

MULTIPLE REFLECTIONS ON THE MONARCH-SUBJECT RELATIONSHIP OF CONFUCIANISM DURING THE MING AND QING DYNASTIES

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Abstract: The Ming and Qing dynasties marked a period of great change in Chinese political and cultural thought. During this period, the monarch-subject relationship was a central theme in the study of Confucianism and a central component of traditional Chinese culture, which has long been the focus of interest among scholars in various fields. This paper examines the development of ancient Chinese monarch-subject relations from the perspective of historical factors and the development of Confucianism. In addition, the relationship of the monarch-subject relationship in Ming and Qing Confucianism is analyzed and discussed based on the influential thinkers' theories, such as Gu Yanwu, Huang Zongxi and Wang Fuzhi. This analysis offers valuable insights into the comprehensive innovation of Confucianism in the new historical context.

Keywords: Ming and Qing Dynasties. Confucianism. Imperial Politics. Monarch-Subject Relationship.

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Resumen: Las dinastías Ming y Qing marcaron un periodo de grandes cambios en el pensamiento político y cultural chino. Durante este periodo, la relación monarca-súbdito fue un tema central en el estudio del confucianismo y un componente central de la cultura tradicional china, que durante mucho tiempo ha sido objeto de interés entre estudiosos de diversos campos. Este artículo examina el desarrollo de las antiguas relaciones monarca-súbdito chinas desde la perspectiva de los factores históricos y el desarrollo del confucianismo. Además, se analiza y discute la relación monarca-súbdito en el confucianismo Ming y Qing a partir de las teorías de influyentes pensadores como Gu Yanwu, Huang Zongxi y Wang Fuzhi. Este análisis ofrece valiosas perspectivas sobre la innovación integral del confucianismo en el nuevo contexto histórico.

Palabras clave: Dinastías Ming y Qing. Confucianismo. Política imperial. Relación monarca-súbdito.

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MULTIPLE REFLECTIONS ON THE MONARCH-SUBJECT RELATIONSHIP OF CONFUCIANISM DURING THE MING AND QING DYNASTIES

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Abstract: The Ming and Qing dynasties marked a period of great change in Chinese political and cultural thought. During this period, the monarch-subject relationship was a central theme in the study of Confucianism and a central component of traditional Chinese culture, which has long been the focus of interest among scholars in various fields. This paper examines the development of ancient Chinese monarch-subject relations from the perspective of historical factors and the development of Confucianism. In addition, the relationship of the monarch-subject relationship in Ming and Qing Confucianism is analyzed and discussed based on the influential thinkers' theories, such as Gu Yanwu, Huang Zongxi and Wang Fuzhi. This analysis offers valuable insights into the comprehensive innovation of Confucianism in the new historical context.

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INTRODUCTION

In the traditional ethical system of ancient China, loyalty to the monarch was widely recognized and revered. Since the Song dynasty (960-1279 AD), Neo-Confucianists considered the guiding principles for the monarch and subjects eternal "heavenly principles". Therefore, the concept of loyalty to the monarch became a means to restrict people's intellectual freedom and limit their thoughts. With the spread of Western sciences in the East and rapid economic development, the psychological thinking advocated by Wang Yangming spread during the Ming (1368-1644AD) and Qing (1636-1912 AD) dynasties. The turbulent times triggered an ideological revolution. Represented by Huang Zongxi, Gu Yanwu, etc., Confucian scholars reflected on the guiding principles for the monarch and subjects. They promoted the democratic spirit in pre-Qin Confucianism, which created profound impact on the ideological transformation and the revolutionary movement against the imperial system in modern China.

