

# **The Symbolic Meaning of the Grand View Garden in Dream of the Red Chamber and Its Influence on Character Fate**

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**Abstract:** This paper explores the symbolic meaning of the Grand View Garden in Dream of the Red Chamber and its influence on the fates of the characters. The Grand View Garden, as both a physical and emotional space, represents the glory and prosperity of the Jia family while also foreshadowing its decline. Through an analysis of the role of the Garden in the destinies of key characters such as Jia Baoyu, Lin Daiyu, and Xue Baochai, this paper reveals how the symbolism reflects their inner conflicts and ultimate fates. Additionally, the study examines how the design and symbolism of the Garden embody Jiangnan culture and traditional values, deepening the understanding of the narrative depth and cultural significance of Dream of the Red Chamber.

**Keywords:** Grand View Garden; Symbolism; Character fate; Dream of the Red Chamber; Traditional culture

## **1. Introduction**

### **1.1 Research Background and Significance**

Dream of the Red Chamber (also known as The Story of the Stone) is one of China's Four Great Classical Novels, written by Cao Xueqin. The novel is renowned for its complex narrative structure, rich use of symbolism, and in-depth portrayal of Qing dynasty society [1]. It not only depicts the rise and fall of a noble family but also explores the complex relationships, dreams, and tragedies of its characters [2]. Symbolism, as one of the central narrative tools in the novel, enhances its narrative depth and reveals the complexity of the characters' inner worlds and emotions [3]. Among the various symbolic elements, the Grand View Garden stands out as a significant space that symbolizes both the glory and decline of the Jia family and reflects the inner

worlds and fates of the main characters [4].

The Grand View Garden is not only a physical space but also an idealized world that carries the desires and dreams of the characters. However, this beauty is fleeting, symbolizing the fragility of the Jia family's glory [5]. The symbolism of the Grand View Garden goes beyond its physical attributes; it also reflects the inner worlds of the main characters and the inevitable fate of the Jia family's decline. As a microcosm of society, the Garden mirrors the cultural ideals of the time, including Confucian values and the aesthetic appreciation of nature [6, 7].

### **1.2 Research Objectives and Structure**

This paper aims to explore the symbolic meaning of the Grand View Garden in Dream of the Red Chamber and analyze how this symbolism influences the fates of the main characters. Through a detailed analysis of the role of the Grand View Garden in the narrative, this paper will reveal the Garden's dual role as both a physical and emotional space, and its influence on character relationships and plot developments [8]. This study will also examine how the design and symbolism of the Garden reflect the cultural influence of Jiangnan and traditional Chinese values, thereby deepening the understanding of its role in shaping character destinies [9].

The structure of this paper is as follows: the next section will discuss the historical and cultural background of the Grand View Garden, followed by a detailed analysis of its symbolic meaning. The following chapters will focus on the impact of the Garden on key characters such as Jia Baoyu, Lin Daiyu, and Xue Baochai, particularly their inner conflicts and final fates [10]. The conclusion will summarize the main findings and discuss the broader significance of the Garden's symbolism in understanding Dream of the Red Chamber and its reflection of traditional

culture.

## **2. The Construction of the Grand View Garden and the Preliminary Presentation of Its Symbolic Meaning**

### **2.1 The Background of the Garden's Construction**

The construction of the Grand View Garden was prompted by Yuan Chun's visit to the Jia family. This grand garden was created to welcome Yuan Chun, the emperor's consort, and to display the Jia family's prominent status and glory [11]. Yuan Chun's position as a royal concubine gave the Jia family the opportunity to build the Grand View Garden as a symbol of the family's splendor and wealth [12]. This prominence not only manifested in material wealth but also symbolized the Jia family's hope of maintaining power through Yuan Chun's royal favor [13]. However, underlying this grandeur was an impending crisis: the Jia family's prosperity was dependent on external royal favor, and once that favor was lost, the family's wealth could not be sustained [14].

