ABSTRACT

The Jian-an literary era (A.D 184-232) can be categorized into two phases: the earlier and the latter period. Cao Cao and Cao Pi were representative poets from these two periods, respectively.

In regard to poetry from the Jian-an era, there seems to exist a consensus that it displayed a unified undertone of realism. Under this spirit of realism that is collectively known as Jian-an Fenggu (建安风骨), the poetry truly reflects the turbulent scenarios of wars and the tedium of office work. Poems of Cao Cao, who was actively involved in the military and political scenes of the disorderly late Han period (东汉末年), did manifest this spirit. However, this does not appeared to be true in the case of Cao Pi, who resided in the relatively peaceful domain of Ye Cheng (邺城), for a large amount of his time.

The objective of this honours thesis is to establish a link between the poems of Cao Cao and those of Cao Pi to their respective environment, and to study the chronological development of Jian-an literary trends.

Besides a thorough comparative study between the poems of Cao Cao and Cao Pi, references to the respective historical panorama of the two poets were widely explored, too.

It is observed that the distinct environment of the two poets provides a vital explanation for their differing themes and literary styles. It is also noted that the changes of themes and the more refined quality of Cao Pi’s poetry largely reflect a literary development, which was diverging from the earlier spirit of realism.