



Binary opposition and conflict—A study on the “polarity” of A Dream of Red Mansions from the perspective of Iconology

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Abstract: "Polarity" is an important concept put forward by German art historian Aby Warburg, the founder of iconography, which refers to a kind of binary opposition and conflict. "Polarity" is a summary of Warburg's profound thinking on the primitive society to the modern society, and it is concretely expressed as the opposition and conflict of human emotions. It embodies the symbolic forms of dualistic conflicts between human self and the external world, classical mythology and modern civilization, reason and passion, pathos and mania, Christianity and paganism. In recent years, the theory of literary images has become a hot topic in academic circles. In A Dream of Red Mansions, many characters are depicted in different ways when they face their tragic fate. By juxtaposing the "polarity" forms of representative characters in the text, we can conclude the presentation of the binary conflict between silence and agitation. In the study of A Dream of Red Mansions, imagology theory is used to explore how to reproduce and sublimate the meaning of A Dream of Red Mansions in the integration of Chinese and Western cultures through open and cross-border art theory. In order to explore the profound social, cultural and psychological symbolic meaning of the ancient classic A Dream of Red Mansions, which carries social memory and human emotion, and its life aesthetic connotation which has been neglected in the contemporary era.

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1. Introduction

After Lessing's Laocoon was published, the distinction between image and literature aroused great attention in the field of aesthetics (Wang Huaiyi. On the Origin of Text Images in A Dream of Red Mansions [M]. Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 2022. Preface page 3). Iconology, as a discipline that arose in the early 20th century, is a study of the system of art history, which originates from the in-depth interpretation of images and their symbolic meanings in art works. Ancient China also had the idea of valuing characters over pictures. But more people acknowledge the role of images. More famous is the theory of "calligraphy and painting homology", which believes that calligraphy and painting had a state of "same body without division" at the earliest time, and even if they were distinguished later, they also had a close relationship (Gao Jianping. The Opposition and symbiosis between Literature and Image [J]). *Literary Review*, 2005, (06):130-139). In recent years, iconography has gradually expanded to the study of

literary works, and has become an important method to understand the symbolic meaning and aesthetic implication of literary works. As a literary work rich in symbolic and visual images, A Dream of Red Mansions is a traditional text analysis. It focuses on the interpretation of characters, plots and symbols. The traditional emotion analysis is often based on the relationship between characters, focusing on the emotional expression of the text and the psychology of the characters, but ignoring the emotional expression of the visual images. However, from the perspective of imagology, the expression of emotion is not limited to text narration, but is also displayed through the gaps in the text and the actions and expressions of characters, so it is feasible to interpret the text graphically. In addition, the meaning of A Dream of Red Mansions has a metaphysical dimension: the inquiry into the ultimate meaning of life (life). (Ye Lang. "The World of Sentient Beings" is on this shore -- Ye Lang on the Dream of Red Mansions [M]. Beijing: Peking University Press, 2021. Page 5). The theory of

"emotional program" in imagology contains a strong concern for human life modality. Therefore, this paper attempts to explore the "polarity" in "A Dream of Red Mansions" from the perspective of iconology, that is, the opposition and conflict of human emotions, and explore this special symbolic form of history and experience, so as to more comprehensively understand the questions about the original existence of human beings hidden in "A Dream of Red Mansions". Its meaning is to dig out the life energy of each person in this bank of the "world of feeling". This paper takes a Dream of Red Mansions, published by People's Literature Publishing House in 2022, as the reference center to analyze the text content from the perspective of iconography.

2. Dualistic opposition and conflict -- the emotional representation of polarity

In Warburg's view, "polarity" not only appears in artistic images, but also reflects the survival dilemma of man himself (Cao Hui. A Study on the symbolic Forms in Abby Warburg's Art Theory [J]. Journal of Zhengzhou University (Philosophy and Social Sciences Edition), 2023,56(06):85-91+140). Abby Warburg was deeply influenced by anthropology and psychology, he transformed the empirical form of empathy psychology into a form of life impulse, and proposed the concept of "Pathosformel", referring to the formal quality of emotional expression, used to describe the movement and expression of characters in artistic works in historical gaps and stylistic differences the law of recurrence. He understood art as a form of emotional expression loaded with life energy and cultural energy, and a replacement of life energy in a symbolic way. The transmission of human life energy is always embodied in the two poles of silence and agitation, always swinging back and forth between the two poles, which is the most original form of life modality, that is, the polar composition of art. Warburg once said, "Sometimes I look like a psycho-historian trying to diagnose the schizophrenia of Western civilization in its images by autobiographical reflex, with a mesmerizing 'Nife' (mania) on one side and a mournful river god (depression) on the other." (E.H. Gombrich. Warburg Thought Biography [M]. Li Benzhen, trans. Beijing: The Commercial Press, 2018. P. 345).

