ABSTRACT

Cao Cao 曹操 (155 - 220) has invariably been regarded as a man of some notoriety in Chinese History. However, from a cultural point of view, by taking advantage of his political power, he promoted learning and raised the social status of men of letters. Besides, Cao Cao also wrote a large number of memorable essays and poems which were simple in style and realistic in approach.

The literary pre-eminence of Cao Cao, however, has long been neglected. The present study examines the literary qualities of Cao Cao's poetry and hopes to re-establish his status as a literary man.

This academic exercise begins with an introductory chapter which describes the objective and the approach of this study.

Chapter Two discusses the literary background of Cao Cao's poems and considers the social background of Cao Cao's China.

Chapter Three analyses the main themes and contents of Cao Cao's poems in four aspects: (1) the expression of his ambition; (2) his criticism of warlords and powerful houses; (3) the laments of war; and (4) his yearnings for the immortal world.
Chapter Four explores the artistic techniques of Cao Cao's poems in three aspects: (1) the breaking of new grounds for the Yueh-Fu Genre; (2) the revealing of emotions; and (3) the presenting of arguments.

Chapter Five critically evaluates Cao Cao's poems and calls attention to his poetry.

The important features and notions regarding Cao Cao's poems are given added emphasis in the concluding chapter. Cao Cao's contributions towards the development of Chinese poetry are not in doubt while his status as a literary man is re-examined.