

The Role of Costume in Cao Xue-Qin's Novel *The Dream of the Red Chamber*

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Translated by Cecilia Shickman

Translator's Preface

The present article appeared in the book entitled *Chinese Costume* (Moscow, 1975) written by the father-and-son team of Soviet sinologists L. & V. Siechov. Their article offers a unique and novel approach to *The Dream of the Red Chamber*.

First of all, the Siechovs are the first to point out the importance of costume description in the novel and in the process display a considerable erudition in a field which had been little studied in the West.

Secondly, another insight offered by the Siechovs is the intricate triangular relationship between the three main characters. Since Bao-yu 寶玉 is a celestial being combining both male (*yang* 陽) and female (*yin* 陰) origins he is attracted to both celestial Lin Dai-yu 林黛玉 and terrestrial Xue Bao-chai 薛寶釵.

Moreover, by analyzing Bao-yu's costume the Siechovs point out that it is both archaic and contemporary Qing in style, which enhances the unique origin and the dual nature of Bao-yu.

Finally, the authors of the essay aptly sum up: "The comparison of the technique of the talented author of the first 80 chapters of the novel with that of his less gifted successor plainly demonstrates what a powerful artistic tool a costume description can become in the hands of a great master!"

For the above mentioned reasons, I think this article deserves greater attention in the West.*

The amount of critical literature devoted to Cao Xue-qin's 曹雪芹 masterpiece *The Dream of the Red Chamber* is vast. However, at the moment we are interested in one sole aspect of this immortal work — costume description and its symbolic meaning in the novel. We assume that costume description is one of the most effective artistic devices in Cao's work.

Why did the author attach such significance to costume? We believe for the following reasons: First of all, the author grew up in the family of the Textile Commissioner of Jiangnin [sic], who supplied the Imperial Court with material and clothes. It is natural that the family had a heightened interest in costume. Secondly, the costume is the most vivid embodiment of the material shell which covers up the human essence. What else can best symbolize the vicissitudes of human existence, its vain ups and sad downs, its colours and aroma? Yet this is precisely the leit-motif of the novel.

The transformation of costume description into highly meaningful symbolic images, full of deep philosophical content and, at the same time, unusually bright concretization of these images is particularly characteristic of Cao Xue-qin's creative method. This can be proved by simple statistics. By comparing the last forty chapters written by Cao (i.e. chs. 40-80 of the novel) to the forty chapters added by Gao E 高鹗, one sees that Cao Xue-qin mentioned different articles of clothing 169 times, while Gao E only 49; Cao defines 64 times from which material the described clothing is made, while Gao — only 13 times; Cao mentions furs 28 times in connection with clothes description, while Gao mentions them only 7 times; Cao Xue-qin uses 14 special terms to characterize the ornaments on clothing, while Gao uses only 4, and last but not least, Cao defines the colour of the clothing 81 times, mentioning 28 different colours while Gao's palette consists only

* In her letter to the editor, the translator indicates that she has omitted some passages from the original text which criticized the Russian translation of the novel. As the translator uses Hawkes' translation, which employs the *Pinyin* system in transliterating Chinese, we have preserved the original transliterations for the convenience of readers who also use Hawkes' version.

of 17 colours used 28 times. Moreover, Cao differentiates between 8 shades of red, while Gao mentions only 5, Cao has 9 nuances of green, while Gao — only 2, Cao describes a whole range of delicate pastel colours, i.e. grey, pale yellow and lilac, using them 6 times, while Gao mentions only one.

It is also interesting to juxtapose the two authors' description of the main protagonists' actions with articles of clothing. While Cao mentions concrete articles of clothing (i.e. "took off his *long gown*") 58 times in these descriptions and only in 16 instances uses general phrases like "he undressed," Gao E uses concrete descriptions only 8 times and general phrases 16 times.

Of course, it could be attributed to the fact that Cao Xue-qin was a genius while Gao E — a man of limited artistic talent, but, as we shall show later, the reasons are more profound than that.

However, before analyzing the description of the costume we would like to introduce the reader to the protagonists of the novel, who form a kind of a love-triangle, which Cao Xue-qin turned into a philosophical symbol.

The youth Bao-yu is an image in whom the ancient Chinese beliefs are fancifully interwoven with Taoist and Buddhist philosophies. He was a magical stone, rejected by the Goddess Nü-wa 女媧 when repairing Heaven (a motif from ancient Chinese mythology) and exiled to Earth, where he had to go through a cycle of transmutations and live out "the dream of life" with all its sorrows and sufferings (Buddhist motif), as retribution for being unfit for his lofty mission. Hence Bao-yu is both a celestial and a human being combining male and female origins. Cao Xue-qin constantly stresses this point by describing the peculiarity of his actions, appearance and, as we shall see, deeply symbolical attire.

Outwardly in the plot of the novel the double nature of Bao-yu is manifested in his ethereal love towards Lin Dai-yu and the bonds of earthly marriage with which Bao-chai has tied him to herself. Moreover, Dai-yu died, i.e. left behind her earthly shell, precisely at the same moment when Bao-yu was bounded by the fetters of Earth.