1 TRADITIONAL LOYALISM

The monarch evolved from the hereditary clan chiefs of the primitive society and the military, political and religious leaders of the tribal confederation. After King Wu conquered

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the Shang dynasty (1600-1046 BC), he feudalized the state and established a unified feudal hierarchical country. The hierarchical relationship among the monarch, feudal princes and scholar-officials was formally established (Wang, 2000, p. 58). The Zhou dynasty (1046-256 BC) established a hierarchical state according to the intimacy of consanguinity. Under the influence of the patriarchal system, royal subjects and feudal ones were all appointed by subjects of the same clan as the monarch, and the courtier chose scholars from the same clan. Besides, the closeness of blood relationship also represents the level of status. For the scholar-officials, filial piety at home and loyalty to the country are consistent, and there is no fundamental conflict of interests between the monarch-subject relationship and the father-son relationship. The concept of “filial piety” as the cornerstone of the patriarchal system has become the criterion for approving the morality and etiquette that ancient monarchs and subjects should adhere to. The subjects serve the monarch with the heart to serve their fathers in order to maintain the order and stability of the entire hierarchical society (Chen, 2022, p. 79). The philosopher Youzi, a disciple of Confucius, once said:

There are few who because they are filial and fraternal like to offend their superiors. There is no one who because he does not want to offend their superiors, likes to cause confusion. The superior focuses his attention on what is radical. When that is established, all practical courses develop by themselves. Filial piety and fraternal submission! - are they not the root of all benevolent actions? (Zhang, 2019, p. 3).

This shows the significance of the concept of “filial piety” to the concept of loyalty to the monarch (Sun, 2015, p. 30).

During the Spring and Autumn period (770 - 476 BC), with the Zhou royal family’s decline and the increasingly competitive annexation of feudal princes, the original social order was broken, the power of kinship shifted further downwards, and the relations among the monarch, the feudal princes and their subjects underwent major changes. The social and political changes during this period were manifested as follows. The “public”, represented by the feudal princes, gradually declined. The “private”, represented by the high officials, expanded, continuously divided, annexed the “public” and eventually replaced the “private”. The nationalization of the “private” is finally completed. The turbulent social reality aroused Confucius’ concerns and his contemporary ideologues and nourished the Confucian Great Unity at that time. Due to the transformation and expansion of the private into the public, states generally established a monarchy in which only the monarch is hereditary, and the understanding of the relationship between monarch and subject also entered a new stage (Tien, 2019, p. 101). In the chapter of “Xianggong’s Twenty-Second Year”, in *Zuo’s Commentary on The Spring and Autumn Annals*, the famous prime minister of Qi State, Yan Ying, once said this to Chen Wuji: “The monarch must keep his promise, and the ministers must always respect the monarch. And the character of loyalty, faithfulness, and respect must

be possessed by the monarch and his ministers together. This is a matter of course” (Zuo, 2017, p. 95).

For more than four hundred years since the Spring and Autumn periods, the political idea of Confucian Great Unity has become a reality with the unification of China by the monarch Qin (221 BC). The monarch Qin unified the other six states and personally held the supreme absolute power, so that “[...] the security and stability of the country were closely linked to the monarch” (Sun, 2020, p. 293). However, the Qin dynasty (221-207BC) did not consider Confucianism the foundation of the country but believed in legalism. With the fall of the Qin dynasty, social and political practice proved that legalism, as a political ideology, could not meet the needs of a unified empire. Therefore, at the beginning of the Han dynasty (202 BC-220 AD), Dong Zhongshu (179-104 BC) absorbed the lessons from the fall of the Qin dynasty and transformed the Confucianism of the pre-Qin period to better suit the needs of a unified feudal state. In his view, the notion of “Great Unity”, underlying the Spring and Autumn Annals, is “[...] the constant norm that applies equally to the past and present” (Ban, 2009). He also believes that “[...] the monarch derives his authority from God, so the whole country should be ordered by the monarch”. The monarch represents “the will of God” and rules over all the people, and subjects must obey the monarch. He also formulates three cardinal principles: “The monarch guides his subjects, the father guides his son, and the husband guides his wife”. He believes that “[...] all the fundamental political systems and moral norms of human society have their origin in God and are immutable” (Feng, 2005), and considers the “three cardinal principles” and the “five constant virtues” as the divine law of the universe². Dong’s theory ideologically confirmed the monarch’s supreme rights. As for the executive power, the final decision-making power for all administrative matters, from the central to the local, lies entirely in the monarch’s hands. As for legislative power, “[...] every word of the monarch constitutes the constitution and can decide the life and death of the people”. Imperial decrees or edicts are all laws, and the rise and fall of laws are entirely determined by the monarch’s will. It must be admitted that the Confucianism of the Han dynasty, founded by Dong, played a positive role in promoting national unity and social stability, but it also had profound negative effects (Yu, 2000, p. 67).

