

# Deification of Flowers and its Deconstruction: The Comparison and Connection between “The Flower Gods” in *The Peony Pavilion* and Fairies represented by “Jinghuan” in the Land of Illusion in *The Dream of the Red Chamber*

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**Abstract.** This article trying to analyzing the connection between *The Peony Pavilion* 牡丹亭 and *The Dream of the Red Chamber* 紅樓夢 from the perspective of “Flower” and “Flower God 花神” with the comparison of their effect and content in two books. Beautiful “Garden” is the same environment for two stories with profound meaning. As a folk belief, “Twelve Flower Gods 十二花神” has appeared in both books, especially the similar appearance of flower fairies in *The Interrupted Dream* 驚夢 the 10<sup>th</sup> scene[1] in *The Peony Pavilion* and Chia Pao-yu wanders in spirit in the region of the Great Vacancy 賈寶玉神遊太虛幻境 the 5<sup>th</sup> chapter of *The Dream of the Red Chamber*[2] both to encourage the lust between male and female. Nevertheless, the significance of “Flower God” is different, the deification of “Flowers” in *The Peony Pavilion* justified the rationality of the love and sex between two roles with the color of myth. Meanwhile the “Flower God” is the characteristics of “Human”. The head of the flower god “Jinghuan Fairy 警幻仙姑” had in-depth talk about lust with Baoyu and instructed him about sex, which deconstructed the instance between the “Wonderland” and “World” reflecting Cao Xueqin 曹雪芹’s further comprehension of “Qing (love)”. The deconstruction of “Flower God” in *The Dream of the Red Chamber* is corresponding with the deification of “Flowers” in *The Peony Pavilion*. It proves Cao Xueqin’s recognition and reflection of Tang Xianzu 湯顯祖’s view of “Pure Love 至情” and proposed the view of “Lust of Mind 意淫” to distinguish the love of the body and the soul.

## 1. Introduction

Since the beginning of *The Book of Songs* 詩經 and *Verse of Chu* 楚辭, “Flower” has become an important subject in Chinese literature. The color, shape, smell, function and other characteristics of flowers have been meticulously excavated by the literati. The colorful flowers are not only the true portrayal of the environment, but also contains various meanings and emotions. Some portrayed people’s appearance, temperament, character and other aspects with some characteristics of flowers. Some used the opening and closing of flowers to echo the change of people’s life and fate. Both metaphors were used in *The Peony Pavilion* and *The Dream of the Red Chamber*.

The humanization of “Flower” is also reflected in the folk beliefs about “Flower God”. The formation of “Flower God” can be traced back to mythological stories, religious legends, historical figures, literary works, etc., which is also reflected in some relics of the Ming and Qing dynasties. The most common “Twelve Flower Gods” in the folks are directly related to Chinese traditional Lunar System and Solar Terms which are important for farming, and there is a specific “Flower Festival 花朝節” to celebrate the birthday of flowers.[3] “Flower God” appeared in some chapters of *The Peony Pavilion* as a decorative but important role. *The Dream of the Red Chamber* selected the Flower Festival as the birthday of the heroine Lin Daiyu. The novel also wrote about the celebration of a festival related to flower gods.

“Flower” and “Flower God” both played vital roles in *The Peony Pavilion* and *The Dream of the Red Chamber*. *The Peony Pavilion* directly took flowers as the title, the heroine, Du Li Niang met her

love in the dream happened in the garden and transcended life and death for “*Pure Love* 至情”. “Flower” created a wonderful environment for the story as well as symbolized Li Niang’s image. The meaning of “Flower” in *The Dream of the Red Chamber* was richer and deeper in contrast. Represented by Twelve Beauties of Jinling 金陵十二釵, female characters’ talents, temperament and destiny are closely related to various flowers. The whole story took place in a garden in face, the Grand Garden 大觀園, and female characters formed a garden on the level of metaphor.

