the commander of both Ning Guo and Rong Guo Mansion.

Jia Jing is the highest seniority in Ning Guo Mansion, but in the novel, Jia Jing left the Ning Guo Mansion and didn’t live there any longer. He went to the temple, which was situated outside the capital, and he wouldn’t go home even when his families held birthday party for him. That was the reason why Ning Guo Mansion was faced with a very difficult situation in the blood pass. Because Jia Jing later became a monk and he certainly had no other children except Jia Zhen-his only son. Jia Zhen also had only one son named Jia Rong. So it can be seen clearly that how important Jia Rong is and how much he means for such a big feudal noble family. For the sake of blood pass, the wife of him should be decent, elegant and at least should come from a noble family. She should have equal status with Jia Rong, and had to be carefully selected.

According to the description in the book, there are also two sons under Rong Guo Jiamu, Jia She and Jia Zheng. So in the aspect of family members, Rong Guo Mansion was more exuberant. Choosing a wife for Jia Rong should be considered seriously. But at the end of the Chapter 8, there is an explanation to the origin of Qin Keqing, which seems very peculiar. Her father Qin Ye is a jack-in-office, who is nearly 70 years old with his wife died early. Because his wife couldn’t give birth to children, he adopted a son and a daughter from a place named Yang Shengtang, a place where children are cared together without knowing their original parents. Children from it were usually called “wild child, bastard” by others.

In Chapter 8, the author made an account of Qin Keqing’s origin like this: Her father Qin Ye was a minor official, who had no children at first, then adopted a son and a daughter for Yang Shengtang. But the boy was dead, only leaving a daughter who became the wife of Jia Rong. Rong Guo Mansion is a great noble family, so it seems impossible to accept such a daughter-in-law, who has indecent origin and lower social status. In modern society,

many people have open mind, and pay little attention to the origin of their daughter-in-law or son-in-law. But there are still more people who are not open to that extent, knowing the girl is an orphan, but are still willing to allow her to marry a man from such a noble family, let alone in the feudal society as what *A Dream of Red Mansions* describes. With such an identity, Jia Rong from Ning Guo Mansion got married with such a woman. It is completely odd. Too strange. And Qin Keqing, an infant from Yangshengtang, has become many daughters-in-law Jia is an exception.

3. RELATIONSHIP

As a daughter of a minor official at that time, Qin Keqing successfully became the wife of Jia Rong, but all of the influential people in the mansion thought highly of Qin Keqing.

3.1 Jiamu

As the family's core character and the most highly-respected woman, Jiamu thought Qin Keqing as the first person among her many great-grand daughters-in-law. Other great-grand daughters were all equally matched in terms of wealth and social position. AS was mentioned above, Ning Guo Mansion was faced with a very difficult situation in the blood pass. Because Jia Jing later became a monk and he certainly had no other children except Jia Zhen-his only son. Jia Zhen also had only one son named Jia Rong. So it can be seen clearly that how important Jia Rong is and how much he means for such a big feudal noble family. For the sake of blood pass, the wife of him should be decent, elegant and at least should come from a noble family. She should have equal status with Jia Rong, and had to be carefully selected. And Qin Keqing was married to marry to Jia, to marry the Ningguo Mansion, and married to Ningguo Jia Rong's side, thus becoming Jiamu's first great grandson daughter-in-law. In addition, Jiamu was both very satisfied with her and was proud with her.

3.2 Qin Keqing's Father-in-Law

Jia Zhen is the father of Jia Rong and is the father-in-law of Qin Keqing. It seemed that everyone in Jingguo Mansion knew that Qin Keqing had an ethical abnormal relationship with Jia Zhen, who was Qin Keqing's father-in-law, and the ambiguous relationship in Ningguo Mansion is not a secret at all. As a daughter-in-law died, Jia Zhen would rather he could have died instead of Qin. He was no more than forty years old, but after Qin Keqing died, he had to lean on crutch to walk, which visible in the uttermost distress. Jia Rong turned out to be completely opposite.

3.3 Qin Keqing's Mother-in-Law

She should be very angry when she knew the abnormal relationship between Jia Zhen and his daughter-in-law. But Qin Keqing was sick in bed in Chapter Ten, she went to

visit Keqing and did show any touch of anger. Instead she asked his son not to make Keqing tired. She also said that if there was something happened to Keqing, how he could marry such a good wife, such a look, such a character. There was no place to go to look for the second Keqing. This is all very strange.

3.4 Wang Xifeng

She never visited people who were inferior to her. She even didn't give any respect to and looked down on the current authorities. But to the wife of Jia Rong, she was completely different. In fact, Wang Xifeng and Qin Keqing got along well with each other. When she went to visit the sick Keqing, she said a lot of intimate words. She comforted Qin Keqing, said the whole family of Jia will make every effort to keep the entire life here. They could afford two kilos of ginseng a day, and if there is no left in Ningguo Mansion, she would go to Rongguo Mansion to seek for her. She and Keqing formed a close friend.