Confucianism was transformed into a completely autocratic political tool under Dong Zhongshu’s efforts. After the Han dynasty, subsequent dynasties continued the system of the Qin and Han dynasties, with little change in the regime structure and organizational

² “Three cardinal principles” refers to the principles that emphasize the roles and responsibilities within certain relationships. It signifies that the monarch should guide the subjects, the father should guide the son, and the husband should guide the wife. Those who hold the positions of subjects, sons, and wives are expected to exhibit absolute obedience towards their respective authorities, namely the king, father, and husband. Correspondingly, the monarch, father and husband serve as a role model for ministers, sons and wives. “The five constant virtues” consist of benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and fidelity. These values serve as moral guidelines for adjusting and regulating the relationships between monarchs and subjects, fathers and sons, siblings and friends, and husbands and wives.

structure, forming a centralized and unified feudal regime that lasted for thousands of years. This political system also affected the feudal princes' and ordinary people's values, shaping the concept of maintaining unity and loyalty to the monarch. Thousands of years later, in the Song dynasty (960-1279 AD), the emergence of Neo-Confucianism marked the culmination of Confucianism. Confucian scholars, in the Song dynasty, despised the Han and Tang dynasties, denounced the Buddhas and wanted to adopt Confucius' and Mencius' teachings. "To ordain conscience for heaven and earth. To secure the life and wealth of the people. To carry on the lost teachings of the past sages. To create peace for all future generations" (Wei, 2018). But it is unfortunate that the Confucians in the Song dynasty turned a blind eye to the essence of democracy in Mencius' and Xunzi's thought, and focused only on the theory of good nature³ and the way of heaven. This situation is related to the improvement of the Confucian scholars' status in the Song dynasty. The monarch of the Song dynasty pursued a relatively peaceful policy and placed Confucian scholars in an important position after learning the lessons from the downfall of previous dynasties. Therefore, "[...] ruling the country together with the scholars" (Yu, 2011, p. 114) became one of the most important features of the political ecosystem in the Song dynasty.

As for the relationship between monarch and subject, the Confucianism of the Song dynasty adopted that of the Han dynasty and was even better than that Dong Zhongshu's one. In the Song dynasty, the three cardinal principles and the five constant virtues were considered the principles of heaven and human nature. Cheng Hao, the founder of Neo-Confucianism, once claimed: "Although I studied with my teacher, the word 'the principles of heaven' was created by my mind" (Zhu, 1985). Monarch-Subject Principles and the Father-Son Principles are the main content of the eternal principles of heaven he created. Zhu Xi, a representative of Neo-Confucianism, said: "The universe exists on the basis of 'principles'... Its extensions are the 'three cardinal principles' (the monarch guides his subjects, the father guides his son, and the husband guides his wife) and 'the five constant virtues' (benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and fidelity). The 'principles' are operated everywhere." (Zhu, 1989). That is, he believes that the three cardinal principles and the five constant virtues are the normal manifestations of the heavenly principles in the world. As for the relationship between monarch and subject, Zhu Xi believes that the monarch and subjects' righteousness is the manifestation of the man's original mind. "There is no greater righteousness in the world than that of monarchs and subjects, and the reason it is so long-lasting and intractable is that it is born from the nature of the human heart and does not wait for something from outside" (Zhou, 2008). Objectively, the interpretation of Confucianism by the Confucian scholars of the Song dynasty strengthened the absolute monarchy's political rule.

