

Analyzing the Characters in the Dream of the Red Mansion and Jane Eyre from the Perspective of Feminism

Qianzhi Zhai^{1,a,*}

¹Shandong Weifang No.4 Middle School, Qingdao, Shandong, 261206, China

a. 18678051102@163.com

*corresponding author

Abstract: Feminism not only has many manifestations in theory but also in practical life. This paper explores feminism from the perspective of literary works from both East and West. In the East, although feminism was influenced very late, it began to sprout as early as the feudal society. The feminism of this period was closed, not bold, and oppressive. Cao Xueqin's "Dream of the Red Chamber" can become an encyclopedia of Chinese feudal society. Feminism is manifested in all aspects here. When China was in a backward feudal period, Western societies such as Britain and France had already begun a vigorous bourgeois revolution. Women are already openly and boldly fighting for democracy, freedom, and liberation. British writer Charlotte Bronte, influenced by the idea of compromise and combining her own personal experience, wrote the masterpiece *Jane Eyre*. This paper analyzed the characters in *Dream of the Red Mansion* and *Jane Eyre* from the perspective of feminism.

Keywords: Feminism, *Dream of the Red Mansion*, Jane Eyre

1. Introduction

As half of humanity - mother, wife, daughter. Women are not only an endless topic for women themselves, but also an endless topic for men. The quality of life of women is directly related to the quality of life of the entire human race. Because of this, discussions and research on the topic of feminism have continued to this day, and people are still actively exploring and deepening it. This article explores the differences and roots of feminism between Cao Xueqin's "Dream of the Red Chamber" and Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre* through a comparative analysis [1].

The original name of "Dream of the Red Chamber" was "The Story of the Stone", which tells the story of a feudal aristocratic family from prosperity to decline. The tragic love and marriage of Jia Baoyu, Lin Daiyu, and Xue Baochai are the center of this story. The author's brilliance lies in not presenting this love tragedy superficially or simply but in exploring the social roots of this love tragedy from the depths of the character's ideological character and interpersonal relationships, thus fully exposing the cruel hypocrisy of feudalism and the corruption and evil of the feudal ruling class. The theme of the work is not limited to the personal love tragedy itself, but revolves around the central event, launching many complex contradictions and struggles, depicting an extremely broad picture of social life, indicating that the entire feudal society is already full of holes and crumbling. Thus, he deeply and sharply criticized the feudal social system, political bureaucracy, marriage system, and ethical relationships and bitterly accused the cruelty and ruthlessness of feudalism and the extinction

of human nature, boldly and keenly foreshadowing the inevitable historical fate of the feudal society and the feudal ruling class. In China, "Dream of the Red Chamber" is evaluated as an encyclopedia analyzing feudal society.

Jane Eyre is the representative work of the 19th-century British critical realist literary writer Charlotte Bronte. The author lived in an era of social unrest in England, where, with the rapid development of capitalism and the intensification of class struggle, the famous Charter Movement in British history erupted. This article explores the author's social and family background, and it is in this context that the author created Jane Eyre. In her works, Jane Eyre has neither wealth nor beauty, but she is tenacious, brave, sincere, and passionate, pursuing independence, freedom, and equality, defending personal values, and maintaining self-dignity. It can be said that she is a new woman of the era who has self-respect, self-love, self-improvement, and self-reliance. This article focuses on Jane Eyre's life experience and her environment, explaining how Jane Eyre, under the influence of the environment, transformed from a weak little girl into a successful woman who dared to challenge fate and achieved self-worth through her own efforts. The work successfully portrays a female figure who dares to resist and strive for freedom and equality in the face of social injustice, thus sounding the first trumpet for women to strive for equality and freedom. This reflects the awakening of female consciousness among Western women in the 19th century. The spirit of women's pursuit of autonomy and self-improvement advocated in the work still has a profound impact in contemporary society. This spirit of not giving in to pressure and daring to challenge setbacks is commendable today. Jane Eyre, who has self-respect, self-improvement, and self-reliance, should always be a role model for us to learn from.

2. Jia Baoyu's Feminism

Jia Baoyu is a male character in *Dream of the Red Mansion*. Although he is male, he has a girl-like appearance. His complexion is delicate, elegant and beautiful. He wears a colorful golden crown embroidered dress in the novel. From coronal clothing to casual clothing, from summer clothing to winter clothing, there are many styles and gorgeous colors, ranking first among the characters in the book.

Jia Baoyu also loves to cry: for the parting of friends, for the scene of dying, for a sad poem, for the sisters who ignore him, for a word that breaks his heart. He shed more tears for others than Daiyu's tears of self-pity. Often, when no one is around, he cries and laughs for himself; when he sees a swallow, he talks to the swallow; when he sees a fish in the river, he talks to the fish; when he sees the stars and moon, he either sighs or mumbles. Baoyu's sentimental and sensitive personality is no less than Daiyu's.

