Abstract

To be utterly honest, the selection of my area of research for this thesis was not entirely of my own doing. Rather, it was with help and advice from my supervisor that I finally decided on this topic. Thus, in the beginning, I was at quite a loss as I did not know how to go about tackling this topic, much because I was acquainted with neither the author nor the text itself. Thankfully, by the grace of God, and with recommendations from my supervisor regarding what books to read, I was able to somehow make some headway.

Thus said, this thesis will not be able to present an exhaustive discourse on Zhang Dai’s *Xi Hu Meng Xun*. What it could do, however, is to present a rather broad overview of the deeper meanings of the text, ie to interpret the “meng” spoken of here. Perhaps a little different from many thesis of the same kind, in this one, I decided to approach the text from a rather sociological point of view. Much as we would like to think that the author has absolute control over the content of his work, it is without doubt that, somehow or other, what he pens down is very much affected by his upbringing, lifestyle, and the social and historical setting at the point of his writing. Thus, I proceeded to draw the link between certain aspects of the author’s “dreams” and his lifestyle prior to the writing of this book.

The word “dreams” is used, here and previously, within commas because it is unclear as to whether it is a record of the actual dreams of the author, or is it just an anthology of his memories. Thus, there is also a part where I discuss about the possibility
of it being both. Then I go on to try to decipher the different kinds of memories that have been evoked in this book, namely autobiographical, historical, individual and collective.

Much, if not all, of this book consists of pieces which have little or no link with one another – in other words, fragmented. Thus, there will also be a part which deals with this feature of fragments in the book, and how it reflects and brings out the uniqueness of the book.

In short, this book is about “dreams” (or memories). Both are often not within our control – they come as they want and go as they like. Sometimes, they choose to leave with us certain remnants that we might not be interested in. Yet sometimes they choose to take away other parts that we desperately want to preserve. They have us eating out of their hands. Such is their power that even the author cannot fathom. As such, it is not within the capacity of this thesis to fully interpret this “meng”. Rather, it presents some avenues to do so, and in reading, it is hoped that the reader can perhaps be led to decipher more of what this “meng” is about.