ABSTRACT

Xiren (袭人) and Qingwen (晴雯) are just two mediocre characters in the mammoth Qing novel Dreams of the Red Chamber (Hong Lou Meng 《红楼梦》). But in the portrayal of the novel, these two maids play a very crucial role; Xiren is the 'shadow' of Xue Baochai (薛宝钗) and Qingwen, the shadow of Lin Daiyu (林黛玉). Both help to intensify the characterization of Xue and Lin respectively. As such, they have been the focal point of much debate, both among the lay readers and redologists.

In the past, studies on these two protagonists used to dwell on their relationships with the hero, Jia Baoyu (贾宝玉), but these researchers were unconsciously limited by the spatial gap between the period in the novel and the time the researchers lived in. Moreover, their studies were often marred by their personal prejudices and as such, Xiren was hopelessly belittled and Qinwen became a much-praised heroine.

This academic exercise aims at making an objective and fair analysis of the images of these two female characters. This exercise is divided into six chapters. The introductory chapter dwells on the approach to the study of the topic. Chapter Two discusses the significance of Xiren and Qingwen, especially with regard to their being the shadows of Xue
Boachai and Lin Daiyu. Chapter Three and Four explore the character and philosophical outlook of Xiren and Qingwen respectively. Chapter Five examines these two characters in the eyes of the other characters in the novel. Chapter Six concludes with an overall evaluation of these two characters.

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