Abstract

Since the time of *Classic of Poetry* 2500 years ago, Si-fu (思妇) poetry has been a prominent (sub)genre in the corpus of Chinese traditional literature especially in the era of Six Dynasties (220-589), a period considered by many as one of the exemplary peaks in ancient literary and philosophical development.

Traditionally, the poetry depicting a lonely woman awaiting for the return of her lover or husband was accepted as an analogy for the poet's undesirable political situation. The melancholy expressed by the woman was treated as a truthful and skilful reflection of the emotion of the author who is usually a man. With the coming of the Southern Dynasty (420-589) in the Six Dynasties period and the rising of a highly decorative, “palace style” literary form, the Si-fu (sub)genre continued to flourish but in a different fashion. No longer a morally symbolic subject, “palace-style” explored instead the sexuality of this woman image.

Much has been said about the works of Si-fu poetry which mainly emphasized on the realistic and performative aspects but none has been critical enough to expose the hitherto natural sexual and gender implications of the representational schema within the content. The aesthetic myth projected by Six Dynasties was a major contributing factor to this trend. Drawing from inter-disciplinary fields, this study aims to re-present the female stereotype in the poetry and place it under the analytical scrutiny of Feminist Literary Theory and Gender Studies.

During recent years, feminism has proved to be an useful and effective discursive practice in deconstructing some of the canonical prejudices surrounding the production of literature. Through re-reading the poetry with gender posited as a necessary agenda and challenging the various widespread statutory literary notions of Six Dynasties, juxtaposition which is crucial for the demystifying of the context, it is shown that Si-fu text serves as a subtle mode of patriarchal discourse.