Abstract

The palace-style poetry in the Southern Dynasties has always been an area of inadequate research in the history of Chinese literature. This is because critics have depicted it as an erotic literature and tend to downplay its significance.

However my findings will show that palace-style poetry actually marks the earliest development of feminine literature. This thesis aims to explore the literati’s views on women during the Liang, Chen as well as the feminine images reflected in their poetry. By doing so, I hope to expose the implications behind the feminine representations.

My synopsis first defines the mentality of the poets by exploring the sociology and aesthetic values of the Southern Dynasties. I shall exemplify the literati’s views on women through a critical analysis of palace-style poems and contemporary feminine ideas. The study then proceeds to investigate the poetry’s narrative mode by using psychological theories on voyeurism and aesthetic alienation. The male poets often sexualized the portrayal of women in the poetry through the act of male gaze so as to satisfy the intention of gender inversion. Women are identified as objectified images, and with feminine aesthetics as its ruling condition, this brings about an ambiguity of the poets’ identity. My study ends with a brief outline of the artistic contribution made by palace-style poetry to the development of female stereotypes.

By using inter-disciplinary perspectives between contemporary feminine ideas and psychological theories, as well as the unique viewpoint of palace-style poetry as a form of feminine literature, I hope to bring about new illuminations on the literati’s state of mind.