³ In Mencius' theory of human nature, he posits that individuals are inherently born with a kind nature that remains unchangeable, regardless of their wealth, social status, gender, or age.

2 IDEOLOGICAL ENVIRONMENT

After the middle of the Ming dynasty, Confucianism itself became increasingly rigid and fell into the quandary of dogmatism and formalism. At the same time, the spread of Western sciences to the East increased, and capitalism began to sprout and develop in the South along the lower reaches of the Yangtze River. These violent clashes inevitably bring out different thoughts and viewpoints. Wang Yangming's *The Study of the Mind*, for example, was founded and developed under these conditions. During the Wanli period (1573-1620 AD), *The Study of the Mind* continued to spread and even became an accepted "mainstream theory" in government and among the public. *The Study of the Mind* put more emphasis on the consciousness of the individual self so that it formed a tendency towards self-liberation or the liberation of human nature in society (Zhang, 2020, p. 63).

Meanwhile, many scholars and officials also broke the shackles of Confucianism, and instead advocated the idea that learning should contribute to good governance. The Donglin School, for example, represented by Gu Xiancheng and Gao Panlong, combines concern for important national affairs with the exploration of academic ideas, emphasizing practicality and governing the country for the world's good. They use this as a yardstick for evaluating and measuring all ideological theories and vigorously reject only talking about the mind. They also put forward a new theory concerning scholars, peasants, manufacturers and merchants. Based on this theory, they raised some practical problems that need to be urgently solved for the revival of industry and commerce south of the Yangtze River, such as abolishing the trade tax, severely punishing corrupt officials, resisting the mine overseer's plundering, and advocating benefits for the economy and the people. Based on a desire to serve the country and the people, the Donglin School emphasized doing practical things and making real achievements that were useful to the world. The "useful science" it advocated had an enlightening effect on the ideological circles of the late Ming dynasty (Li, 2005, p. 65). The emergence of this knowledge trend, in the late Ming Dynasty, marked a significant shift in the realm of thought. There was a growing inclination to transform Neo-Confucianism into Sinology, which focused on textual research, during the Song and Ming Dynasties. Scholars began to pay attention to the research and solve social reality problems. The nation's affairs and the well-being of its people were deeply regarded as "worldly affairs." This approach of conducting scholarly research in close connection with social reality not only clarified the purpose of learning for emerging scholars but also stood in stark contrast to the empty rhetoric of Neo-Confucianism. It had a profound impact on the pragmatic and evidence-based style of study advocated by Gu Yanwu and Huang Zongxi in the late Ming and early Qing dynasties. These scholars emphasized the importance of practical application and substantiated claims through evidence (Jia, 2011, p. 72).

3 POLITICAL DISENCHANTMENT

In the late Ming dynasty, with the further development of the commodity economy and under the subtle influence of Wang Yangming's *The Study of the Mind*, Confucianism in the Ming and Qing dynasties showed strong anti-traditional thoughts and the desire for an awakening of self-consciousness. In addition, Huang Zongxi, Gu Yanwu, Wang Fuzhi and others are the representatives (Zhao, 2001, p. 4).

Huang Zongxi examined the origins of monarchy in Chinese social history from the perspective of social function and social needs. Starting from the origins of monarchy, he shows the corrupt character of monarchy and comprehensively reflects and criticizes the autocratic monarchy system for two thousand years. He abandoned the assertion of the divine right of monarchy, and explained the origins of monarchy from the utilitarian view: "Every man has his selfish interests at the beginning of his life" (Huang, 2016, p. 23). According to Huang, if people pursue their interests based on their nature, there will be conflicts with the public interests. Therefore, people must choose a person to coordinate the contradiction between the public and private interests in order to maintain social order, and this person is the monarch. The monarch is originally there to safeguard the overall interests of society. "The people are the master, and the monarch is the guest, who serves the people" (Huang, 2012). However, the monarchs of later generations were not like that. They did not hesitate to use all sorts of cruel and sinister means to appropriate all the wealth after ascending the throne. "He crushed the people and extracted the marrow from them and he separated the children of the people, only for his pleasure" (Huang, 2016, p. 11). As a result, social disasters accumulated and people resented the monarch, considered him an enemy, and called him "Dufu" (a brutal monarch who committed many crimes). Huang Zongxi shed the mantle of the monarch's divine right, criticized the monarch as the people's opposite and shook the foundation of the theory of autocratic monarchy, by proposing his new political thought: "The people are the masters, and the monarch is the guest" (Zhang, 2007, p. 193).

