

Abstract

A Study of the Major Women Writers of the
Han Dynasty (206 B.C. - 220 A.D.)

by

Wong Yin-lee

The contribution of various Chinese women writers during different dynasties had profoundly influenced the history of Chinese literature. Their literary works were varied, consisting poems, proses, verses, essays, and others. Because of their significances, the study of Chinese women literature has become a major research project among modern scholars. However, it seems that scholars seldom focus on the study of individual women writer of any specific dynasty comprehensively. The aim of this thesis is to analyse, thoroughly and critically, the works of five major women writers of the Han Dynasty (206 B.C. - 220 A.D.). It is expected that this study would contribute to an understanding of women's perception on, and attitude towards, the contemporary social, moral, political, and intellectual problems. Simultaneously, it analyses the social conditions and status among contemporary Chinese women. This study also discusses the following issues: the literary style of these five women writers; contemporary and later reviewers' criticism and assessment on their works and personality; and the impacts of their works and ideas in the contemporary and later periods.

This thesis studies the following five major women writers: Tang Shan Fu Jen 唐山夫人, Pan Chieh Yu 班婕妤, Pan Chao 班昭, Hsu Shu 徐淑, and Tsai Yen 蔡琰. The research scope and method is based on vertical and horizontal approach. Vertically,

III

the thesis analyses the background, form and content, and ideas of the works of individual writer from an historical perspective. Horizontally, the thesis commentates on the individual literary work with a view to analysing the writer's life experience, sentiment, and thinking.

There are seven chapters. In chapter one, a general discussion on the women literature of the Han Dynasty is presented. In chapter two, Tang Shan Fu Jen and her major work, Ah Shih Fang Chung Ke *安世房中歌*, are studied. In chapter three, the value and impact of the literary works written by Pan Chieh Yu is assessed. In chapter four, Pan Chao's scholastic achievement in history and literature is introduced. In this chapter, her social and ethical thinking as exposed in Nu Chieh *女誡*, and her achievement in scholium as revealed by Lieh Nu Chuan Chu *列女傳注* and Yu Tung Fu Chu *幽通賦注* are studied. In chapter five, the sublimity and moral thinking of Hsu Shu is investigated by studying her life experience and writings. Chapter six is a biographical study of Tsai Yen and a textual criticism of her major works. This chapter also discusses the critiques of her literary works by reviewers of the later periods. The last chapter is a conclusion, summing up the scholastic achievement and status of these five writers and their unique state of mind in the contemporary literary world. It also makes an assessment on their profound impacts.