The Early Qing Literati Mentality and Leisure Sketches

Abstract

The study of early Qing leisure sketches aims at providing another aspect of the analysis of early Qing literati mentality through textual analysis of leisure sketches from the years of the reign of Shun-chih to the middle period of Kang-hsi.

Leisure sketches has not been the focus of studies of early Qing literature. It has often been overlooked because it was not the mainstream literature during this period.

This thesis therefore hopes to explore literati mentality by adopting a microscopic approach through the analysis of leisure sketches. The political and social-economic milieu of early Qing is also examined as it had played an important role in shaping the literati’s behaviour and outlook.

It is discovered that a group of literati tried to seek solace and compensation in a life of pleasure and aestheticism when they were deprived of opportunities to advance into the bureaucracy. Pleasure became a primacy for them and they were indulged in amenities such as enjoying the beauty of the nature, admiring women, which brought extreme delight to them.

In conclusion, the change in attitude towards the ultimate value of life of this group of literati is attributed to the loss of faith in traditional values which resulted in their ambivalence towards the non-Han government. Their dilemma eventually led to their shunning of political responsibilities.