ABSTRACT

The Dream of the Red Chambers (红楼梦) is the most extraordinary of all Chinese novels. Much research effort has been put in to illustrate the uniqueness of the novel, particularly on its brilliantly designed plot. The purpose of this thesis is to analyse the causality and non-causality in the plot-design of the novel.

After a brief introduction about the causality and non-causality in narrative works in the first chapter, the second chapter examines the non-causality of the narrative structure. Despite the narrative tradition of having a happy ending for everyone (大团圆), The Dream of the Red Chambers had questioned and even subverted this established mindset. Instead of adopting the externally controlled plot that had shown the presence of “karmic justice”, the plot of the novel had demonstrated the unpredictability and irrationality of reality, where the virtues are not necessarily rewarded.

On the other hand, chapter three looks into the tightly interwoven plot of The Dream of the Red Chambers, which had been shaped by the actions and intentions of the characters themselves. Events had been
arranged in cause-and-effect relationship. Foreshadowing (伏笔) that had been widely used throughout the course of narration had constructed an extremely sensible narrative structure.

Hence, the plot-design of The Dream of the Red Chambers has presented a dual structure: causality and non-causality. This complex dual narrative structure leads to the indispensable tragic meanings of the novel. No matter how the characters had grown by free will (causality), their tragic fate had been predestined unreasonably (non-causality). These two components of the plot-design intertwine and work together to form an intense sense of helplessness. And the novel has always moved its readers by this sense of helplessness.