Abstract

Bai Juyi (772-846) is universally recognised as one of the finest poets of the Tang Dynasty (618-907) when China was noted for its great achievement in the arts, and was especially famous for its poetry.

Bai Juyi was very involved socially and politically until his early forties. This was also a period when the Tang Dynasty underwent great internal disorder and engaged in a series of frontier wars. He wrote freely and critically on the current events and the hardship of the commoners. He suggested methods of improving the government and the life of the people. However his criticism against the government and senior officers led to his banishment from Chang'an in 815. He took that punishment to heart and thereafter steered clear of court intrigues and palace cliques. The number of politically oriented satirical poems also declined.

As he grew older, the defeats he endured in the political arena and his isolation during the ensuing periods of separation from his native home found expression in his poetry. The subsequent death of his children, and that of his closest friend, Yuan Zhen, led to more lyrical works which can be read as poetic vignettes of the artist's personal life.

Bai Juyi composed more than 2000 poems in his life time. In 824, he classified his poems into four main categories, viz 'Allegory poem', 'Leisurely poem', 'Sentimental poem' and 'Miscellaneous poem'. Poems written in his later years were mainly classified according to the artistic form of the poem into 'Regulated poem' and 'Patterned Poem'.
A myriad of research has been done on his 'Allegory poem' and his 'Theory of Poetry'. However, there is little research done on his 'Leisurely poem' perhaps because many people considered these poems to be negative and that he was an escapist. However the cause of his passive attitude could be traced to his political disillusion. Despite this, the Leisurely poems still continue to express his concern for the people and the country.

This M.A. thesis consists of six chapter. The first chapter states the purpose for and the direction of the research study on Bai Juyi's 'Leisurely poem'. Chapter Two delineates the historical background of Bai Juyi's 'Leisurely poem', with specific reference to his career, the subsequent changes in his life, his enforced retirement from politics and his disillusionment. Chapter Three analyses the thoughts, ideas and feelings as reflected in Bai Juyi's 'Leisurely poem'. Chapter Four analyses the artistic significance of the 'Leisurely poem', which is characterized by its verbal simplicity and directness. Chapter Five is a critical evaluation of Bai Juyi's 'Leisurely poem', where comments and criticisms made on Bai Juyi's 'Leisurely poem' were analysed. The last chapter summarises and concludes the research findings.