Who then was Lin Dai-yu? She was a celestial being, Grass of Immortality, Crimson Pearl, who had dwelt in the kingdom of fairy Disenchantment before the action of the novel commenced. Later, she was reincarnated as a girl and sent to earth as if in order to remind Bao-yu of his celestial origins.

Their spiritual relationship had started before Bao-yu was reincarnated as a human being. He hears of it in his dream from the fairy maidens that sing for him "A Dream of Golden Days Suite". In the first part of their song the following words are found: "The bond of old by stone and flower made" — *mù shí qián méng* 木石前盟.¹ The "flower"—*mù* 木—symbolizes Lin Dai-yu and the "stone"—*shí* 石—Bao-yu. But the preceding line in the same song says: "the marriage rites of gold and jade"—*jīn yù liáng yuán* 金玉良緣. With these words the author hints that on earth Bao-yu will marry not Lin Dai-yu but Bao-chai. It is very clear that "gold"—*jīn* 金—stands for Bao-chai because the character "chai" (hair-pin) has the "gold"—*jīn*—radical, while "jade" again means Bao-yu.

At first sight it may seem that Bao-yu was forced into marriage, moreover, he was forced to marry a girl whom he did not love. He was forced, rather, tricked into marriage: Bao-yu was convinced that his wife-to-be was Dai-yu and discovered the deception only when he took off the wedding veil from the bride's face. But the impression that Bao-yu had married the girl he did not love is wrong. It cannot be assumed that all of the authors', as well as Bao-yu's, sympathies belong to Miss Lin. Bao-chai's image possesses such composure and warmth that it often outshines the sickly, fickle, inwardly brittle image of Lin Dai-yu. One can cite many examples where the author praises Bao-chai or conveys the deep sympathy that Bao-yu felt towards her.

Of course, sympathy, however deep, cannot be equated with love. However, there are many places in the novel that prove to us that the sympathy Bao-yu felt towards Bao-chai bordered on love. It is true that it was a purely earthly love but this is just the case. This love is juxtaposed to the unearthly love towards Lin Dai-yu.

The following incident from chapter 28 is very significant in this respect: Bao-yu asks Bao-chai to show him her medicine beads which she happened to be wearing on her left wrist. Bao-chai struggles with them since her arm is plump and perspired easily. It attracts Bao-yu's attention. We cannot doubt the character and the direction of his thoughts. As we read further:

Bao-yu had ample opportunity to observe her snow-white arm, and a feeling rather warmer than admiration was kindled inside him.

'If that arm were growing on Cousin Lin's body,' he speculated 'I might

hope one day to touch it. What a pity it's hers! Now I shall never have that good fortune,'

Suddenly he thought of the curious coincidence of the gold and jade talismans and their matching inscriptions. He looked again at Bao-chai —

that face like the full moon's argent bowl;
those eyes like sloes;

(a taste association devoid of any spiritual connotation that would be associated with eyes. L.S.)

But the following sentence is particularly interesting:

those lips whose carmine hue no Art contrived;
and brows by none but Nature's pencil lined."

This was beauty of quite a different order from Dai-yu's. Fascinated by it, he continued to stare at her with a somewhat dazed expression.²

The author stresses the influence of Bao-chai's natural beauty on Bao-yu, since applying make-up is in a sense an art and demands a certain manifestation of spirit. We feel that the above quoted passage conveys the split identity of Bao-yu as a celestial and a terrestrial being. Here reality, i.e. True Essence is opposed to dream, i.e. earthly life. While Lin Dai-yu was the image of True Essence that he longed for, Bao-chai is the incarnation of his beautiful, but none the less, earthly bonds.

This motif is stressed by the "framing" of the novel. There are two episodical characters in it, whose fate and meetings enveloping the whole novel, serve as a refrain to its main parts, commenting on the major events of the novel like a chorus in a Greek tragedy. Their names are: Zhen Shi-yin 甄士隱 and Jia Yu-cun 賈雨村. They are homonyms for: "True events are concealed by fictional accounts", outwardly stressing the allegorical meaning of the narrative, inwardly concealing the more complicated concept of interrelationship between the truth of real Being and the dream of life.

Names that form homonymous rebus! Names-symbols! It is all very typical of Cao Xue-qin's style. Not only Zhen Shi-yin and Jia Yu-cun prove it but the meaning of the names of all three main characters is connected in one way or another with the names of objects of toilet. If we analyze their names, we shall obtain one more proof of this.

The name of the main hero — Bao-yu "Precious jade" — is in its worldly

meaning the adornment hanging from his neck, that jade pendent with which he was supposedly born and should never part.

The name of the heroine – Dai-yu consists of two characters “colour for the eyebrows” and “jade”. If we change their places and substitute “dai” with a homonym, then the meaning will be “jade belt” – *yudai* 玉帶, which is very important.