As a supporter of Tang Xianzu’s praise on “*Pure Love*” in *The Peony Pavilion*, Cao Xueqin echoed this theme in *The Dream of the Red Chamber*. The most direct part is the 23rd chapter named as “A seductive song in the Tree-peony Pavilion alarms the fragrant heart 《牡丹亭》豔曲警芳心”[2], with Du Linian’s sigh on the lapse of the spring-like youth in the 10th scene in *The Peony Pavilion*, *The Interrupted Dream* 驚夢, echoing Lin Daiyu’s mood. Meanwhile *The Interrupted Dream* is also similar to the 5th chapter of *The Dream of the Red Chamber*, Chia Pao-yu wanders in spirit in the region of the Great Vacancy 賈寶玉神遊太虛幻境, both main roles are enlightened to know the lust, which was respectively vital for two stories. This article tries to make a comparison between “Flower God” in *The Peony Pavilion* and fairies represented by “Jinghuan” in the Land of Illusion of *The Dream of the Red Chamber* to analyze the connection of two works.

*The Peony Pavilion Young Actor's Version* adapted by Bai Xianyong highlighted “Flower God” which was inconspicuous in the original book, emphasizing that *The Peony Pavilion* was a “love myth” [4]. “Flower God” was originally a decorative role to enhance the persuasiveness of the story with the effect of “Deification” as a kind of narrative skill. It promoted a festive and lively atmosphere on the stage performance to justify two protagonists’ love. As the prophetic chapter of *The Dream of the Red Chamber*, the Land of Illusion was the beginning and terminal point of all kinds of clues. Jinghuan Fairy, the leader of the wonderland who can be seen as the center of flower gods, was described as a “beauty” (“human”) with various characteristics of appearance, figure, words and expression. The “Flower God” in the two chapters were playing the role of encouraging and guiding the protagonist’s understanding and “love” or “obscurity”. The contrast can begin from the analysis of “Flower”.

## 2. Flower God and Garden: The Connection of Wonderland and World

Whether it is *The Peony Pavilion* directly named after the flower, setting the back garden as the environment of the love and reunion of two protagonists, or *The Dream of the Red Chamber*’s various flower-related names, plots and scenes, both of them had close relationship with traditional “Flower” culture. In the *The Interrupted Dream*, the flower god turned the gardens into a fairyland to perfect the in-fact difficult love in fictional world with romantic colors. The flower gods in *The Peony Pavilion* were arranged according to lunar system and solar terms, and they were even divided into female (yin 陰) and male (yang 陽) gods. According to the evidence, the performance pattern of “Twelve Flowers God” in *The Peony Pavilion* was quite mature during the Qianlong period of Qing Dynasty .[5]

“Flower God” is derived from the beliefs and customs of folk traditions. There is no lack of description of folk flower god beliefs in *The Dream of the Red Chamber*. This may be related to the local “Flower God” belief influenced Cao Xueqin at that time, according to the research on “Flower God” culture of the Ming and Qing Dynasties. The Flower Festival was commonly reflected in literary works and historical records. Before the late Qing Dynasty, the flower gods in the Jiangnan area remained intact. Today, cities such as Nanjing and Hangzhou still have streets named after the flower god and the flower temple.[3] The word “Flower God” directly appeared in the 27th, 42th, 58th, and 78th of the first 80 chapters, and 102th and 116 of the last forty chapters. In 27th chapter described Mangzhong, the day when flower gods left at the end of spring as the novel said:

尚古風俗，凡交芒種節的這日都要設擺各色禮物，祭饒花神言芒種一過，便是夏日了。衆花皆謝，花神退位，須要饒行。閨中更興這件風俗……或用花瓣柳枝編成轎馬的，或用綾錦紗羅疊成干旄旌幢的，都用綵線繫了。[6]（第二十七回《滴翠亭楊妃戲彩蝶 埋香塚飛燕

泣殘紅》)

The number “Twelve” of “Twelve Beauties in Jinling” in *The Dream of the Red Chamber* similar to “Twelve Flower Gods” was well designed by Cao. He carefully designed the corresponding flower gods for concrete characters reflected directly in 63<sup>rd</sup> chapter *A birthday celebration at the I-hung Hall. Grouped fragrances open a feast in the night* [2], different roles got the poems about corresponding flowers for them in the game. The “Flower” theme ran through the whole work. It was obviously set as a kind of plant and background, while metaphorically as the symbol of girls’ image and fate.

