**SUMMARY**

Zhang Dai (1597 - 1689?) was no ordinary writer. He was a scholar in history, literature, aesthetics as well as a master in the arts of living. Zhang Dai was a *Ming* descendent who lived through the transition to the *Qing* Dynasty. Although he chose to lead a secluded life rather than committing suicide with the fall of *Ming* like most literati of his time, he carried great compassion for his country and pleasant memories of the good old days. The impact from this meandering experience was significant in his creative writing.

Recent development saw discussions on Zhang Dai opening a new chapter where more of his works were being re-annotated and new works discovered. Zhang’s essays served good reference to life in the *Ming-Qing* transition period; filled the gap to a complete understanding of literature development in the late *Ming* period and mirrored the sentiments of a section of the literati and officials. For this reason, the thesis focuses on Zhang’s essays with an objective to re-position Zhang Dai in the history of Chinese Literature.

There are seven chapters in this thesis. The First chapter outlines the aims and objective of this study, defining the scope and stating the research methodology.

The Second Chapter describes the life of Zhang Dai and his creative writings to serve as the ground for further analysis. The fall of *Ming* is a determining event in the life of Zhang Dai. Using this event as a divider of the life-stage of Zhang Dai, its resultant impact is apparent. Before *Ming* succumbed, the affluent and carefree Zhang Dai enjoyed a great social network. Abrupt changes took place when the *Ming* dynasty collapses. As a descendent of a fallen dynasty, Zhang Dai was greatly hurt both spiritually and physically. The tortuous pain of losing one's country as well as the unbearable break from his past sensory indulgence filled his essays, adding depth to his works.

The Third Chapter analyzes the evolution of “Minor Pieces”, an essay form which all along existed in the history of Chinese Literature, but only commonly used by the Late *Ming* literati in their expression of “self”. It is against this backdrop that the thesis proceeds to analyze Zhang Dai’s “Minor Pieces”.

Chapter Four studies how Zhang Dai portrays himself in his compositions. The thesis attests the case that Zhang Dai actually attempted to use the “longevity of literary works” as the vehicle to sustain “longevity of the individual” and therefore, the “longevity of the *Ming* Dynasty”.
The Fifth Chapters connects “Dreams” with “Memory” in exploring the content, themes and thoughts as reflected the compositions. Zhang’s essays, particularly those in Tao’an Meng Yi (陶庵梦忆) and Xihu Meng Xun (西湖梦寻), are proofs that Zhang survived on past memories that were also his dreamed-life. “Memory” and “Dreams” are communicable in forms. Both are unstructured, scattered and jumpy. The Chapter also illustrates the elements composing the dream of Zhang Dai: nation, friends, gardens and past traveling.

The Sixth Chapter explores the writing styles and techniques employed by Zhang Dai in his essays, highlighting the use of aesthetics principles such as “Encompassing the Macro within the Micro” (以小统大) in areas like characters sketching, visual shift, contrast, sound and images. The thesis maintained that through the use of this principle, Zhang Dai succeeded in breaking time and space constraints to add literary value to his “Minor Pieces”.

The Seventh Chapter concludes the contributions of Zhang Dai in establishing a paragon for “Minor Pieces” and dismisses common prejudices held on this essay form.