Abstract

As *Hong lou Meng* and *Liaozhai Zhiyi* are considered as one of the greatest traditional Chinese novels, they have always been a major topic of interest in the academic circle. However, analysis of the two novels have so largely focused upon areas like theme, narrative structure, use of language, plot and characterization, that there seems to be a lack of corresponding studies on the the significance of their setting, which, I believe, is integral to their formation, although occupying only a small part in them. After all, everything that happens, happens somewhere at some time. This academic exercise is, therefore, an attempt towards exploring the design and significance of setting in *Hong lou Meng* and *Liaozhai Zhiyi*.

This academic exercise is divided mainly into two parts, each analysing certain illustrative examples of setting in *Hong lou Meng* and *Liaozhai Zhiyi* so as to allow readers to better appreciate the significance of setting in these two books. Following this, I will sum up with a simple comparison of the design and significance of setting in the two novels. In the course of comparison, the functions of setting in these novels will also be highlighted to emphasize its importance.

The above analysis suggests that the authors of these novels consciously deploy certain elements of setting to support the novels’ plot development, characterization and manifestation of theme. However, as the authors have different intentions during their story-crafting and that *Hong lou Meng* and *Liaozhai Zhiyi* are long and short stories respectively, the design of their setting bear different limitations and hence, do vary in some ways.

This academic exercise is only a preliminary attempt towards establishing the significance of setting in *Hong lou Meng* and *Liaozhai Zhiyi*. Conclusions drawn in it are, to say the least, tentative, and have to be modified and validated by a much fuller study which examines more examples of setting in these novels. Nonetheless, it is hoped that these tentative conclusions do serve to lead to a study as such.