The flower’s bloom and the withering symbolized the fate of women, building the bridge of empathy for two heroines between *The Peony Pavilion* and *The Dream of the Red Chamber*. Liniang’s regret on the inevitable lapse of her spring-like youth caused Daiyu’s resonance. Liniang’s word “See how deepest purple, brightest scarlet open their beauty only to dry well crumbling. 原來姹紫嫣紅開遍，似這般都付與斷井頽垣。[1]” left deep impression on Daiyu when she unintentionally heard **twelve** girls in rehearsal of *The Peony Pavilion* outside the wall. Simultaneously she associated the content of *the Record of the Western Chamber* 西廂記 and the image of fallen flowers and water in poems accompanied causing deep feelings. Cao named this chapter as “alarms the fragrant heart 警芳心” corresponded to the theme about “Jing 警 (to inspire and alarm)” in 5th chapter, the intention of Jinghuan Fairy guiding Baoyu in the Land of Illusion. Daiyu heard **twelve** girls’ rehearse corresponded to **twelve** songs of the Red Chamber Dream performed by **twelve** goddess in the Land of Illusion in Baoyu’s dream, which was the response between virtual and reality.

It is worth mentioning that *The Interrupted Dream* in *The Peony Pavilion* is more similar to the 5th chapter of *The Dream of the Red Chamber*, *Chia Pao-yu wanders in spirit in the region of the Great Vacancy*, in contrast of plot, environment and characters especially the “Flower God” to the 23<sup>rd</sup> one. Both protagonists were dreaming of “Qing” mixing the reality and illusory. Things happened in virtual dreams was realistic and closely connected with life in fact, which laid foundation of latter plots. Nevertheless, the difference of emotion and atmosphere was obvious with different hidden themes. From the “Flower God” who played the guiding role in two works can be seen in the different interpretations of “Qing” by Tang and Cao.

The appearance of “Twelve Flower Gods” in *The Interrupted Dream* turned the back garden into a fairyland with fascinating spring scenery. “Flower God” protected Du Liniang and Liu Mengmei when they fell in love and had sexual relationship. The atmosphere of the words in this scene was enthusiastic and lively. The image and significance of “Flower God” in the Land of Illusion was more complicated on contrast. Fairies’ names and their words hid clues of girls’ characteristics and fate in reality. The prophecy of the fate of “Twelve Beauties”, twelve Songs of Red Chamber, the magical fragrance named “*The Marrow of Collected Scents* 群芳髓 (sounds like bones of many flowers)” and the tea named “*A Thousand Reds in One Hole* 千紅一窟 (sounds like thousand flowers cried)” [2] all reflected sadness on short-lived youth and beauties’ tragic life. Compared with passionate love and vitality symbolized by “Flowers” in *The Peony Pavilion*, the emotional tone of “Flower” and “Flower God” was sad and heavy *The Dream of the Red Chamber* due to different themes of two works. *The Peony Pavilion* praised “Pure Love” of Liniang pointing to the ideal while *The Dream of the Red Chamber* emphasized female beauty and tragedies pointing to the reality.

Additionally, the garden was similarly main venue for two stories. Some researchers pointed that the “Garden” in *The Peony Pavilion* was a metaphor of women bodies and the “Flower God” directly symbolized the sexual intercourse and rebirth (fertility). [7] Some researches analyzed the “Garden” in two works was both natural and artificial co-construction. They were both open and closed while the nature often became the foil of artificial creation. The “Garden” was an entity externalizing the fact that both women natural nature and destiny were artificially controlled, [8] which contained the birth and restriction of natural sexual desire.