In addition to Wang Xifeng, other people in both Ningguo Mansion and Rongguo Mansion all regraded Keqing as a person who can depend on. Either when alive or after death, they were blindly remembered her advantages, even in the back they did not say bad word on her. Jiamu said that she was a good child, and if there was something wrong with her, she could felt heart broken. Jia Zhen said that this daughter-in-law of me was ten times better than his son. You Shi, Jia Zhen's wife, said that Keqing was good both in character and in performing, all the relatives and elders like her. As can be concluded, Qin Keqing was respected and loved in Jias. It is doubtful that those who are in a position to be very different from those who have a different temperament, are surprisingly consistent with her evaluation.

4. FUNERAL

Zhu Lian put it, "All men will die, that's for sure. The death of Keqing makes people think." (Zhu, 1963) In the description of Keqing's funeral, there emerged the novel's most extravagant scenes. Young and old from the House of Jia, including Jia Dairu, Jia She and Jia Zhen, Jia Baoyu and more than 30 other people have come to see her off. As a younger generation of the family, it is difficult to explain the magnificent scene about her funeral after she died.

After Qin Keqing's death, Wang Chitose ebony coffin which is definitely no common people can enjoy, which even Jia Zheng thought she didn't have the honor and status to such a coffin, which originally justifiably supposed to sleep into Yizhong Prince left by old Chitose precious ebony coffin made of wood—inside. Was she so distinguished? This undoubtedly makes the mystery deepened.

In addition to the funeral of a senior special wooden coffin outside on her funeral as well as the right to wear

the Daming Palace palm intrauterine phase (inside the palace eunuch) affinity to the offering. Qin Keqing, nothing more than just a great-granddaughter of Ningguo Mansion, with her husband Jia Rong, had only temporary title, which was nothing compared with those who were genuine nobles at that time. Qing Keqing's funeral, compared with other imperial concubines, in the story, is the most extravagant one (Zhan, 2001). And the Daiquan, who is the controlling prime minister of Daming Palace went to the funeral in person, riding on the car, under the banners of umbrellas instead of sending a little eunuch. Such status as she was, the funeral was really a magnificent. This is a mystery.

5. ORIGIN

The description in the fifth round of Qin Keqing's bedroom appeared abnormal. Keqing's bedroom wall of Flirting "Begonia spring sleep map", both sides have to write a couplet Qin Void, on the day the case is provided with Wu Zetian mirror chamber provided Hokyo while standing arrayed Chebi dance off gold plate, throw the tray of candy Lushan had hurt too true papaya milk. The above set of Shouchang chapter containing Highness Princess lying couch, hanging is made with Chang princess Pente posted. Bedroom furnishings, are ancient "eclectic Story" artifacts, said Qin Keqing if only a simple grandson's wife, her bedroom is furnished according to her personal preferences, that she would be guilty of "seventy" in Article. The disparity is in her identity and supplies difference. "Dream of Red Mansions" in the overall description of the furnishings will be taken to a realistic approach. The description qing bedroom is an exception, extremely exaggerated. And not only her father's house these things can not be provided, that is, even Jia and his identity in the same room nor a person.

Before the death of Qin Keqing's death, She pointed it out to Wang Xifeng that the future of Jia will be on the decline, and would like Wang Xifeng to make plans for the family after her death. This is the mystery of the magic pen added to Qin Keqing, let the reader feel she still living. There are more than 400 people in the Jias and Qin Keqing turned out to be the only one who cared about and foresaw the future survival of the whole family. Why did she have these social and political experiences? It can only be explained as she was born more noble than people in Jias. Social status decided her attention to the future and destiny of the whole family, she died to tell Wang Xifeng, enabling us to finally understand the complex background

of the young lady, who worries about the whole family day and night, and what she still concerned until death.

CONCLUSION

As we all know, there are full of mysteries in the book *A Dream of Red Mansions* from the very beginning. Jia Baoyu was born with jade, Lin Daiyu is a purple strains immortality. The design of Qin Keqing with mysterious appearance and origin, in fact, is the key to all the mysteries of the novel, which will push the story to a climax, not only add to the readability of the article, but also leave readers more room for imagination. This story is always worth exploring. From the above mentioned, the satisfaction and respect from both the young and the old in Rongguo Mansion, and the magnificent scene of her funeral showed the true identity of Qin Keqing is unusual, not humble, and even higher than Jia. She should be of extremely noble birth, which is likely to be an aristocratic palace, after the "bold vision, careful verification", the Qin Keqing should be of royal blood. Perhaps the author wanted to write something to understand, but also for taking into account the social background of the then dynasty, some things can not be too explicit to write, but they do not write to missing the true, nor is the author intended. So authors may be with this ambivalence in the characterization of this figure, insinuations tell the reader, so there have been so much mystery. Even the author himself did not understand, but tried to make the readers realize the mystery and make room for further imagination. As a result, from marriage to the survival state, and then to exaggerate the extent of the scene. The authors used the beautiful flowers wither in the sludge, to show readers in a family a social system in the final situation, all for the family, she was the last person to save the family, but the first to die in the story. Here the author expressed his cry and indictment for her fate.

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