ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates popular culture in late Ming China and attempts to clarify the definition and nature of popular culture. In view of the myriad changes within its political, economic and educational arenas, the late Ming era was selected to provide a sufficiently complex social background for research, and a window through which the social conditions of a decaying empire may be better understood. The above aspects will be discussed in Chapters One, Two and Three of the thesis.

Chapters Four, Five and Six examine the salient characteristics of late Ming popular culture through the relationship between the elite and merchant classes, popular literature and folk art, and the prevalent social atmosphere.

Chapter Seven, the concluding part, evaluates late Ming popular culture as an agent of social integration and its ability to transcend class boundaries and unite people from all levels of society. Its consequences for new standpoints and possible reasons for the absence of these integrating characteristics in the Qing dynasty are also discussed.

This thesis being a pioneer effort on research concerning late Ming popular culture, we hope only to establish a workable research angle through assimilating related findings of Eastern and Western scholars, in combination with records from the Ming and Qing dynasties.