The illusory dream overlapped with the real world garden in both works. In *The Peony Pavilion*, “Flower God” completed the “Deification” of the real back garden, while two “Gardens”, the Land of Illusion and the Grand View Garden, were actually one garden in *The Dream of the Red Chamber*.

Baoyu felt familiar when he visited the wonderland. According to *Red Inkstone* 脂硯齋's annotation "Already printing the picture of villas for Yuanchun's visiting. 已為省親別墅畫下圖式矣", the Land of Illusion was a blueprint of the Grand View Garden. Setting the fairyland-like garden as the place breeding the human lust, deconstructed the distance between "world" and "fairyland" in traditional cognition. *The Peony Pavilion*'s "Deified Garden" justified Liu and Du's love, *The Dream of the Red Chamber* explored further themes of love including the difference of physical love and psychological love, and the horror of desire abyss. In a word, the "Garden" witnessed the change of life and desire.

### 3. The Deification and its Deconstruction: The Deified "Flowers" and The Personalized "Fairies"

Both *The Interrupted Dream* and *Chia Pao-yu wanders in spirit in the region of the Great Vacancy* began with the dream, and fairies played guiding roles in plots. Stories happened in dreamy and fairy land not only enhanced the vividness of description, but also enabled authors to write in an indirect way in order to evade the shackles of political persecution and moral stereotypes to a certain extent under historical background in Ming and Qing Dynasty. Tang used illusory stories to interpret realistic themes of "Pure Love" as he said "Love caused dream, and dream gave birth to dramas. 因情成夢，因夢成戲。" [9] *The Dream of the Red Chamber* brought the "Deification" as a narrative method to deeper level. Compared with stable requirement for *The Peony Pavilion* as *Kun opera* 昆曲, *The Dream of the Red Chamber* could jump out from the restriction of length, space-and-time and performance, "Deification" used in narrating blurred the time, place and the image of characters, etc.. At the beginning of the story, the origin of the "Stone" could be traced back to the myth *Niwa Mends the Heavens* 女媧補天, which used myth to enhance the fidelity of the novel.

However, although two stories used narrative methods and set characters related to deification, their purpose and meaning of "Flower God" and related fairies were very different in two works.

The "Flower God" in *The Peony Pavilion* encouraged and protected two protagonists' love and sexual intercourse, helping lovers to get perfect love. The image of the leading flower god was similar to Linjiang's maid, *Spring Fragrance* 春香, an innocent and lively girl. The image of the leader of flower gods was related to flower god, old man under the moon in folk beliefs. In the *Infernal Judgment* 冥判 chapter, the flower god listed nearly forty kinds of flowers set by the Lord of Heaven, and the description of each flower was also related lust to a certain extent:

吾乃掌管南安府後花園花神是也。因杜知府小姐麗娘，與柳夢梅秀才，後日有姻緣之分。杜小姐游春感傷，致使柳秀才入夢。咱花神專掌惜玉憐香，竟來保護他，要他雲雨十分歡幸也。（《牡丹亭·驚夢》之《山桃紅》）

【淨】你要做十分顏色，數著你那胡弄的花色兒來。【末】便數來。……【淨】腰恁擺  
【末】凌霄花【淨】陽壯的哈【末】辣椒花【淨】把陰熱窄【末】含笑花【淨】情要來【末】  
紅葵花【淨】日得他愛【末】女蘿花……【末】這花色花樣，都是天公定下來的。小神不過  
遵奉欽依，豈有故意勾人之理？且看多少女色，那有玩花而亡。（《牡丹亭·冥判》之《後  
庭花滾》）[10]

The appearance of "Flower God" created a mysterious atmosphere from nature for the back garden, which not only added legendary color to the story, but also showed that Du Linjiang boldly faced up and pursued her natural desire, achieving surreal romantic effect. From this perspective, Du Linjiang herself has become an immortal and youthful "flower god". The deified flower in *The Peony Pavilion* was the portrayal of heroine's "Pure Love", which enabled her to be immortal. The "Flower God" was aimed to emphasize "Pure Love", their appearance revealed Linjiang's embodiment of nature in her dreams, fulfilled with vivid natural beauty.