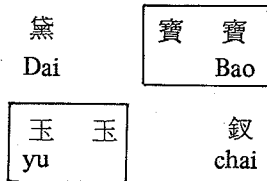
The name of the other heroine is Bao-chai – “Precious hairpin”. Besides, *Jinling Shier Chai* 金陵十二釵 *Twelve Hairpins of Jinling* – as if a collective metonymical name of the twelve heroines in the novel, was once considered as a title for the novel. That all of this is not a chance coincidence but a particular characteristic of Cao’s method of choosing costume to embody ideas in visually colourful images, will become clear to us at every turn in the analysis of the costume description in the novel. We would like to quote a passage from chapter 5 of the novel, which especially convinces us that the peculiar meaning of names, as we showed above, play an exclusive role in the contents of the novel.

In his dream Bao-yu leafs through the Main Register of heroines’ fates. On the first page he sees a picture: two trees with a jade belt hanging in their branches. Obviously it is a rebus that can be decoded as “Lin Dai-yu”, since two trees stand for the surname “Lin” (林 consists of two “trees” – 木 *mu*), while the jade belt – *yudai* – hanging in their branches, is the name Dai-yu with characters which have changed places.

Under the trees Bao-yu sees a pile of snow in which a golden hairpin lies half-buried. This is another rebus that stands for the name of Xue Bao-chai, since her surname “Xue” which sounds the same as the Chinese word for “snow” and the “golden hairpin” is the “precious hairpin” i.e. Bao-chai. Under the picture Bao-yu reads a poem that repeats verbally what the picture conveys visually:

The jade belt in the greenwood hangs,
The gold pin is buried beneath the snow.

Let us now look at the characters that form the love triangle of the novel (read from top to bottom):



It becomes especially clear how complicated the interwoven relations between Bao-yu and the two heroines are. Character *yù* (jade) connects him with Dai-yu, which is firstly the epithet of the ruler of Heaven Yuhuang 玉皇, and, secondly, homonym of *yu* 宇 -Heaven³. It becomes even clearer if we remember that *yu* is one of those stones with which Goddess Nü-wa repaired Heaven. Hence, the character “yu” which they share stresses the heavenly link between Bao-yu and Dai-yu.

Character *bao* links Bao-yu with Bao-chai. On the one hand, those are our earthly possessions (the character represents riches under a roof), on the other hand, it is a homonym of the word *bào* 抱 - “to embrace” and also of *bǎo* 飽 - “to eat one’s full”. Therefore, we can assume that community of character *bǎo* represents the earthly link between Bao-yu and Bao-chai.

But this is not all. Let us examine now the characters *dai* and *chai* which were left outside the frame of our diagram. The first character is a homonym of the belt which is an important article in the official costume of a man while the second - a hairpin, is a detail of a woman’s attire. The belt and the hair-pin along with the hat and the skirt very often are figurative designations of a man and a woman. Hence the character *dai* testifies that Dai-yu is the representative of Heaven⁴ and the repository of the male element *yang* in nature, manifestation of Primordial truth (she is the Grass of Immortality). She calls Bao-yu to return (to “awaken”). Character *chai*, on the other hand, defines Bao-chai as embodiment of Earth, the expression of the female element *yin*, a woman of flesh and blood, manifestation of everything transient and mortal, all that urges Bao-yu to stay on earth.

But this is not all! Phoneme *dai* has two meanings: colour for the brows conceals a man’s belt, which hints that the male element of Immortality is disguised by a mortal girl. Hence the name “Dai-yu” is connected with cosmetics and make-up, while character *chai* is utterly simple with its one meaning. Bao-chai is a woman without fancy and double-meaning and her

dislike of make-up which Cao Xue-qin stresses many times, stems from it.

In conclusion, let us point out a subtle psychological trait of the heroines, connected with their names. Despite the fact that Lin Dai-yu and Xue Bao-chai represent two cosmic forces, in every day life they are two girls, and rivals at that. Heavenly creature Lin Dai-yu is temperamental like lightning, tearful like a cloud, and her moods change as easily as the colour of sunset clouds. While she succeeds in concealing her Primordial essence, she really does not know how to conceal her purely feminine jealousy. Xue Bao-chai, on the other hand, is stable like mother-earth, and cold like the snow that covers it, but human emotions are not alien to her either. She is also a little bit jealous but over-tactfully hides it. She claims to dislike make-up, thinking at the moment that even if somebody will remember that her rivals' name is "colour for the brows", there will be no ground on which she can be accused of being jealous.

How do the characters of the protagonists, their relations and roles manifest themselves in their appearance, and, of course, in their costume? First, let us point out that Cao Xue-qin's description of the costume is always philosophically functional and is never a description of manners.

Let us analyze Bao-yu's attire in which he makes his first appearance in the novel. This attire is the full ceremonial dress with a significant head gear and contains traditional symbolism of all details, colours and ornaments, hence the analysis of this one costume can illustrate the theme of the present study.

Cao Xue-qin describes this costume in great detail using 89 characters in the description: 9 are names of articles of attires and their details, 6 names of different materials, 4 traditional terms, characterizing ornamentation, 7 names of colours and 6 verbs designating actions, connected with the process of putting robes on.

Bao-yu is dressed so magnificently because he just returned from the temple in fulfilment of a vow.