### **2.2 The Preliminary Presentation of Its Symbolic Meaning**

The Grand View Garden, as a meticulously designed landscape, symbolizes the pinnacle of the Jia family's power, displaying their wealth and social status [15]. The design and depiction of the Garden reflect the elegance and finesse of Qing dynasty garden art and represent the Jia family's boundless pursuit of opulent living and refined culture [16]. However, this symbol of prosperity is ephemeral. Beneath the surface of luxury lies the Jia family's deep-seated vulnerabilities. As Edwards (2022) points out, the design and construction of the Garden were imbued with the symbolism of the Jia family's false prosperity [17], and these splendid scenes foreshadowed the eventual decline of the Jia family.

The Grand View Garden not only represents the family's glory but also reflects their illusory pursuit of honor. The lives of the Jia family members in the Garden are a projection of their ideal world, but this prosperity is built on a fragile foundation of power. The creation and initial symbolism of the Grand View Garden become metaphors for the Jia family's gradual decline [18]. In this process, the

symbolism of the Garden shifts from representing family honor to revealing the vanity and latent dangers in the Jia family's fate, laying the groundwork for their eventual fall [19].

## **3. The Multiple Layers of Symbolism in the Grand View Garden**

### **3.1 The Symbol of Youth and Dreams**

In *Dream of the Red Chamber*, the Grand View Garden is not only a grand physical space but also a repository for Jia Baoyu and his cousins' youth and dreams. As a "youthful paradise," the Garden serves as a microcosm of their ideal life, symbolizing the freedom and purity of youth [20]. Jia Baoyu and the other young women enjoy a fleeting yet beautiful period of carefree youth in the Garden, filled with poetry and idealized visions of life [21]. However, this innocence and purity are destined to be short-lived, as the beauty of the Garden ultimately shatters under the pressures of reality, symbolizing the illusory and transient nature of the Jia family's splendor [22]. This symbol of youth and dreams makes the Grand View Garden a representation of unattainable ideals in the novel.

### **3.2 The Symbol of Honor and the Family's Fate**

The construction, flourishing, and eventual decay of the Grand View Garden mirror the rise and fall of the Jia family. At its peak, the Garden symbolizes the Jia family's honor and wealth, a sign of their high social standing. However, with Yuan Chun's death and the family's loss of favor, the Garden gradually falls into ruin, reflecting the family's trajectory—from the pinnacle of glory to inevitable collapse [23]. This layer of symbolism is vividly presented through the Garden's transformations, foreshadowing the Jia family's inevitable decline [24]. This symbolism not only depicts the family's rise and fall but also reveals the fragility of power and wealth in feudal society.

### **3.3 The Symbol of Conflict and the Ruin of Ideals**

The Grand View Garden also symbolizes Jia Baoyu's pursuit of spiritual freedom and his desire to return to nature, reflecting the conflict between his ideals and the harsh

realities of life. Within the Garden, Jia Baoyu seeks a life free from worldly constraints, one that harmonizes with nature. This idealized environment gives him a brief space to resist the oppression of reality [25]. However, as the Jia family declines, the beauty of the Garden is gradually destroyed, and Jia Baoyu's pursuit of spiritual freedom becomes an unattainable fantasy [26]. This conflict reflects Jia Baoyu's inability to escape the constraints of the secular world, symbolizing the collapse of ideals in the face of harsh reality.

#### **4. The Influence of the Grand View Garden on the Fates of the Main Characters**

##### **4.1 Jia Baoyu's Spiritual Longing and the Ruin of Ideals**

For Jia Baoyu, the Grand View Garden is a symbol of his spiritual longing and idealized freedom. The Garden, like a "spiritual paradise," represents his desire to live away from worldly constraints and to return to nature. Within the Garden, Jia Baoyu can temporarily escape the complex family struggles of the Jia family and enjoy moments of peace and freedom [27]. However, as the Garden falls into ruin, so too do his spiritual ideals. His dream of a life untainted by worldly affairs crumbles under the weight of his family's decline and the pressures of reality [28]. The destruction of the Grand View Garden symbolizes the collapse of Jia Baoyu's ideals and his ultimate decision to renounce worldly attachments, which is a tragic culmination of his failure to reconcile with reality [29]. The process from the Garden as a symbol of spiritual longing to the ruin of ideals is a key tragic element in the story.

