ABSTRACT

"Tan-ci" is a form of performing literature. It takes the form of singing, accompanied by musical instruments like pipa, and is usually performed by 2 people. "Tan-ci" is a development from Tang Dynasty "Bian-wen" (变文) over the years. After the Tang Dynasty, "Tan-ci" gradually took form in the Ming Dynasty. And by the Qing Dynasty, its popularity was widespread.

The nature of "Tan-ci" has its uniqueness over other literary form. "Tan-ci" writing is usually very long ranging from hundred thousands to a million characters. An interesting part of it that clearly distinguishes it from others is that, most of the sentences are in seven characters per row. Because it is a "yun-wen-ti" (韵文体) novel and has seven characters in a sentence, its story is written in a playwright form, making it pleasant to the audience at that time.

Most "Tan-ci" novels were written by female writers. This is something rare, considering the male-dominance in the particular era. Great "Tan-ci" novels have been passed on and re-edited for the purpose of reading and opera performance even till today. Some of which include Zai Sheng Yuan (再生缘), Tian Yu Hua (天雨花), Bi Sheng Hua (笔生花) and Feng Shuang Fei (风双飞). All of these great works came from the female writers then.

In this dissertation, the historical and social background of female writers’ "Tan-ci" will be discussed.

As most "Tan-ci" novels are the works of female writers, the flavor of feminism is usually found in them. The idea of feminism is startlingly clear in the story of "Tan-ci". Many of these female writers were from wealthy family or scholastics family. They were well brought-up, in terms of education and literary-knowledge. However, in the period of male-dominance, they were very much confined within their space, and had no grounds for pursuing fame or "Gong-Ming" (功名) unlike their male counterparts who
might not be as learned as them. Thus, all their hopes were pinned on producing “Tan-ci” novels, in which they were able to pour out all their over-whelming frustration that society had imposed on female writers or generally woman’s rights.

Feminists’ idea in “Tan-ci” will also be quoted from the evaluation of two masterpiece novels, Zai Sheng Yuan and Tian Yu Hua. The two “Tan-chi” made use of impositions on female such as feet bonding to demonstrate their agony and helplessness, as females during the period. In Zai Sheng Yuan, the lead female character Meng Li-jun impersonated a male to achieve fame and power. It would be unthinkable if a female to achieve so.

Although “Tan-ci” novels are not as popular as other from of literature works such as poems, they are still important works due to their strong feminist flavor. This is very rare, considering the social factors during the period of Qing Dynasty.