ABSTRACT

Ci poetry, fully developed in the Song dynasty, regained its popularity and scaled to a new height in the Qing dynasty. Same as Song Ci, Qing Ci is classified into two styles of writing, namely the "graceful and restrained" (婉约) and the "bold and unconstrained" (豪放). Literary critics usually claim the former as the original characteristic style of Ci and they seem to regard these two styles as distinctive with no connection. As a result, scholars often placed emphasis on the unique writing style of each individual poet and seldom made comparison with his peers or predecessors.

The aim of this dissertation is to study the three main Ci poets Chen Wei Song (1625-1682), Zhu Yi Zun (1929-1709) and Nalan Xingde (1655-1685) in the early Qing period, to establish an in-depth study and a fair appreciation of their works by looking into their talent and skills in bringing out the theme of the poem, their artistic ways of expressing their emotions, and more importantly, their ability to produce poems with skillful techniques. Chapter One states the purpose and scope of the research. Chapter Two is the historical review of the development of Ci poetry during Qing dynasty. Chapters Three, Four and Five focus on Chen Wei Song, Zhu Yi Zun and Nalan Xingde, respectively, to find out the reasons that caused them to write different styles of Ci poetry. At the same time, comparison is made between these three poets. The study reveals that each poet was indeed capable of different styles of writing. They wrote splendid and tragic poems as well as soft, charming lyrics. The poet's life experiences and personality, to a large extent, contributed to his writing styles. Another factor was the influence caused by the political background and social lifestyle of that historical era. The findings will enhance our understanding of the development of the Qing Ci poetry.