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### **A Dialogue between the Reader, the Critic and the Author: The Qing Dramatist Hong Sheng's Historical Play *Changshengdian* and Wu Yiyi's Commentary**

The fall of the Ming was not only a national crisis; it also seemed to contemporaries to mark the dissolution of the Chinese world. The Chinese always experienced complex feelings of being able neither to accept nor reject the Qing, and these contradictory impulses produced the painful and tragic consciousness that was expressed in early Qing literature. In fact, for those literati who experienced the dynastic transition from Ming to Qing, the conflict between “public” political correctness and “private” sentiments inevitably drove them struggling in a difficult situation of identification crisis. When these literati looked back to the past, how they perceived and narrated the fall of the Ming becomes a controversial issue worth further discussion. The representation of Ming history thus became a critical task for the Qing scholars, and this trend of rewriting or even reinterpreting historical event into a historical fiction/drama became prevalent throughout the early Qing and the Mid-Qing. This paper aims to explore how the mid-Qing scholar Dong Rong (董榕, 1711-1760) dramatized and interpreted the collapse of the Ming in his *chuanqi* play, *Zhikan ji* (*The Ganoderma Shrine*, 芝龕記) by delineating the story of the famous female chieftain Qin Liangyu (秦良玉, 1574-1648) in the Sichuan area.

I will first analyze how Dong Rong was influenced by the early Qing trend of “writing drama as history” (以曲為史) to engage his artistic pursuit of narrating and interpreting the last thirty years of the Ming Dynasty. I will also explore how Dong Rong argued that the Ming dynasty is “a world of pure *Yin*” 純陰世界 basing on his historical outlook of *Yin* 陰 and *Yang* 陽 originated from the *Book of Chang* (*Yijing*, 易經). I will then, on the one hand, discuss the vivacious depiction of critical battles on the southwestern frontier in the Ming and the distinguished “female military exploits” accomplished by the Sichuan chieftain Qin Liangyu; and on the other hand, examine the presentation of the “*femme fatales*” who caused the decline and downfall of the Ming. Finally, I will explore the consciousness of loyalty and gender implication in the play and their aesthetic significance in the tradition of Chinese drama.