On the other side, "Flower God" was not a totally supernatural power, they were also bounded by ethics and regulations. She also said "but now my flower palace is sullied by lust 淫邪展污了花臺殿"[1]. And she was called to interrogate in the *Infernal Judgment*, and regulated by the judge:

【淨】你說自來女色，沒有玩花而亡。數你聽著。花把青春賣，花生錦繡災。……你道花容那箇玩花亡？可不道你這花神罪業隨花敗。【末】花神知罪，今後再不開花了。（《牡丹亭·冥判》之《寄生艸》）[10]

Although “Flower God” pleaded for Du Li Niang in the infernal, Liniang was granted pardon mainly because her sin took place in dream, her identity as the daughter of Du Bao, an official with high reputation, and her destined marriage with Liu. The reasonable force that supported her rebirth still came from ethics. After she was reborn, her mother thought her daughter was harmed by the flower demon, reflecting the “flower god” was commonly recognized as a threat to regular rituals.

Compared with the deification of natural flowers in *The Peony Pavilion*, Jinghuan Fairy in *The Dream of the Red Chamber* was much bolder and more complicated. As the fairy, the description of her was full of characteristics of “human”. She had in-depth understanding of the human affairs especially her clear attitude towards “*Qing*” with calm and ironic analysis. She boldly talked about “*Yin(lust)*”:

自古來多少輕薄浪子，皆以‘好色不淫’為解，又以‘情而不淫’作業，此皆飾非掩醜之語耳。好色即淫，知情更淫。是以巫山之會，雲雨之歡，皆由既悅其色、複戀其情所致。吾所愛汝者，乃天下古今第一淫人也！（第五回《賈寶玉神遊太虛境 警幻仙曲演紅樓夢》）[6]

She directly satirized and criticized the hypocrites indulged in sexual desire but veiled with moral principles, which corresponded to the contrast between ignorant, ugly and lecherous male roles and wit, lively and energetic unmarried girls in the novel.

The image of Jinghuan fairy could be traced back to *Verse of Chu* like *Nine Songs* 九歌 and the *Song of Goddess* 神女賦,[11] and Cao used words like “*Fu* 賦” to describe her beauty. *Red Inkstone* wrote annotation that “He had to carefully portrayed these two characters probably because they were central for the whole stories. 蓋此二人，乃通部大綱，不得不用此套。” Researcher Ou Lijuan commented Jinghuan was a continuation of *Nüwa* and *Queen Mother of the West*, as the goddess born from maternal gods.[12] As a fairy, Jinghuan boldly talked about “human” desire, which was rebellion against traditional image of immortals and gods. Jinghuan inherited the literary prototype of the “beauties in dreams” about sexual love, such as “*Wushan Goddess*” in Songyu’s *the Ode to Gaotang* 高唐賦.[12] Jinghuan was a “humanized fairy”.

The Land of Illusion was not a traditionally pure fairyland, fairies had emotion and desire like human. Twelve beauties of Jinling was reflection of flower gods in the wonderland. The description of Jinghuan Fairy appearance and physiological activities was humanized, deconstructing the unreachable distance of fairyland and ascetic image of immortals, which could be seen as in-depth rebellion against traditional values mainly constructed by Confucianism as well as the doubt on some religious concepts of Buddhism and Taoism. As the “*Master of Flowers of Roles* 絳洞花主”, Jia Baoyu witnessed the girls(flowers)’ fate. His image blurred the boundaries of age, gender, thought, class, etc. Baoyu’s “*lust of the mind* 意淫” and intrinsic “*infatuation* 癡情”, which was not recognized by traditional ethics and regulation but admired by Jinghuan Fairy, became the ideal role in Cao’s composition with complete, free and independent personality.[13] Cao did put the novel in a multiple ideological system with the center of “*True Love*”.

