ABSTRACT

Li Shangyin (李商隐) (812-858 A.D.) was a poet of the Tang dynasty, an exponent of ambiguity in Chinese poetry. One of his literary achievements was a set of poems called "untitled poems". The untitled poems can be defined in two ways: the broad sense and the narrow sense. The former includes the poems specified "untitled" and those with titles taken from the verse in the poems. The latter refers only to the poems entitled "without title". The primary purpose of this academic exercise is to do a critical study of Li's untitled poems in the narrow sense.

Structurally, this exercise is divided into seven chapters. Chapter One which is an introductory chapter provides the aims for the study of Li Shangyin's untitled poems and also a brief description of the approach taken. Chapter Two discusses the historical background, biographical sketch and thoughts of Li as these three aspects are necessary for an adequate understanding of his poetry. The Third chapter is divided into four sections dealing respectively with the origin of untitled poems, the reasons for Li to write such untitled poems, the forms and choices of untitled poems. Chapter Four analyses the complicated subject matter of untitled poems and is subdivided into two sections: (a) poems with explicit subject matter such as his wife, love affairs and self-pity, (b) implicit subject matter which comprises the various interpretations of the critics. Chapter Five discusses in detail the characteristics of untitled poems. Besides being ambiguous in subject matter and style, daring in his choice of theme, concise in diction, exquisite in allusions,
intricate in the use of symbolism and metaphor, they are also emotive and gay. Chapter Six, which analyses the critique of untitled poems, consists of four parts: (a) critics' praise of the untitled poems, (b) critics' criticism of these poems, (c) critics' mixed reception to untitled poems and (d) certain important points forwarded for proper evaluation. The final chapter sums up the entire exercise and mentions briefly the influence of untitled poems on later writers.

The study brings out in full the range of possible meanings of Li shangyin's untitled poems and examines them from an objective and critical point of view.

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