The description commences with the following words: "The young gentleman who entered . . . had a small jewel-encrusted gold coronet on the top of his head".⁵ — *tóushàng dàizhe shùfǎ qiānbǎo zǐjīn guān* 頭上戴着束髮叢寶紫金冠 *Shufaguan* 束髮嵌 means a decorative, often metallic, little cap that grips the knot of hair on top of the head.

This coronet is clearly seen in the earliest illustration of the novel,

i.e. in the 1791 edition of *Kangben Hunglou meng* 庚本紅樓夢 and on the lithographs of the 1892 edition undertaken by Yao Mei-bo 姚梅伯 and entitled *Pingben Shitou ji* 評本石頭記. *Shufaguan* can also be seen on numerous prints wishing one to have a talented son who will attain high office.

In order to understand correctly the meaning of this head-gear we must first establish Bao-yu's age. In chapter 2 of the novel we learn from the lips of the antique-dealer Leng Zi-xing 冷子興 that Bao-yu "is now rising ten",⁶ when he moves into the Garden he is about thirteen and at the very end of the novel he is nineteen years old. Hence, during his first meeting with Dai-yu (and with the readers), he is still a boy. However, Bao-yu's wet-dream in chapter 5 and the ensuing intercourse with his chief maid Aroma in chapter 6 of the novel make us conclude that Cao Xue-qin conceived of Bao-yu as having already reached the age of puberty. This is stressed by the fact that Bao-yu wears *shufaguan* on special occasions, since in Chinese *shufa* 束髮 means 'adolescence', when a boy is already grown-up but has not yet legally come of age (wei chengren 未成人); already wears his hair as an adult but does not yet wear the official hat, which in ancient China was first put on at the age of twenty, during the ceremony of *guanli* 冠禮.

The term *shufa* as well as the custom of wearing the *shufaguan* coronet stems from antiquity. In *Li Ji* 禮記 (*Da Dai Li* 大戴禮 version) it says: "To bind the hair (*shufa*) and commence the Great Learning."

However, in ancient China not only adolescents but grown-up men wore their hair in a similar manner. We can see the drawing of this coronet in the Ming dynasty encyclopedia and the description points out that it can be seen on the portraits of "three *wangs*", i.e. the founders of the ancient dynasties of Xia, Shang and Zhou. It is significant that one of the heroes of *Sāngúo Yǎnyì* (三國演義), Liu Bei 劉備, who is always portrayed wearing *shufaguan*, says of himself: "I am a solid man, even Zhang Fei 張飛 cannot beat me in a single combat."

All this leads us to think that the author did not use *shufaguan* so much in order to establish Bao-yu's age (even though it seems so at first glance), but in order to make him appear more archaic. The archaism of his appearance which evokes Liu Bei and other heroes of antiquity hints again at Bao-yu's celestial origin; he is the Precious Jade precipitated into the abyss of human sufferings.

The next object of his toilet also evokes reminiscences: "a golden

headband low down over his brow in the form of two dragons playing with a large pearl.”— *qí méi lè zhe èrlóng xǐ zhū jīn mò*— 齊眉勒着二龍戲珠金抹額. Ironically, while all the illustrations of *The Dream of the Red Chamber* portray Bao-yu with *shufaguan*-coronet and *jiàngǒng zānyīng* 絳絨簪纓—the walnut-sized red woolen pompom quivering on a flexible golden stem outside the cap widely known because of their appearance on lithographs and in the theatre, nowhere have we seen an illustration of the *mo*-headband. The illustrators probably did not know what it looked like. It is not surprising: in the *Cihai* dictionary *mo* is defined as: “A headband. Resembles *pà* 帕 kerchief.” It is followed by a quotation from the biography of the famous general Lou Shi-de (VII c. A.D.) included in *Tang Shu* 唐書: “[he] declared a recruitment of brave warriors for a campaign against Tibet. Filled with ardour, [they] put on their red *mò* and joined the army.” Moreover, in the Song dynasty manuscript *Dōngjīng Mènghuá Lù* 東京夢華錄 it says: “All the warriors wearing small coronets and embroidered yellow *mò*”— i.e. exactly Bao-yu’s headgear. Concerning *pà* it says in *Hou Han Shu* 後漢書 that during Qin dynasty rule princes and generals wore red headkerchiefs—*jiàngpà* 絳帕—as signs of distinction.

It follows, then, that in all cases, Han, Tang and Song dynasty sources indicate that *mò* was a manly, warrior-like headgear. Since we could not find later references to it, it also means that it was an archaic headgear, just like the *shufaguan*, and reverberating with the image of Liu Bei. However, the ornamentation of the *mo* makes its meaning more subtle.

The words “two dragons playing with a large pearl” —*èrlóng xǐ zhū* 二龍戲珠—is not just a description but a traditional term with a deep symbolic meaning. For the ancient Chinese rain was the concrete manifestation of the union between Heaven and Earth. Dragon, a fantastic creature, is the Ruler of the rain appearing amidst thunder and lightning. He embodies both *yang* (fire) and *yin* (water). Thus dragons bear a complicated cosmogonical meaning. Bao-yu who is a rejected particle of Heaven in the earthly imprisonment, must be the incarnation of both Heaven and Earth, combining both the male (*yang*) and the female (*yin*) elements, which is expressed in the ornamentation of the headband *mo*.