Gu Yanwu analyzed the monarchy from the perspective of the country and the world, and made the demand to establish a system of "The world belongs to all" by reflecting on the nature of the absolute monarchy: "The world belongs to individuals". Gu explained the difference between the country and the world in his masterpiece *Rizhilu* as follows:

How can one distinguish the difference between the destruction of the country and the destruction of the world? Gu said, the change of dynasties is the destruction of the country; but the loss of benevolence and righteousness, which results in beasts eating people, and men eating each other is the destruction of the world. Why can the empty talk of some scholars and officials in the Wei and Jin dynasties (220-420 AD) destroy the world? The reason is that what Mencius said about Yang Zhu and Mo Di's theory caused the people to become arrogant, not to respect their parents or their superiors, and to degenerate into beasts... Therefore, if you know how to protect the world, you can understand how to protect your country. The country is protected by monarchs and subjects while protecting the world is everyone's responsibility (Gu, 2020, p. 64).

According to Gu, the destruction of the country refers to the change of dynasties, and the destruction of the world means that “[...] benevolence, righteousness, and morality are not carried on, the monarchs mistreat the people and the people are in constant strife” (Gu, 2020, p. 65), leading to the phenomenon of wild beasts eating people and people engaging in cannibalism. In short, Gu believes that a country is just a regime with one surname and that the destruction of a country is the downfall of a regime. The main responsibility for “protecting the country” lies with carnivores like monarchs and subjects, not with ordinary people, or at least not mainly with ordinary people. In comparison, the destruction of the world is the downfall of morality and the etiquette system. Even ordinary people have the responsibility to “protect the world”. His thoughts rebel against the unquestioning loyalty represented by the monarchy. The monarch regards the world as his property and takes generously from the people to serve himself so that the ordinary people do not need to protect the country for the monarch’s own family. However, the world is something different from the country. The world is the people’s world. At this level, the ordinary people’s status, the monarch and the subjects are equal to each other. Therefore, those who protect the world are humble and responsible. His thoughts reflect that ethics and morality are the basis of state power, so the monarch, subjects and people’s equality, at the level of ethics and morality, also means political equality (Ouyang, 2013, p. 111).

In comparison, Wang Fuzhi advocates the importance of objective laws. He distinguishes between the “individual” and the “public”. In his view, what determines the development of history is not the inheritance and extension of imperial lineage, but the laws of nature and the people’s support. In *Comments about History as a Mirror*, he criticized the feudal “orthodoxy” and believed that “[...] those who talk about the world must follow the principles ‘the world belongs to all’ instead of ‘the world belongs to individual’” (Wang, 2018). In addition, Wang Fuzhi emphasized that Mencius’ theory that “the people are more important than the emperor” appeared in the special historical period when the feudal order of the Zhou dynasty was gradually disintegrating. According to Wang, during the Warring States period (403BC-221BC), in which Mencius lived, the Zhou dynasty declined and was unable to assume the responsibility of governing the world. The new monarch may rise from the rebellion of the six regional states, or the two tribes of Beidi and Xirong. They fought against each other and caused countless deaths and injuries to the people, so the monarch can be underestimated at that time. Those who value the people and protect their safety can be recognized as the new monarch, with no need to worry about the righteousness between Monarch Zhou and his subjects. Therefore, Mencius advised the feudal princes to practice benevolence and compete for the throne with the Zhou dynasty. In Zhou’s view, the people’s life matters more than the succession of a dynasty. In a period of disordered rule, the ability to respect the people and ensure their safety means directly obtaining the legitimacy

of the regime. It is not necessary to confirm whether the regime is orthodox or hypocritical according to the way it seized power.

