ABSTRACT

*Hong Lou Meng* is one of the greatest classical novels ever written. Much research has been done on various aspects of the work ever since its completion, one of which being analysis on the fictional characters in the novel. Yet, all these years, researchers only focus on the analysis of the few main characters, little attention has been drawn to the large group of servants which exists throughout the whole novel. Even when they are touched upon, it is only the selected few, the more outstanding ones that are put in the limelight. None has tried to analyze the servants as a whole. This might be due to the large number that exists, both male and female in the Ning and the Rong Mansions. However, this dissertation aims to analyze the servants that were mentioned in the novel by limiting the scope to solely the female servants in the Rong Mansion, since they are the more emphasized and oppressed group in the whole novel.

The aim of this study is comprehensive, highlighting various aspects of the female servants of the Rong Mansion: namely, their background, hierarchical system, duties, living conditions, maltreatment by their masters and mistresses, relationships with their masters and mistresses and within themselves.

This dissertation not only hopes to present an overview of the plight of the servants in the novel, but also hopes to provide an insight into the actual well being of the servants existing in the imperialistic China during the eighteenth century. Furthermore, the findings also show
that, regardless of whether it is the mere existence of these female servants or their relationships with their masters and mistresses, all these are direct or indirect reflections of the societal and philosophical changes. Thus, it aids in the understanding of the servants and certain significant aspects of the society in the Qing Dynasty, while giving the author his due recognition in his success in the creation of the many well-developed servant figures.