However, just like in the other aspects of the novel fantasy merges with reality, religious-philosophical digressions are followed by descriptions of everyday life and exposure of its corruption. In the same way headband

mo has a double meaning. Along with its philosophical meaning it also characterizes the Jia family's dissipation, which causes its final downfall. Later on in the narrative Cao Xue-qin portrays the confiscation of the family's property. Among the listed items were some, which were only allowed at the imperial court. It is possible that this headband was among those items, since only the members of the imperial family could wear the image of the five-clawed dragon *lóng* 龍 – versus the four-clawed one – *mǎng* (蟒).

On the other hand, it is significant that in chapter 15 of the novel the prince of Bei-jing is described wearing a white *mǎngpáo* “gold-embazoned with the royal five-clawed dragon”⁷ *chūanzhe . . . wúzhǔǎnlóng bǎimǎngpáo* 穿着…五爪龍白蟒袍. His official status at the court made him strictly abide by the law. Even though he was allowed to wear robes with the royal five-clawed dragon as a sign of imperial favour, his robes are called *mǎngpáo* and not *lóngpáo*. That was the designation given to princely robes to distinguish them from the imperial robes under *Qian-long* jurisdiction.

Mò and *mǎngpáo* emblazoned with five-clawed dragon! Archaism and Qing reality. This is one of the clearest examples of Cao's creative methods, which will be further illustrated in the course of our exposition.

But let us come back to Bao-yu. The description of his head gear is followed by that of his robes: “He was wearing a narrow-sleeved, full-skirted robe of dark red material with a pattern of flowers and butterflies in two shades of gold.”⁸ – *yíjiàn èrsè jīnbáidié chūanhūa dàhóng jiànxiù* 一件二色金百蝶穿花大紅箭袖。The most interesting aspect of this phrase is the term *jiànxiù*, actually used instead of *jiányī* 箭衣. In the Chinese edition of the novel used in our analysis the commentary says: “A kind of long gown with narrow sleeves worn in antiquity for archery. Here Qing dynasty *paóguà* 袍褂 is meant.” Unfortunately, the commentary is not complete and does not throw light on the meaning of this image. We find the key to it in *Cihai* which adds after the explanation that it is the gown worn for archery: “the upper part of the cuff is long in order to cover the hand, the lower part short to facilitate shooting.” It is absolutely clear that Cao had this kind of sleeve in mind since it closely resembles the “horse-hoof” – *mǎtíxiù* 馬蹄袖 – cuff of the Manchu robe.

Cao Xue-qin's artistic method culminates in this detail! A contemporary appearance is clearly visible through an attribute of great antiquity.

Truth (*zhenshi* 眞事) represented by a Manchu sleeve is hidden (*yin* 隱) by a fictional phrase (*jiayu* 假語) representing the ancient gown *jianxiu*. (Recall Zhen Shi-yin and Jia Yu-cun mentioned at the beginning of this essay).

Those who doubt the identity between the robe disguised under the name of *jianxiu* and the long gown *pao*, must pay attention to the fact that each time Bao-yu's ceremonial robes are described, Cao Xue-qin uses the word *jianxiu*, but in naming it while describing action, when, for example, it is put on or taken off, it is always called *pao*, since archaism is the enemy of movement. A dynamic image requires a lively description.

Bao-yu's *jianxiu* is most accurately depicted by the earliest illustrator of the novel, but was totally garbled by the illustrator of the 1832 edition. In the first instance the gown has *matixiu*—“horse-hoof” cuffs, in the second-wide flowing sleeves popular in pre-Qing dynasty times. In the 1892 edition Bao-yu's costume looks even more fictitious and theatrical.

The gradual departure from the Qing reality of the illustrators in the depiction of Bao-yu's costume is understandable when we recall that Qian-long's laws regulating Qing costume, were promulgated in 1759 while Cao's hand-copied edition of the novel appeared in 1756. Illustrations of Qian-long's code of laws were published in 1766 while Chen Wei-yuan's edition of the novel saw light in 1791. Hence, the painter of the first illustrated edition of the novel lived during a period of a heightened interest in the new forms of Qing costume. It was another matter a hundred years later, when the stagnation and decline of Qing culture were felt both in the art of costume-making and costume-illustration.

Shifting from general characterization of Bao-yu's ceremonial robe to its ornamentation, we must point out first of all that Cao Xue-qin is not really describing it but defining it with a traditional term that is used in Chinese weaving up to the present day: “a pattern of flowers and butterflies” —*báidié chuān huā* 百蝶穿花.

Butterfly was one of the favourite homonymic symbols in the decoration of the Chinese costume. On the one hand it embodies longevity since it sounds like the character *dié* 耄 —“old man between seventy and eighty” on the other hand, the synonym of the word *dié*, which is *hú* 蝴, in south China is pronounced as *fú* and is a homonym to the word *fú* 福 —“happiness”.

However, it is not only limited to this basically Confucian symbolism.

