

The Leadership of the Northern Taiwan Literature: The Literati and Their Literature Activities in the Chu-ch'ien Area During the Ch'ing Period

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ABSTRACT

During the Ch'ing period, the Chu-ch'ien area was developed as an important literature place in northern Taiwan and had been even honoured with the title of "The Leadership of The Northern Taiwan Literature" for a long time. However, until lately, owing to a lack of related study on this subject, its inside story is still quite vague. Therefore, by exploring the corresponding records of local monographs, prose and poetry, this paper tries to investigate the literature groups at that time and seek out the facts of their literature activities. It attempts to deeply unveil the visage of the literature development in the Chu-ch'ien area during the Ch'ing period.

This research, in addition to describing and capturing the major life instances of the literary intelligentsia in the Chu-ch'ien area, also analyzes their organizations and social backgrounds. It can be largely observed that most of the local literature authors gained their merit and fame by passing the civil service exams; most of them were the local South Fukienese living in the Chu-ch'ien town, while few were Cantonese; over half of them were merchant descendants bearing strong family colors; literature writers were mostly male and seldom female. In addition, there were some literary intellectuals immigrating and residing in Taiwan, who are involved in a sort of literature skill rivalry, and thus made the literature fashion in the Chu-ch'ien area more colorful and beautiful.

Among the local and the immigrated literary intelligentsia, there existed complicated interpersonal friendship networks, including the various relations of family, marriage, tutor-student, mating friends, commerce, officer-nobleman, and so on. This engendered the rise of the group-activity trend for the literary intelligentsia, aside from their individual artistic creations. They gathered and set up poetry group organizations, and reached an activity climax especially in the literature

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festivals surrounding the “Pei-Kuo Yuan” (北郭園) and the “Ch’ien Yuan” (潛園) poetry clubs. This trend particularly contributed to the splendor of the Chu-ch’ien literature. This article portrays the above literary intelligentsia and their literature activities, thus showing and demonstrating the splendid literature scenes in the Chu-ch’ien area, which led the northern Taiwan literature during the Ch’ing period.

Keywords: Taiwan literature, Ch’ing Period, Local literature, Chu-ch’ien, Literati, Literature Activities