##### **4.1.1 The symbol of freedom and purity in yihong courtyard**

Yihong Courtyard, Jia Baoyu's residence in the Grand View Garden, symbolizes his yearning for a carefree, pure life. The name "Yihong" represents joy and youth, reflecting Jia Baoyu's desire for freedom and untainted emotions. Here, he lives in equality with his servants and enjoys a carefree existence. His care for his servants and his activities in the courtyard express his ideal of harmonious and egalitarian relationships [30]. However, as the Jia family declines, Yihong Courtyard loses its joy and tranquility. The internal conflicts within the family and external pressures turn

the courtyard from a place of joy into a symbol of emptiness and despair.

##### **4.1.2 The Xiaoxiang pavilion as a symbol of solitude and sensitivity**

The Xiaoxiang Pavilion is the residence of Lin Daiyu, renowned for its quiet, serene atmosphere. This pavilion symbolizes Daiyu's solitude and sensitivity, while also reflecting Jia Baoyu's deep sympathy for her [31]. In his interactions with Lin Daiyu in the Xiaoxiang Pavilion, Jia Baoyu embodies his pursuit of pure emotions and his yearning for a soulmate. The Xiaoxiang Pavilion represents an idealized space for Jia Baoyu, where he can find spiritual resonance and understanding. However, as the Grand View Garden gradually deteriorates, the Xiaoxiang Pavilion also becomes desolate and forlorn. As Daiyu's health worsens, the pavilion mirrors her declining state. The pavilion's transformation symbolizes the gradual end of Lin Daiyu's life and also represents Jia Baoyu's inability to realize his idealized emotional pursuits [32]. The deterioration of the Xiaoxiang Pavilion foreshadows the collapse of Jia Baoyu's emotional ideals, illustrating his inevitable resignation to the harshness of reality.

##### **4.1.3 The Hengwu garden as a symbol of the conflict between secularism and reality**

The Hengwu Garden, the residence of Xue Baochai, is more elegantly and meticulously arranged than other gardens, yet it also feels strict and conventional. Xue Baochai's character complements the design of the garden, symbolizing her adaptation to reality and her conformity to societal norms [33]. For Jia Baoyu, the Hengwu Garden symbolizes the societal rules that he cannot accept yet cannot escape. In his interactions with Xue Baochai, Jia Baoyu is both attracted to her gentleness and wisdom, yet he feels the heavy pressure of societal expectations. The existence of the Hengwu Garden forces Jia Baoyu to confront the burdens and responsibilities imposed by reality. Especially in the context of the Jia family's decline, the conformity and practicality embodied by Xue Baochai sharply contrast with his spiritual world [34]. The Hengwu Garden symbolizes the inescapable secular constraints and the cold reality that Jia Baoyu faces, deepening the conflict between his ideals and reality.

##### **4.1.4 The Daoxiang Village as a symbol of the disillusionment of the pastoral ideal**

Daoxiang Village, a garden in the Grand View Garden with a pastoral style, is famous for its natural beauty and idyllic environment. The Daoxiang Village symbolizes Jia Baoyu's pursuit of nature and his desire to return to simplicity, reflecting his longing to escape the constraints of family and live a simple, rustic life [35, 36]. In Daoxiang Village, Jia Baoyu experiences a sense of peace away from the turmoil of the world, where his ideal utopian life is briefly realized. However, as the Jia family's decline accelerates, Daoxiang Village loses its former tranquility and vitality. The desolation of Daoxiang Village symbolizes the end of Jia Baoyu's pursuit of nature and freedom. This pastoral ideal proves to be fragile under the pressure of feudal society, unable to endure. The ruin of Daoxiang Village not only symbolizes the disillusionment in Jia Baoyu's inner world but also represents his complete disappointment with reality, ultimately leading him to renounce the world.

