ABSTRACT

In the long history of China, women have no status of her own in home or society. The inferiority accorded to women can be traced back to the Pre-Han period, but it was during the Han (206 B.C. – A.D. 196) when the rise and eventual domination of Confucian philosophy strengthened the inferior status of women. Even during the Wei-Jin (A.D.196 – A.D.420), when people no longer upheld Confucianism and women enjoyed relative freedom, the inferiority of women remained unchanged and unchallenged. The aim of this academic exercise, therefore, is to examine the impact of Confucian ideology on women and its influence on society’s perception of women at that time. Besides examining Confucian classics and didactic texts, literary works would also be examined to see the influence of Confucianism on the portrayal of women literary figures.

In addition, the views on women also had an impact on women’s literature. The personality and outlook reflected in most of women’s works are “feminine” : their language are characterized by a typically feminine, gentle and plaintive tone while the content usually falls into the categories of love, loneliness and details relating to life in confinement of the women’s quarters. This is attributable to the society’s standard of female compliance and the many constraints imposed on women. All these go to show that the feminine values formulated in the Confucian doctrine did imposed strong restrictions on the thoughts and actions of women at that time.