This symbolic form of "polarity" also has the shadow of Nietzsche's thought. Nietzsche described the life force of the ancient Greeks with the dualistic impulse of the sun god and the Dionysian God, while Warburg believed that human emotions are bipolar. The "emotional program" is a graphic program of emotional energy with polarity, and the accumulation and release of emotional energy in history has always oscillated between two polarities, the two polarities of

emotional energy constitute a strong tension, thus forming two special emotional programs in art: the Apollonian rational calm program and the Dionysian passionate intoxicant program. Warburg drew a gender distinction between two types of emotional programming: the commotion, which represents strength, struggle, and pathos, is often represented by a male figure; the masculine emotional programming is represented by the body in motion, i.e. posture or gesture, which is prominently represented in the image as a painful posture, immense strength, and tragic action; What is quiet, elegant, decorative, and dynamic is often the image of a woman, and the expression of a feminine emotional program is an appendage in motion, meaning clothing or hair. Warburg regarded gesture and expression as the highest expression of human emotion, especially the intense conflict between movement and expression in the state of pain, despair, fear and rage in the moment of life crisis.

Warburg's main concern and research is the intergenicity of the Florentine Renaissance, which experienced the transition from the early stage of artistic development to the high stage, involving the relations between literature and images, philosophy and images, theology and images. Explore the similarities and differences between images, as well as the symbiosis of images in the aspects of motif, detail description and theme interpretation, which can also be called the intercharacter between words and images. This intercharacter can also be applied to the study of Chinese literature, especially in the Dream of Red Mansions, which writes the tragic fates of a large number of characters. The life course of these characters is like a song or a song or a song, which radiates strong emotional energy and life energy. These emotional energy and life energy are also embodied in the work. In the process of the text circulation of "A Dream of Red Mansions", a large number of "polar" symbolic forms have been quietly generated, waiting for us to explore.

3. Silence and commotion -- the binary form of polarity in A Dream of Red Mansions

As mentioned above, Warburg's "emotional formula" is also a metaphysical aesthetics of life, referring to the way human beings respond to the challenges and crises of the external world, with lyrical, quiet, gentle and passionate, sad and extreme two forms of duality. The neutral form in the middle is mediocre, worthless, and does not constitute an "emotional program."

The first kind of "polarity", which is quiet and sad, is represented by many characters in A Dream of Red Mansions, such as Qin Keqing, the first person who shared Wan Yan's sorrow, who was the first woman to die due to tragic fate in the novel, although

some plots were deleted in the original work. However, readers learn from the comments of Zhi Yanzhai and others that he most likely died in fear, shame and depression after being discovered for having an affair with his father-in-law Jia Zhen. The funeral after her death was lively and grand, but the process of her death was quiet and silent, not even a struggle, not a cry. After her death, when she gave Wang Xifeng a dream to express her worries about Jia Fu and her specific plans for the future, her expression and words were calm and rational, but they conveyed a quiet life energy. In the beginning of the thirteenth chapter of *A Dream of Red Mansions*, there is a description of the plot of Qin Keqing's dream of Wang Xifeng. When facing the end of her life, she changes her usual gentle and peaceful character and makes a rational prediction of the rise and fall of Jia Fu and puts forward her own unique suggestions. This is an important and powerful modal representation of Qin Keqing at the last moment of her life, which is calm and gentle.

Another example is Xiang Ling, whose fate is more rough, her short life has been in danger since she was abducted at the age of four, but she actually had a time of strong vitality before Xia Jangui married into the Xue family, and under the influence of the atmosphere of poetry society in Large view Garden, she asked Daiyu for advice, concentrated on studying poetry, and even later some crazy. In the face of her tragic fate, although most of the time she was resigned to it, but at this stage she was in peace and full of strength. In the related paintings of Sun Wen's complete book *A Dream of Red Mansions*, we can see the scene where Daiyu instructs Xiangling to write poems. The two of them are sitting at the window talking. Daiyu's right hand is extended upward, as if she is teaching by example, while Xiangling is listening quietly. A peaceful and quiet picture contains Xiangling's tenacious life energy, which is also one of the few highlight moments in Xiangling's life.

