ABSTRACT

San Yan refers to the compilation of Yu Shi Ming Yan, Jing Shi Tong Yan, and Xing Shi Heng Yan. After the re-adaptation of Feng Meng Long, many pieces became much more refined as compared to the original. Thus, Feng can be regarded as the engineer of the San Yan.

Most noteworthy is the pioneering effort of San Yan in portraying artisans, peddlers, merchants and prostitutes, who form the base of urban citizenship, as moral characters. Pieces with regards to famous prostitutes as the main characters have especially captured my attention, as these are largely reflective of the prevalent revelry and values adopted during the Ming Dynasty. Hence my dissertation shall focus on exploring the emotions, aspirations and their position on chastity as depicted by these characters. By painting an alternative figure of the prostitutes, it is hoped that the reader will be able to obtain another viewpoint unseen in classical texts.

My research will show that Feng’s portrayal of “true feelings” (真情) was not to challenge traditional Confucian values as such, but to invite the society acceptance of these “true feelings” within the boundaries of traditional moral values. Feng’s contribution, however, was his insight in rejecting the feudalistic opinion of caste, and advocating that the prostitutes’ pursuit of individuality and love should not be restricted by societal discrimination. This was a revolutionary opinion during the period of Feng Meng Long and should be applauded.