ABSTRACT

The Literary Reform in the Sung Dynasty was marked by the belief that literature should have a serious purpose and bear the author's distinctive individual traits. It took place after a brief period of reversion of euphuistic prose style with emphasis on artistry and erudition. At that time, the call for the use of simple plain words with the assertion of Confucian orthodoxy for official and serious literary expression effected the change of the contemporary literary style and ultimate triumph of neoclassic prose and poetry. The Literary Reform was said to be initiated by Liu Kai (柳开), matured in the hands of Ou-Yang Xiu (欧阳修) and lately accomplished by Su Shi (苏轼).

Although this paper is not intended to present an in-depth study of the whole Literary Reform Movement, it nevertheless provides chronological brief description and analysis of the theories put forward by the major writers who had made their invaluable contributions towards the success of the reform.
Chapter 1 begins with a brief introduction of the purpose and scope of the study. Chapter 2 touches on the background of the Literary Reform. Chapter 3 to Chapter 6 are devoted to the analysis of reform theories in prose and poetry of four periods of Literary Reform. The main theme shared by these theories was the emphasis on the part of the writers to reflect social reality by using comprehensive, simple plain words. Chapter 7 examines the underlying reasons which contribute to the success of the reform. The last chapter summarises the analysis of the Literary Reform in the Sung Dynasty.

In short, this Academic Exercise has attempted to study the major themes and assertions put forward by the reform theorists of the Sung Dynasty.