Abstract

Farmstead culture has long been a tradition in Chinese literature, usually expressed in poetry. However, in the studies of HongLou Meng (《红楼梦》), scholars have yet to explore the farmstead culture depicted in this great novel. The main purpose of the thesis is to analyse Cao Xue Qin’s (曹雪芹) views on farmstead culture. The analysis will only involved the first 80 chapters.

The first chapter will be a summary of the general development of traditional farmstead culture looking at poets representative of the era. “Proto-farmstead” pieces seen in the “Book of Poetry” (《诗经》) as a means of livelihood came to be wedded to reclusion as literati shunning politics took to rustic life. As written literature has always been the privilege of the literati, farmstead culture can be interpreted in 2 different forms, which made up the Chinese farmstead tradition: an idealistic “reclusive” farmstead and a realistic “farmers” farmstead.

Chapter 2 seeks to explore Cao Xue Qin (曹雪芹) correspondences to traditional farmstead culture. He was a literati who was rejected the political advancement as a result of the downfall of his family, thus reclusion (as opposed to officialdom) was never an option to him; he was highly talented but was denied the chance to fulfill his ambitions in the Imperial Examinations. Unlike officials in farmstead reclusion, he retreated to farmstead life towards the later part of his life.