In Chinese feudal society, men held a dominant position, and the idea of men being superior to women held a very important position. Feudal nobles often demanded that their descendants receive the most orthodox feudal education, strive to rise to higher positions and become successful officials [2]. Under this request, many dandy boys have fought for it. But Baoyu has a rebellious nature. This rebellious nature precisely illustrates his feminism. This is mainly manifested in his "lover", which is the admiration and closeness towards some humble and lowly people, especially his special love and respect for girls. In terms of positive significance, this actually reflects the requirements of human liberation, individual freedom, and human rights equality. Essentially, it is the concept of humanity and human rights ideology, which is the progressive feminist ideology.

The most prominent characteristics of Jia Baoyu are her love for women, respect for women, and admiration for women. The novel *Dream of the Red Mansion* repeatedly portrays this characteristic, sometimes emphasizing it with myths and exaggerated brushstrokes. The formation of Jia Baoyu's feminism was not only due to his upbringing in a group of young girls who were loved by many, but also because his love was not just for men and women but also for the unfortunate people around him

in a broader sense. The so-called "broad love" should contain two meanings: firstly, this kind of love is broad, including closeness, love, consideration, respect, sympathy, etc; the second reason is that the objects of this love are relatively broad. Not limited to the ten hairpins in Jinling, but also some of the most ordinary maids [3].

3. Wang Xifeng's Feminism

Wang Xifeng's outstanding talent in managing a family has been well demonstrated in the "Assistant Manager Ningguo Mansion". As soon as she took office, she quickly cuts through the chaos, sorted out the five major drawbacks in the government, and then applied the right medicine to the situation. She makes decisive and swift decisions in the campaign, wielding various tactics and strategies and exuding a royal demeanor. In a short period of time, a chaotic Ningguo Prefecture was rectified in order. At the same time, she also had to manage the Rong Mansion. Wang Xifeng, with her superhuman intelligence and double efforts, excellently shoulders two heavy burdens at the same time, making her a "marvel of the whole clan". And Wang Xifeng's outstanding ability of family management can be transferred to governing the country, indeed demonstrating her ability to control the overall situation and manage complex dramas.

In traditional Chinese society, the daughter-in-law has always been "obedient and filial" to the father-in-law, and the husband should be "obedient", and "must not violate any rules" [4]. Wang Xifeng not only disagrees with her mother-in-law but also is not very loyal to her husband. Traditional ethics require women to be centered around men, requiring them to be absolutely obedient to men and subordinate to them. And Wang Xifeng was neither submissive nor obedient to her husband. On the contrary, she wanted to be the core, to dominate the man and everything [5].

4. From the Biblical Complex in *Jane Eyre* to See Its Feminism

Jane Eyre breaks through the three "C" worlds of traditional British women (church, cookery, and children), completing a leap in feminism with the awakening of female self-awareness. At the same time, it also contains a strong biblical complex. For people who grew up in a Christian cultural atmosphere, "the words and rhythms of the Bible will be imprinted in their minds and become a part of their thoughts so that when quoting Bible words, they do not know that they are from the Bible." In fact, there are more than 60 narratives, dialogues, and confessions in the entire book of Jane Eyre, either quoting the Bible, or borrowing or using allusions, sentences, metaphors, and images from it; There are countless references to God in the article. This is enough to witness the profound influence of the Bible on Charlotte and her Jane Eyre. Jane Eyre and Rochester experienced a transformation from "losing love" to "getting love", which is very similar to the intention in the Bible.

In the mid-19th century, Charlotte in England was influenced by rationalism such as Darwin's theory of evolution, which made her protagonists unwilling to be arranged by God. When Jane Eyre returned to Rochester again, the balance of power underwent a fundamental change: the "master" Rochester became a poor and disabled weak person, and the "maid" Jane Eyre miraculously inherited an inheritance from overseas, becoming a young, wealthy, and healthy strong person. This change ensured Jane Eyre's equal status in her future marriage [6].

Jane Eyre has self-respect, autonomy, and rebellious resistance: Jane Eyre, at her aunt's house where she resides, conflicts with her arrogant and cruel cousin John, and the skinny one dares to fight with him, and he angrily scolded him, saying, "You are really vicious and cruel, you are like a murderer - you are like a slave abuser - you are like the Roman emperor." He also dared to criticize his cold and protective aunt, "You think you are a good person, but you are bad, you are cruel." Jane Eyre's childhood life gave readers a preliminary understanding of her rebellious personality and the spiritual starting point of defending her independent personality.

She pursues spiritual freedom and equality, dares to pursue true and complete love, and has a strong will and exceptional wisdom. When Jane Eyre found out that she had deeply fallen in love with her master, in such a situation of unequal status, she dared to love because she firmly believed that people are equal in spirit. In the Gateshead mansion, Jane Eyre is the "Cinderella" in fairy tales. All forces oppress her, harm her nature, and stifle her growth. However, Jane Eyre's heart is not destroyed by the ugly reality, her spirit is tempered with stubbornness due to rough life, her will is tempered with determination, and her extraordinary situation cultivates her extraordinary courage and insight. A ten year old child seems to possess adult intelligence, and this exceptional intelligence prompts her to fearlessly resist oppressors.