#### **4.2 Lin Daiyu's Emotional Symbolism and Life's Conclusion**

For Lin Daiyu, the Xiaoxiang Pavilion in the Grand View Garden represents a symbol of her emotional attachment and her lonely state of mind. The pavilion's environment mirrors Lin Daiyu's sensitivity and pride, where she invests a great deal of emotional energy and thought. However, as the Grand View Garden declines, the decay of the Xiaoxiang Pavilion symbolizes the gradual deterioration of Lin Daiyu's life. Her fate is inextricably linked to the garden's fate, and when the garden loses its vitality, Daiyu's life also approaches its end. The collapse of this emotional attachment and the pavilion's ruin are interlinked, reflecting the tragic conclusion of Daiyu's fate and her inability to integrate into the reality of the Jia family. The ruin of the Xiaoxiang Pavilion is not only a symbol of the Grand View Garden's decline but also a concrete manifestation of Lin Daiyu's inability to bear the weight of reality.

### **5. The Decline of the Grand View Garden and the Echo of the Jia Family's Rise and Fall**

#### **5.1 The Decline of the Grand View Garden and its Symbolic Meaning**

The decline of the Grand View Garden

symbolizes the gradual downfall of the Jia family's fate. In *Dream of the Red Chamber*, the Grand View Garden serves as a symbol of the Jia family's glory, and its eventual desolation reflects the unsustainability of worldly wealth and power. The once thriving Grand View Garden symbolized the zenith of the Jia family, but with the death of Yuan Chun and the Jia family's gradual loss of power, the garden begins to decay, becoming a symbol of the family's loss of honor and status. This decay reflects the fragility of feudal families' reliance on power and the emptiness behind their worldly success. The decline of the Grand View Garden represents more than just the physical decay; it also symbolizes the internal disintegration of the Jia family and the collapse of its spiritual world.

#### **5.2 The Synchronization of Spatial Symbolism and Family Fate**

The process of the Grand View Garden's transition from brilliance to ruin parallels the changes in the Jia family's fate, symbolizing the inevitability of the family's fall. The Grand View Garden serves as a microcosm of the Jia family's rise and fall, with its transformation from a lavishly constructed garden to a desolate wasteland symbolizing the family's shift from prosperity to collapse. This change is not only reflected in the material realm but also deeply affects the spiritual and cultural levels of the family members. The deep emotional attachment of major characters such as Jia Baoyu and Lin Daiyu to the garden also fades, symbolizing the inability of family members to escape the inevitable decline of the family's fate. The symbolic transformation of the Grand View Garden echoes the Jia family's demise, reinforcing the tragic theme of the novel.

### **6. Conclusion**

#### **6.1 Summary of the Symbolism of the Grand View Garden**

In *Dream of the Red Chamber*, the Grand View Garden is not only a physical space but also a multi-layered symbol of the family's honor and disgrace, youthful ideals, and the characters' fates. During the garden's construction, it symbolizes the Jia family's wealth and the glory of the family's peak. As a "garden of youth," the Grand View Garden

embodies Jia Baoyu and his sisters' youthful dreams and pure emotions, symbolizing their pursuit of freedom and a beautiful life. However, beneath this symbolism lies an underlying theme of helplessness in the face of reality, as the garden's gradual decline parallels the family's fate and highlights the transient and illusory nature of worldly success. The rise and fall of the Grand View Garden reflects the fate of the family in feudal society, serving not only as a witness to the Jia family's fortunes but also as a concrete expression of their inevitable demise.

### **6.2 Insights for Contemporary Society**

The symbolic meaning of the Grand View Garden still offers profound insights for modern society. It reveals that traditional family systems, in their pursuit of honor and power, often overlook the needs of individuals and the importance of spiritual freedom, leading to an irreconcilable conflict between ideals and reality. The decline of the Grand View Garden highlights the fragility of feudal family fates and the emptiness behind their outward splendor. This serves as a poignant reminder for modern society, urging individuals not to neglect their own spiritual needs and emotional connections in the pursuit of career and familial success. The conflict between personal ideals and traditional family responsibilities remains prevalent in contemporary life, and the symbolism of the Grand View Garden in *Dream of the Red Chamber* teaches us that only by finding a balance between ideals and reality can we avoid falling into the trap of illusory pursuits.

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