Butterfly is not only a homonymic symbol, but can be symbolic in meaning as well, since the cycle of its transmutations is associated with the "chain of reincarnations" in the Buddhist sense. Thus the symbol of longevity develops into the emblem of eternity.

However, the symbolism of butterfly on Bao-yu's ceremonial *jianxiu* is even more complicated. The protagonist appears for the first time before the readers of the novel wearing this gown, therefore the very essence of Bao-yu and of the whole narrative must be reflected in its ornamentation. The butterfly image is connected not only with the world view of the Confucianists and the Buddhists but with the followers of Taoism as well. Zhuang-zi wrote that once he dreamt he was a butterfly and when he woke up he no longer knew: was he really a man who dreamt he was a butterfly, or was he perhaps a butterfly which dreams at this moment that it is a man. Thus the main theme of the novel is again graphically realized, Cao Xue-qin again reminds us what he wrote at the beginning of the novel: "dream . . . is the main idea of this book." Hence, the butterfly not only symbolizes longevity and eternity, but also symbolizes the eternal succession of reality and dream.

The colour of Bao-yu's *jianxiu* which is *dàhóng* 大紅 — "deep red" is also symbolic.

Generally red is the colour of the fire which comes from lightening and consecrates the marriage bond between Heaven and Earth. Therefore it is the marriage colour in general, the most buoyant of the whole gamut of colours. However, Cao Xue-qin gives it a special meaning — let us remember he lists thirteen different shades of red, of which eight define the colouring of clothes. However, *dahong* is the dominant one and the author himself defines it as the colour of drops of blood. This definition complicates the image of red. We not only think of joy but of suffering as well.

In the one hand, the powers of *yin* and *yang* merge in red, passions fuse in its hearth, giving its flames a wonderful brilliance. But it also gives rise to a different image: all, that is born, dies, happiness terminates with suffering. Here it associates with drops of blood and the expression *hóngchén* 紅塵 — Red Dust.

Thus, red becomes the embodiment of the transitory state of the world, of human vanity which in turn gladdens with its dazzling brightness

or saddens with its transient futility. It becomes especially clear that Cao Xue-qin perceived red in the above mentioned way when we juxtapose the name of Bao-yu's residence with that of Cao's. The first was named *Yìhóng yuàn* 怡紅院, i.e. "Enjoyment of Red Colour Study," and the latter — *Dàohóng xiān* 悼紅軒—"Sadness over Red Colour Studio"⁹, i.e. over human vanity.

Hence, the colour of Bao-yu's "jianxiu" and its decor symbolize the fleeting dream of life, with all of its joys and suffering. Now let us add a few words on the technique of pattern execution expressed by the term: *èrsèjīn* 二色金. *Ersejin* in the argot of Chinese weavers means a pattern woven with golden and silver thread. Consequently, on Bao-yu's *jianxiu* golden butterflies are fluttering against the background of silver flowers or *vice versa*.¹⁰

Bao-yu's festive attire is crowned with a *guàzi* 褂子—a jacket worn on top of the gown. The description is as following: "Over the upper part of his robe he wore a jacket of slate blue Japanese silk damask with a raised pattern of eight large medallions on the front and with tasselled borders"¹¹ — *wài zhào shíqīng qǐhuā bātuán wō duàn páisùì guā* 外罩石青起花八團倭緞排穗褂. If there was any doubt remaining that Cao Xue-qin still had in mind Qing ceremonial costume despite different archaisms and anachronisms when describing Bao-yu's costume, we can be assured of it now. It was a purely Qing custom to wear a slightly wider and shorter jacket (according to the Qian-long rules of 1759 it was always dark-blue- *shíqīng* 石青 in colour) on top of a belted, often brightly coloured long gown with narrow sleeves and *matixiu* cuffs.

Attention should also be paid to the term *qǐhuā* 起花—which is the shortened form of the term *qǐ biànsè huā* 起變色花 and denotes a kind of weaving, in which the pattern is differentiated from the background not by colour, but by the direction of the thread. Depending on the different lighting the pattern seems either a little bit lighter or darker than the background creating a unique effect characteristic of the delicate Chinese fabric. The pattern created by the coloured thread is called *zhuanhua*. It follows that Bao-yu's *guazi* is wholly blue, without any coloured patches.

It is very characteristic that Bao-Yu's dark-red lower robe is covered under the dark-blue official jacket. Red was much favoured by the Ming dynasty noblemen and it should be recalled that the sumame of the Ming

emperors was Zhu 朱 (red). Precisely for this reason Manchus could not stomach this colour and nearly totally banished it from the official costume. Only sacrifices at the Altar of the Sun were conducted in red *pao* and even then they were covered under dark-blue jackets-*gua*.

The dark shades of *shiqing* jacket are close to the colour of Heaven—*xuan* 玄, its lighter shades are similar in colour to the tiles of the Temple of Heaven, i.e. with the *yang* colour according to the Qing perception of colour symbolism. The red gown which shows from under the jacket and is similar to the ancient skirt—*shan* 衫 embodies the Earth.

To this we must add the colourless design of seemingly incorporeal flowers on sky-blue background and of golden butterflies on blood-drops coloured background — the colour of earthly joys and earthly sufferings, symbolizing at the same time the eternity of Being and the dream of life, dream in the red prison of passions.