From Jane Eyre, we can see the image of today's new women: self-esteem, self-respect, self-reliance, self-improvement, a firm ideal and persistent pursuit of one's personality, emotions, life, judgments, and choices. This is the inspiration for Jane Eyre's personality charm, as well as her feminism.

5. Compare the Differences and Roots of Feminism Between *Dream of the Red Mansion* and *Jane Eyre*

Whether the female perspective in "Dream of the Red Chamber" is positive or continues to be negative is still a highly controversial topic. The view on *Jane Eyre* seems to have become a fixed conclusion. That is, Jane Eyre appeared as a typical representative of a petty bourgeois female image, mainly describing her struggle for women's economic independence and equal rights in love. It affirms the status of women and even promotes them.

Some people believe that *Dream of the Red Mansion* speaks for women, while others believe that *Dream of the Red Mansion* is still a patriarchal ideology. However, in my opinion, as a male writer, Cao Xueqin, under the influence of Chinese classical literature, inevitably has a bit of male-centered ideology, and it is impossible for him to completely abandon the original culture. But he did not completely belittle women like some original writers did, but instead deconstructed and improved women. The author has exhausted his pen and ink in describing a group of talented women in the Jia family, including Lady Wang, Wang Xifeng, Baochai, and Tanchun. Everyone has extraordinary intelligence, which is why the author consciously endows women with this intelligence and foresight. We can also consider the description of the Grand View Garden in *Dream of the Red Mansion* as a symbol. The Grand View Garden is a symbol of the ideal world, representing a "daughter country" that belongs to the female space, a place far away from male oppression. There, women can freely showcase their talents and have their own true self-examination [7]. This is the author's intentional or unintentional admiration for women. He arranges the pure bodies of women in the cleanest place, far from the secular world, in a place full of spirituality.

Jane Eyre is written in the first person, and the author herself is a woman. The most prominent manifestation of Jane Eyre's self-esteem, autonomy, and rebellious and rebellious personality is her childhood life. She dares to conflict with her arrogant and cruel cousin John, and the skinny one dares to fight with him. She also dares to criticize her cold and protective aunt, saying, "You think you are a good person, but you are bad. You are cruel." All of this is undoubtedly impossible for ordinary children. But Jane Eyre in Charlotte Bronte's works is so antagonistic. In pursuit of spiritual freedom and equality, she dares to love and not to love. No matter what happens, she never belittles her emotions. She is a true person who pursues true love and dares to pursue true and complete love. At the same time, she possesses all the wisdom of ordinary people and has a strong will. In short, she is a female representative of self-esteem, self-respect, self-reliance, and self-improvement, with a firm ideal and persistent pursuit of her personality, emotions, life, judgments, and choices.

Through the different manifestations of feminism in *Dream of the Red Mansion* and *Jane Eyre* mentioned above, we can feel that feminism in "Dream of the Red Chamber" is closed, oppressive,

and not bold, which is closely related to the social system of China at that time. The feminism in *Jane Eyre* is open, exposed, and free. This was clearly influenced by the Industrial Revolution and the Bourgeois Revolution in England at that time, which was closely related to the social situation.

6. Conclusion

The emergence and significant development of feminism is indeed a good phenomenon. From the analysis of *Dream of the Red Mansion* and *Jane Eyre* in this paper, it can be seen that feminism has shown certain signs in both the East and the West. It can be seen that, under the influence of Chinese classical literature, it is inevitable that there is a bit of male-centered ideology, and in the deeply rooted feudal system, it is impossible to completely abandon the original culture. However, *Dream of the Red Mansion* does not belittle women but rather deconstructs them, praising beauty from the perspectives of women's thoughts, writing, and other aspects. In *Jane Eyre*, the author affirms Jane Eyre, affirms women and affirms women's pursuit of spiritual freedom to fight for their rights and struggle for equality. These two works show a recognition and commendation of women. Although Chinese and Western cultures are different, the development of feminism, the achievement of women's equality and liberation, the improvement of women's status, and the increasing respect for women are the same.

References

- [1] Cao Xueqin, *Dream of the Red Chamber*, People's Literature Publishing House, 1981
- [2] Wang Kunlun, *On the Characters of the Dream of the Red Chamber*, Sanlian Bookstore, 1983
- [3] Simon Bova, *Second Sex - Women*, Hunan Literature and Art Publishing House, 1986
- [4] Li Yinhe, *The Rise of Women's Power*, China Social Science Press, first edition, 1997.
- [5] Bao Xiaolan, *Introduction to Western Feminism Research*, Sanlian Bookstore, first edition, 1995.
- [6] Charlotte Bronte, *Jane Eyre*, Faraway Publishing House, 1999
- [7] Yang Jingyuan, *Research on Bronte sisters*, China Social Sciences Press, 1983