ABSTRACT

The Tang Period (唐 618 – 906) is the golden age of ancient Chinese poetic history, and perhaps the entire Chinese lyric tradition. Although numerous studies have been done on the different aspects of Chinese literary theory, literary criticism and Tang poetry, no in-depth studies have been done on the relationship between two important Chinese literary concepts, imagery (意象) and inscape (意境), with respect to the Tang poetry. This dissertation, therefore, seeks to examine these two literary concepts, their inter-relationship and how this relationship contributes to the characteristics of Tang poetry.

The Tang poetic system is divided into surface structure and deep structure. On the surface structure, selected poems are dissected into minimum immediate constituents, i.e., images. In the deep structure, the transforming of the “yi”(意), the subjective feelings and thoughts in images into inscapes is addressed. Besides, an inter-disciplinary approach is used in the analysis.

On the basis of ancient Chinese literary criticism, which suggested image as a binary opposition and coherence between subjective feelings or thoughts (意) and an object or objective image (象), an image is defined as the most fundamental poetic unit of the Tang poetry. Next, the psychological nature of imagery is explored through an author-image-reader model.

It is demonstrated how images in the Tang poetry were integrated to form a coherent inscape and how significance or extended meanings (“衍义” or “余味”) of imagery, based on temporal and spatial structure, colourism and narratology serve as threads in the formation of an inscape. Above all, an inscape is seen as a metaphysical concept, which exhibits Chinese aesthetic nature.

By incorporating these two forms of methodologies, which distinguish the characteristics of ancient Chinese and Western literary theories, the dissertation hopes to provide a new insight into the Chinese poetic criticism.