Abstract

This dissertation aims to re-examine the role of Shi Xiangyun (史湘云) in the great novel *The Dream of the Red Mansion* (红楼梦). Cao Xueqin's (曹雪芹) greatest achievement is his creation of numerous vivid characters, including Shi Xiangyun. Hence, this dissertation aims to present a holistic view of Shi Xiangyun by making an objective and critical analysis of her image and role in the novel.

The dissertation consists of six chapters which analyse Shi Xiangyun from various aspects such as her family background, charismatic *Mingshi* (名士) (non-conformity literary talent) character and her unique image. It also provides a structural analysis on the relational network she forms with mainly Qin Keqing (秦可卿), set in imagery created by crab-apple flower (海棠花) and Chinese herbaceous peony (芍药花).

Comparisons are made with other characters, mainly the only other *Mingshi* Jia Baoyu (贾宝玉) and her counterparts: Xiangling (香菱) and Xue Baoqin (薛宝琴). Through comparisons, we would be able to dwell deeper on the significance of Shi Xiangyun's traits and the function of her role.

Two important phenomena are also discovered: Firstly, Shi Xiangyun's ingenuous image is similar to the author's perception of an ideal lady: magnanimous and caring, unassuming and good-natured. Secondly, the purpose of the creation of the remarkable figure Xue Baoqin is mainly to give prominence to the image of Shi Xiangyun.
The results challenge the views of some researchers who regard Shi Xiangyun only as an insignificant supporting role. Based on the findings, this dissertation reaffirms Shi Xiangyun as one of the female leading roles in the novel, just like Lin Daiyu (林黛玉) and Xue Baochai (薛宝钗), and she plays an important part in the narrative structure of the novel.