However Qing reality still breaks through the ancient symbols. The decoration on the *gua* jacket is that of the typical attire of a contemporary young gentleman and it resembles a woman's festive dress, because *batuan* ornamentation (eight medallions of flowers in the front, on the back, on the shoulders, on the knees and on the back flap) is typical of a woman's jacket. The law makes provision for four medallions on men's jacket. Tasselled borders make Bao-yu's *gua* similar to a woman's sleeveless jacket *xiápei* 霞帔. Though pre-Manchu in origin, it was retained in the Qing dynasty as a lady's festive and wedding attire. A woman's *gua* of the Qing courtly dress *chaofu* was sleeveless, just like the Ming *xiápei*.

The illustrator of the Chen Wei-yuan edition of the novel (1791) understood Bao-yu's costume correctly. In his illustrations one can see clearly the eight decorative medallions *batuan*, the tassels, and it becomes clear how the belt is seen through the slits, since it belts the lower gown and not the upper sleeveless jacket. All these details (except *batuan*) which connect Bao-yu's costume with contemporary Qing dynasty costume do not appear on later illustrations.

The concluding phrase of Bao-yu's costume description does not have any symbolic meaning — black satin boots with thick white soles were worn both in Ming and Qing times but their name-*cháoxiē* 朝靴 — “court boots” is a purely Qing one, and the verb *dengzhe* 登着 — “clamber up” (here: to wear) hints at the purely Qing fashion of excessively thick soles.

After finishing the analysis of one of Bao-yu's costumes, the reader should pay attention to the fact that Cao Xue-qin is often far from supplying us with a detailed description. Sometimes he describes the costumes of his heroes with a few words and more often than not does not mention a word about it.

It is as if we are presented with a Chinese painting in the *gōngxiě xiāngchéng* 工寫相成 style. In it *gōngbǐ* 工筆 i.e. a detailed, academically precise manner of executing the central object is brought into relief by the cursory, hasty, extremely generalized *xiěyì* 寫意 manner of the background execution.

However, the correlation of these two styles in the novel is much more complicated and dialectical, than is possible in painting. Here it is not only the matter of the most important and the secondary in importance, not only of a picturesque effect. Here we are again faced with the dualism of Truth and Falseness, the inner and the outward.

First of all, the device of distinguishing the main protagonist by describing his costume is of course striking. Only Bao-yu's costume is depicted in detail 16 times and his actions with clothing are mentioned 168 times. The description of the Prince of Bei-jing's costume in chapter 15 of the novel¹² which precedes the description of Bao-yu's costume clearly aims to stress the fact that Bao-yu is dressed like a prince. Except Bao-yu, only twelve other characters are accorded a costume description, and then only once, twice or at most four times. As mentioned above, not a word is said about the costume of other characters.

However, if we give it some thought, it will become clear to us that the author did not only aim at distinguishing the principal characters. After all, Lin Dai-yu is also a main character, yet Cao Xue-qin did not describe her costume until chapter 49¹³ and even then in passing. On the other hand, the costume of her rival who tied Bao-yu with earthly bonds, is described in detail in chapter 8¹⁴ and many additional times in passing.

In order to understand the essence of this device, let us turn again to the already mentioned Zhen Shi-yin and Jia Yu-cun. Please pay attention to the fact that the costume of the first is never described, because Zhen Shi-yin symbolises the hidden essence of Being and his shell is irrelevant. On the other hand, Jia Yu-cun appears first in the apparel of a poor scholar, then in the dazzling robes of a Mandarin because he embodies the vicissitudes of

earthly life and there is nothing to him besides his shell.¹⁵

Let us return now to our main heroes, Bao-yu, as we know already, was cast into the abyss of mundane life as if to be punished because of being unfit to repair Heaven. He says of himself: "... what use are my fine clothes but to cover up the dead and rotten wood beneath?" — *dān líng jǐn shā ló, yě bú guò lǐ liáo*. . . 但綾錦紗羅，也不過裹了.....¹⁶

Thus Bao-yu, just like Jia Yu-cun, does not really have anything besides a beautiful shell in his human reincarnation. Precisely this point is stressed by describing his splendid costumes. Ironically, the second place in the opulence of costume description goes to Wang Xi-feng, the main manageress of *Rong-guo* and for a little while- of *Ning-guo* mansion as well, and a living embodiment of all its splendour and vices.

In contradistinction to her is Lin Dai-yu, the Grass of Immortality reincarnated into a girl. She is the "Precious Jade"'s Earning for his true Being embodied into human flesh. Precisely because of this she could not become Bao-yu's wife in this world, and this is precisely why Cao Xue-qin did not mention her earthly shell.

We stress Cao Xue-qin's name because his successor Gao E did not understand the subtle device of the author of the first eighty chapters of *Xōnglōu mèng* and his descriptions of costume are poor and devoid of inner meaning.

At the beginning of the essay we compared the number of times each author described clothing. We would like to conclude our article with another comparison, not of numbers, but of concrete images.