This form is reflected in many characters in *"A Dream of Red Mansions"*, such as Daiyu's sad sadness when she burns her manuscripts and breaks her love, the calm determination to cherish the spring monk, the helpless despair of the Mandarin cat committing suicide and martyrdom, etc., all of which are rational choices made after weighing and analyzing the critical moments of life.

The second is the "polarity" form full of agitation and mania, and the most representative figure is Jia Baoyu. In *"A Dream of Red Mansions"*, he repeatedly threw jade, smashed jade, and went crazy after losing jade. In the third description of the novel, Daiyu and Baoyu met for the first time, because Daiyu had no jade Baoyu crazy, the first time to throw jade, "Baoyu heard, suddenly burst into madness, took off the jade, and was cruel to throw." (Cao Xueqin. *Dream*

of the Red Chamber [M]. Beijing: People's Literature Publishing House, 2022. P. 50.) In Sun Wen's painting of the whole *"Dream of Red Mansions"*, Bao Dai saw the jade for the first time, Baoyu stood among the people, and the jade with a collar fell on the ground in front of him, and everyone looked at the jade on the ground with concern. Baoyu's sudden madness not only startled the readers, but also made Daiyu, who had just entered Jia's house, frightened. This has paved the way for Baoyu to sometimes be no different from ordinary people, and sometimes manic and fierce personality characteristics.

In addition, there are more typical representatives of Jin Chuan, You Sanjie and so on. If the deaths of Qin Keqing, Lin Daiyu, and Yuanyang are sad and quiet, then the deaths of these girls are full of the explosive power of restlessness and passion.

Gold bracelet this is Mrs. Wang's personal big girl, the status in the maid is also very prominent, but suddenly a day of great disaster, in the *"Dream of Red Mansions"* thirty and thirty-two back of the description, gold bracelet in the joke with Baoyu was nap Mrs. Wang found a slap out of Jia Fu after throwing himself into the well. In the written description, the positive description of Jin Chuan is only to kneel down and cry for the wife of the king to be expelled from Jia house with shame and humiliation, and then jump into the well to commit suicide are from the mouth of others, we can not see how ashamed, regretful and desperate this poor girl is when she faces the sudden turn of fate. From the gap of the text expression, we can analyze the strong self-esteem and unyielding character of Jin Chuan, and we can also imagine what kind of excitement, explosive emotions and emotions are full of her hidden leap in that extreme situation.

You Sanjie is a special character in *A Dream of Red Mansions*, and her death is also full of tragic notes and moments. In her short life, there were two turning points of fate. The first moment was in the 65th time, when she faced Jia Zhen and Jia Lian's unabashed frivolity and contempt for her sisters, she thoroughly and profusely scolded them, and since then she has become sober And maniacally shows the unrestrained and rebellious old men who have been in the field for a long time do not know how to deal with, which is her self-destructive and powerful counterattack as a poor woman living in a rich family who realizes that she and her sister have entered the critical moment of fate. The second moment is in the sixty-sixth time, when Liu Xianglian rejected her reputation and said that after the decision to retire marriage, she immediately after a short thought with the love thing Yuanyang sword suicide, "you do not have to go out again to discuss, return your fixed ceremony." With tears pouring down his face, he gave the sword and sheath

to Xianglian with his left hand, and put his right hand on his elbow (Cao Xueqin. *Dream of the Red Chamber* [M]. Beijing: People's Literature Publishing House, 2022. Pp. 926) at this moment, she is self-aware of her own fate, and she is different from the previous rant, although it is full of madness, but there is a clear sadness and determination, which is the strange miserable woman's strong resistance to the fate and helpless end. You Sanjie also displayed a passion and passion similar to the Dionysian.

4. Conclusion

This paper, from the perspective of imagology and combining with the "polarity" theory of the founder of imagology Abe Warburg, analyzes the opposites, conflicts and contradictions of the "polarity" emotions of many characters such as Qin Keqing, Jia Baoyu and You Sanjie in the critical moments of their lives in a *Dream of Red Mansions*. Through the juxtaposition analysis of typical characters in the text of "A Dream of Red Mansions", this paper expounds the binary form of "polarity" in "A Dream of Red Mansions". In the theory of iconography, the symbols contained in the text are preserved in the memory trace of the image, constantly establish new connections with the symbolized meaning, and radiate new life energy through the conflict and contradiction with human passion. The perspective of imagology also provides us with a more unique interpretation framework for rereading a *Dream of Red Mansions*, which helps us better understand the literary masterpiece with numerous characters, rich emotions and profound meanings.

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