ABSTRACT

Love is a recurring theme in many Chinese novels. *Hong Lou Meng* represents the epitome of this tradition. However, this novelistic masterpiece is not simply an eulogy of love. *Hong Lou Meng* delves into the dilemma between transcendence and love, and, in turn shatters the complacent views of love that many novels have held before.

The first objective of this academic exercise is to differentiate the concepts of love and desire, to examine the relationship between love and lovelessness, and trace the reasons which lead some characters to the detachment from love. The second aim of this exercise is to enhance the understanding of the author’s unusual opinion on the concept of love through comparison to the concept of lovelessness as exemplified in the novel. It is crucial to appreciate the subtle difference between “lovelessness” and “detachment from love” to avoid hailing *Hong Lou Meng* as merely tracing the journey of the main character, Jia Baoyu (贾宝玉), towards enlightenment. Therefore highlighting this difference between lovelessness and detachment from love is the other objective of this exercise.

The approach taken by this dissertation is to contrast and compare the different aspects of the thematic concern through the categorization of characters. In this masterpiece, some characters personify “love”, “desire”, “lovelessness” and “detachment from love” respectively. For example, Lin Daiyu (林黛玉) is the ideal of love, while Xue Baochai (薛宝钗) is the embodiment of lovelessness. The tension between the two characters reflects the clash of love and lovelessness. However, the complexities of the characters’ personalities also demonstrate the paradoxes of “love”, “desire”, “lovelessness” and “detachment from love” of the novelistic discourse.

The findings reveal that the author employs elaborate literary techniques of myths, poems and characterization to expound on the thematic concern of *Love, Desire, Lovelessness and Detachment from Love*. Thus it is essential, while researching, to supplement the text with the commentaries by Zhi Yanchai (脂砚斋). The myths, trivial events and poems, which seem redundant, but could reveal deep significance through informed reading and guidance of the commentaries.