While we have devoted nearly the whole essay to the analysis of Bao-yu's one costume, we can say only a few words about the same costume description of Gao E. He described it only in one place — chapter 120, where it says: "... draped in dark-red felt cape"¹⁷ — *pēizhè yīlǐng dàhóng xīng-xīngzhān de dǒupéng* 披着一領大紅猩猩氈的斗篷. Bao-yu is encountered by his father on a snowy night on a boat and the latter can hardly recognize him. He asked Bao-yu: "Why are you dressed in this way?" It is all devoid of any meaning since not only Bao-yu, but all the girls in *Rong-guo* and *Ning-guo* mansions wore exactly the same red capes made of monkey's fur. Even Grandmother Jia wore a similar cape when it snowed (see ch. 50). However, even if we assume that the cloak of a layman and the *sanghati*¹⁸ of the Buddhist can be called by the same name, it still remains

a red cassock. It should be remembered that dressing in red clothes does not follow the Buddhist teaching but most probably contradicts it. (A person leaving the mundane world shakes off the Red Dust). It is true that the higher ranks of Buddhist priesthood wore red, but only since the Tang empress Wu-hou presented the monk Fa-lan with a red cassock (*zǐyī* 紫衣) since it was the official dress of the five highest ranks of officials in those times. Thus, a high ranking Buddhist priest resplendent in purple robes is generally contrasted with the preacher of the true faith clad in rags. This sentiment is expressed by the Tang poet Zhen Gu: "I like monks but not the ones in purple robes (*zǐyī*)."

Hence, had Cao Xue-qin wanted to portray Bao-yu's departure from the mundane world, he would have doubtlessly depicted it as his liberation from the luxurious shell of the visual world, his awakening from the dream in the red chamber, and his clothing himself in the rags of a beggar just like the Buddhist monk and the Taoist in the first part of the novel and not in the red cassock of a high ranking monk. In this way, the fact that Gao E makes Bao-yu appear in a red cloak at the end of the novel and fails to describe his lay costume in the space of forty chapters completely destroys the emotional-graphic structure of Cao Xue-qin's masterpiece.

On the other hand, Gao E suddenly begins to draw a picture of Dai-yu's dainty clothes, wearing a skirt of the colour favoured by the concubine of the emperor Xuan-cun, Yang Gui-fei. In another place, he describes the dress of the Buddhist nun Miao-yu. Cao Xue-qin consciously left out their outward appearance for the length of his eighty chapters. Gao E, on the contrary, describes in detail only the costumes of Dai-yu, Miao-yu and a few other girls, and his descriptions are as out of place as that of Bao-yu's red cassock. Moreover, Cao Xue-qin, continuing his line, should have described Bao-chai's wedding dress in most brilliant colours since the scene of her marriage to Bao-yu is the culmination of the captivity of "Precious Jade" in the bonds of worldly ties. Gao E limits it to the standard four-character phrase: *shèngzhūāng yànfú* 盛粧豔服 devoid of any concrete meaning. He makes a casual mention of Bao-yu's costume: *chūānxīn* 穿新 literally, "dressed in new" and goes no further.

Thus the comparison of the technique of the talented author of the first 80 chapters of the *Dream of the Red Chamber* with that of his less gifted successor plainly demonstrates what a powerful artistic tool a costume

description can become in the hands of a great master!

Notes

1. The translation here is by David Hawkes. See *The Story of the Stone: A Chinese Novel by Cao Xue-qin in Five Volumes*, Vol. I, *The Golden Days* (Harmondsworth, England, 1973), p. 140.
2. Hawkes, vol. 2, *The Crab-Flower Club* (Harmondsworth, 1977), p. 66.
3. It is true that *yù* (jade) is in the fourth tone, while *yǔ* (Heaven) is in the third, but in composing homonymous rebus not only the tone but even velar and front palatal sound of "n" is ignored. For example in the pair: *shen* 厖 (see monster) and *shèng* 勝 (victory). (Remark by Sychovs).
4. Character *dai* in Dai-yu's name is not only a homonym of the word "belt", but is also a homonym, its upper part, even a homograph, of the word "represent". Hence the combination *dai-yu* can also be read as "representing Heaven". (Remark by Sychovs).
5. Hawkes, vol. I, p. 100.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 76.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 288.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 100.
9. Hawkes translates the first as "House of Green Delights" and the second as "Nostalgia Studio".
10. Hawkes translates the term *ersejin* as "... in two shades of gold", which is a mistake according to Sychovs.
11. Hawkes, vol. I, p. 100, According to the *Oxford Dictionary* "slate-coloured" is "(of) dark bluish or greenish grey" while Siechovs insist that only dark-blue jackets were worn in Qing times.
12. Hawkes, vol. I, p. 288.
13. *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 478.
14. *Ibid.*, vol. I, pp. 187-8.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 58 and 65.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 178.
17. Tsao Hsueh-chin, *A Dream of Red Mansions*, tr. by Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1980), vol. 3, p. 572.
18. The Chinese had a special term for the Buddhist "sanghati"- *jiasha* 袈裟 made of coarse camlet. (Remark by Siechovs).

