SYNOPSIS

Ling Mengchu (1580-1644) was a fiction writer who lived in the Ming Dynasty. He did not succeed in the imperial examinations, but his literary career was an enjoyable one in which he was able to compile stories, to write fiction, and to publish some of his works in book form. This was mainly due to the fact that he came from a distinguished and prominent family.

Pai-an Jing-qi, better known as Liang Pai, is a collection (in two volumes) of strange and miraculous stories rewritten by Ling Mengchu from the anecdotes and tales prevalent in the Song, Yuan and Ming Periods. These stories distinctively depict the lives of people and social development throughout the three dynasties.

Curiously enough, only a few scholars have paid attention to the study of his particular work whilst plenty of research have been attracted to San Yan, another Ming anthology which was written by Feng Menglong, a contemporary of Ling Mengchu. In view of this, the present M.A. thesis attempts to supplement the study of Pai-an Jing-qi so as to objectively justify Ling’s efforts in refining and transforming the short stories into something more meaningful and interesting for the readers.

This thesis comprises five chapters. The opening chapter analyses Ling’s family background and its influence on his work.

The second chapter provides an insight into the peculiar social and political milieu under which the Pai-an Jing-qi was written and the traceable influence of the Song and Yuan vernacular stories on Ling Mengchu.

Chapter three explores the themes expressed in the stories of Pai-an Jing-qi whereas chapter four focuses on the style and the satirical devices used by Ling Mengchu.

In the concluding chapter, an overall evaluation of Pai-an Jing-qi is presented.
The author's study shows that Ling portrays different aspects of life during and before his time. His fiction touches on issues like morality, family relationship, marriage, the role of women, inefficiency of officialdom and corruption. The conflict between self-interest and social sanction is carefully analysed. Underlying his stories is the theme that those who practised good deeds would be rewarded and those who did not would be punished accordingly, not just in the present life but also after death.

Disturbed by what he saw to be a deterioration in behaviour and morals, he tried to suggest a code of conduct for his readers. The code itself was in fact a blend of Buddhist, Taoist, Confucian and his own principles and beliefs.

Ling's most obvious contribution is that he recorded stories which were originally narrated by storytellers and in cases where some of them were already available in the written form, he elaborated and developed on them.

Another notable contribution is his development of the characters in the stories. Readers have no difficulties in identifying themselves with the characters where it was quite impossible before because of the brevity and vagueness of earlier works prior to Ling's.

Lastly, his stories serve as a source of inspiration and hope for his readers as they always bear happy endings.

These contributions brought to the stories a wider readership and made the appreciation of Chinese traditional short stories more popular and fruitful.
明代是小说创作的全盛时期。长篇章回小说酝酿成熟，大大的提高了小说家描写人物形象的能力，使小说中的人物有更广阔的社会活动环境。短篇小说也经过了好几个世纪的发展，累积了丰富的创作经验。

《三言》和《两拍》是明代具有代表性的两部短篇话本总集。《三言》收集了宋、元和明三代的话本，并非冯梦龙一人所作。《两拍》里的故事，虽也存有前代话本的遗迹，然而，它却是凌濛初在收集旧有话本的基础上，加工润色而成的作品。学者们常将《三言》和《两拍》合称为《三言二拍》。对于这两部书的评价却并非等量齐观。

一般学者都认为《两拍》的价值不及《三言》，在思想及艺术方面都较《三言》逊色，所以多集中精力对前者的研究上。其实，《两拍》为个人创作，而《三言》则是旧话本的合集，两部作品的特质不同。因此在评论时，应该有所区别。

《三言》的成就，论者都给予较高的评价。然而，它只是收集经过了广大民众调适和集体创作的作品，虽然冯梦龙对旧话本曾作大度的修改，以创作论而论，冯梦龙还是比不上凌濛初。在《两拍》作品中，约有七十五篇是凌濛初个人的创作。

本文第一章将讨论有关凌濛初的生平及其创作。有关这方面的资料，除了县志、府志有零星的记载之外，尚有叶德均所作的《凌濛初事迹系年》，张宏化的硕士论文《两拍研究》及日人荒木直所作的有关凌濛初生平的文章等。然而这方面的原始资料还是十分缺乏，仍有待发掘。

以现代文明的眼光来探讨明代的生活，必然产生隔阂的感觉，所以在第二章中，是以《两拍》做为媒介，去了解当时的社会背景，使现代的眼光能与传统的观点交会，以便体会《两拍》所蕴含的思想意识、社会民情风俗以及它在文学发展上所担负的使命。

值得一提的是，许多评论者都将矛头指向《两拍》中的黄色画面，并给予大力的抨击，及以这点瑕疵来否定这两本书的价值。其实，有关这方面描写的篇幅，只占了极少部分。如果客观地从整体来分析评论作品的思
想内容，它是微不足道的。因此，在第三章探究有关《两拍》思想的篇章中，只集中讨论其精华，其糟粕部分，留待第五章评述。

此外作为通俗小说的《两拍》，写作特点秉承了古典小说中所谓“奇”的技巧。这种“奇”的写作方式产生一种令人不能抗拒的艺术魅力，为当时的读者所喜闻乐见。然而所谓“奇”并非指荒诞不经的无稽故事，而是选择生活中奇特而又有一定社会意义的事件，由事件本身衍生出来，这种“奇”的技巧是建立在现实生活的基础上的。因此第三章中对《两拍》内涵的探讨，是更进一步地了解“奇”的积极作用及其现实意义。

至于第四章，笔者试图从结构和叙事手法、情节、气氛营造、人物及语言等不同的焦点，来讨论作品的艺术成就，盼能涵盖全书的特色。

最后一章，即第五章是为全书的小结，作出总结，并辨别出那些故事，为后来作品所借镜，为小说所采纳，编成集子，刊行流传，藉以说明《两拍》的影响。