SYNOPSIS

This dissertation is based on the sixteen letters of Zheng Banqiao written to his family members. From which, one is able to get a better picture of his unique thought, his ways of handling study, his ways of meeting people, his outlook of life and, most importantly, the reasons why he was considered as a maverick artist.

Chapter one is a general introduction of this dissertation.

Chapter two concentrates on the events that Zheng Banqiao encountered during his lifetime. It covers his turbulent childhood, his dismissal as the seven-degree magistrate of the Wei county of the Shandong Province, and his livelihood in Yangzhou. In Yangzhou, he met good friends from both the art circle and the non-art circle. "The eight mavericks of Yangzhou" was an example of the former, while the latter included songstresses and Buddhist monks. Although they were of the lowest class in society, their roles in helping Zheng Banqiao cannot be denied.

Chapter three is the main body of this dissertation and it covers the thought of Zheng Banqiao. Basically, the thought of Zheng Banqiao is an off-spring of the classical Confucian Thought. His humane thought that all beings are equal is based on "all men within the four seas are brothers" of the Confucian Thought. This thought even extended to thieves. He supported the Confucian idea that one should not only treat one's parents and children well. This kind of ren-ai (love) should be extended to non-related persons and even birds. Zheng Banqiao even extended his care to tombs that left unattended and to wild animals.

In the thought of Zheng Banqiao, farmers ranked first in the social hierarchy. This
sort of propagation only antagonized the business-minded Yangzhou residents, simply because they could not accept such ridiculous ranking.

Zheng Banqiao touched on creative writings and criticism in his letters too. Without doubts, the men of letters whom he respected most were Dufu, a poet of the Tang Dynasty and Fang Baichuan, a specialist in eight-legged essays in the Qing Dynasty. When come to method of reading, Zheng Banqiao felt that one should attain the standard of “reading within reading and reading beyond reading”. But, Zheng Banqiao did not appreciate the ability of remembering facts at one glance, instead he strongly felt one should chew and digest slowly. He also felt that studying was for knowlege’s sake, and not for the sake of passing examinations, becoming magistrate or collecting monetary rewards.

Chapter four is the conclusion for this dissertation.

These sixteen letters written to his family members are the only form of prose in the Zheng Banqiao Collection. He wrote them at the peak of his literary period, and at the time of having mature thought. Therefore, there are ample areas to be researched on.