*The Peony Pavilion* achieved the deification of “*Pure Love*”, while *The Dream of the Red Chamber* humanized “fairies” deconstructing traditional image of immortals. The comparison showed the relationship of two works from perspective of in-depth interpretation of “*Qing*”.

#### 4. Summary

##### ***Pure Love and Lust of the Mind—Continuation from the Love Surpassing Life and Death in The Peony Pavilion to the Distinction of Erotic love and Psychic Love in The Dream of the Red Chamber***

Both *The Peony Pavilion* and *The Dream of the Red Chamber* focused on the “*Qing*” and used male lead and heroine’ love as the backbone of stories, but the “*Qing*” theme was not limited feelings between man and woman.[14] The interpretation of “*Qing*” was different in two books.

When Du Liniang walked in the back garden admiring spring scenery, her happiness and sadness were very personal, she associated spring flowers' bloom and withering with her own life, and her words aroused Lin Daiyu's emotional resonance. The emotion that Du Liniang's sighed on the lapse of spring was similar to Lin Daiyu's lament on burying fallen flower. They mourned their faded youth as well as the shackles of their realistic life from their perspective of women identity, their sadness was not only limited in regret on imperfect love, which was also the closest connection between two works. Beautiful girls were impressed by natural beauty and sorrowed on withering of spring flowers, gazing at the limits on multiple limitations of their gender, social status, and life. The "flowers" were completely integrated with their own characteristics and destiny.

The deification of "flower" in *The Peony Pavilion* was intended to help Du Liniang to seek love and rebirth. Her "Pure Love" surpassed life and death achieving a surreal ideal, so as to put "love" in a very high position. However, her naturally intrinsic "Pure Love" had to get the rationality from power controlled by "human" including imperial power, patriarchy and ethical principles. The beginning of natural "love" and supported power was contradictory to a certain extent. In contrast, the *Dream of the Red Chamber* not only admired and praised "Pure Love", but also paid attention to the difficulties and pain of seeking common recognition of "Pure Love" in real life. The love tragedy of Jia Baoyu and Lin Daiyu was typical on this theme.[15]

Compared with Du and Liu's passionate and sensual love in *The Peony Pavilion*, Jinghuan fairy as a humanized immortal, strictly distinguished erotic love "皮膚濫淫" and psychic love "意淫". The "the pledge between plant and stone 木石前盟" and "the Marriage Rite of Gold and Jade 金玉良緣" not only meant the opposition between love and marriage, but also could be seen as the inverse of love of spirit and love of the flesh. Compared to Tang Xianzu's interpretation on conflicts between "Qing" and "Li(principles)" in *The Peony Pavilion*, Cao Xueqin's praise of "human nature 性情" was beyond the moral and ethical judgment.[16] Some researchers sharply criticized the unreasonable praise on sensual love in ideological trend became erotic hegemony in the late Ming Dynasty which threatened and hurt female, which led women to tolerate much heavier burden on body and thought while tended to satisfy male sexual desire in a seen as much more justified way, and some girls even committed suicide for ideal love led by *The Peony Pavilion*, but Cao Xueqin alarmed the threat and reflected the situation. The "Chili 癡理" value in *The Dream of the Red Chamber* was based on social manner to balance erotic desire and psychic desire.[17] Undoubtedly, the spiritual love "Lust of the Mind" that Cao Xueqin praised had surpassed general concept of infatuation "Pure Love" highlighted by Tang Xianzu as the intention and ideological level. Cao Xueqin had accepted and enriched the meaning of "Qing".

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