ABSTRACT

This dissertation is a study of the artistic outlook portrayed in Youmengying, a book written by Zhang Chao (1650-1707?), a scholar in early Qing China. Youmengying is a collection of sayings illustrating creative daily activities and sensual pleasures derived from the indulgence of oneself in the beauty of Mother Nature; its focus is on the union of spiritual well being and material comforts. As much as Zhang Chao was concerned with pure enjoyment of the arts and recreational activities, ren (human being) is the ultimate concern of the book. Zhang Chao treated the arts as a means towards perfecting a person's character, so that a delicate aura is created in him as a result of his self-seeking and soul-searching process inspired by the arts.

Chapter 1 gives an overview of the thesis and introduces its objectives and significance.

Chapter 2 provides readers with a short biography of the author of Youmengying and a synopsis of the book. Then, a background of the prevailing lifestyle of the literati in late Ming China is provided so as to explain the influence of this literati culture on Zhang Chao's way of thinking and outlook on life.

Chapter 3 explains how the contents in Youmengying can be classified into various categories, namely nature, human being, and the arts.

Chapter 4 discusses in detail the intriguing notion of human being depicted by Zhang Chao in his book.

Chapter 5 expresses Zhang Chao's ultimate concern towards art, life and the spiritual well being of mankind.
Chapter 6 consists of four areas of discussion. They are reading, making friends, visiting scenic spots in the outskirts, constructing gardens whereby the literati would create for themselves a miniature replica of nature for retreat, and lastly admiring the awesome beauty of the moon, flowers and Beauty; all of these are Zhang Chao’s favourite pastime. They are also the most frequently brought up topics in the book, which can be considered the gist of an artistic and graceful life.

Chapter 7 is the conclusion, where Zhang Chao, Youmengying, art, and life are linked up to give this thesis a finishing note.