Abstract

This Academic Exercise is a preliminary study of the “Garden as Thematic Image and Setting” in the classical Chinese Scholar-Beauty Romances (才子佳人小说) of the Early Qing period. It is hoped that the results of this study will help to pave the way for further in-depth studies pertaining to this field.

The first chapter of this study provides a background on the development of the novel and on the mentality of the Chinese Scholars of Early Qing period. The second chapter investigates the tie between garden and marriage without consent of the parents (私定终 身). Examining the role and significance of the garden setting on the level of the story-plot is the focus of the third chapter. Finally, in the fourth chapter, the focus is on the importance and function of the garden setting on the level of the narrative.

The findings of this thesis suggest the fact that the theme of such novels is that of searching and achieving a “negotiated” ideal (妥协式理想) and that the garden as a setting is vital to the manifestation of this theme. In this study, it is observed that the garden setting functions as a theme or motif of a literary work is expressed through an image that embodies the theme (主题性意象). On the of the story-plot, the garden functions as a “stop-over” in the characters’ search for freedom of love and marriage. On the level of the narrative, it serves to illustrate the authors’ (who are also the narrators) preoccupation with the garden as symbolising their ideals, and that the garden setting in Chinese Scholar-Beauty Romances is more than just a simple setting in which things happen.