4 REFLECTIONS

Traditional Chinese politics is usually considered patriarchal politics in which the family and the country are integrated. In the Ming and Qing dynasties, the monarch called himself “Junfu”, and the officials called themselves “Fumu Guan”. The relationship between monarch and subject is usually entangled with the relationship between the people and officials. Although there is no direct consanguinity, the national laws determine that the monarch’s status for his subjects is the same as that blood relatives’ one, and they are recognized in the etiquette system as having the same etiquette status as blood relatives (fathers). With the patriarchal politics of “turning filial piety into loyalty”, the ethics of loyalty to the monarch obtains a natural legitimacy under the guarantee of the aforementioned religious theocracy. Emperor Yongzheng of Qing emphasized in “*Treason by the Book*”⁴: “The monarch should treat the people as children since ancient times; the subjects should serve their monarch the same as serving their parents” (Zhang; Xue, 1999). Confucians in the Ming and Qing dynasties increasingly expressed their disapproval of the customary ethical consensus on the homogenization of loyalty and filial piety such as the theory that “[...] the monarch and his subject are like the father and his son” (Li, 2018, p. 136). They successively proposed different theories that loyalty and filial piety are not homogeneous such as “[...] the emperor and his ministers have priority”, “[...] the emperor and his ministers are based on righteousness” (Xu, 2009, p. 89), etc. They demanded that filial piety and loyalty to the monarch be treated differently, and there was a tendency to divide loyalty and filial piety according to public and private.

As one of the representatives of Confucianism during the Ming and Qing dynasties, Huang Zongxi further clarified that “[...] the people are the master, and the monarch is the guest” (Huang, 2016, p. 46). Huang said: “I became an official for the world, not for the monarch; for the people, not for the royal family” (Huang, 2016, p. 49). Undoubtedly, his view means a direct challenge to the principle of “the monarch guides his subjects”, which was considered the great righteousness of feudal ethics for thousands of years. It also goes beyond the insurmountable boundaries between superiors and inferiors in the traditional Chinese political philosophy that the monarch is superior and the subjects are inferior. In Huang’s ideal, the monarch and subjects should be different in social labor divisions. He pointed out

⁴ The book was compiled by Emperor Yongzheng and featured accusations made by Zeng Jing and others, listing ten crimes attributed to Emperor Yongzheng. These crimes included ten allegations such as patricide, matricide, fratricide, infanticide, greed, murder, alcoholism, immorality, suspicion and disloyalty. In response, Emperor Yongzheng personally took up the task of defending and refuting each accusation individually. The debate process captured in the book reflects the prevailing official mindset during the late Ming and early Qing dynasties in the seventeenth century.

that “[...] the world is so large that it cannot be governed by only one person but by more with different social responsibilities (Huang, 2016, p. 73)”. It is believed that officials should “[...] take the world as their business” instead of “[...] becoming servants of the monarch” (Huang, 2016, p. 76). A subject who ignores the people in distress violates the principle of being a reasonable subject, even if he can assist the monarch to help the country revive and follow the monarch loyally until the country perishes. Governing the country is like shouting slogans together when lifting a log. The monarch and the subjects are the ones who carry the wood together. If the hands don’t hold the rope and the feet don’t touch the ground, then the responsibility of governing the country will be neglected. To govern the country, the monarch and the subjects should be united, cautious, and wholehearted (Huang, 2001). This view re-examines and regulates the relationship between the monarch and his subjects in the sense of social division of labor and also has positive democratic enlightenment significance, revealing the idea of equality between the monarch and his subjects.

Gu Yanwu refuted the monarch’s concept “the world belongs to individuals” through the distinction between “country” and “world”, and emphasized that establishing a monarch aims to serve the people. Officials also should serve for the people, not for the monarch’s self interest. He believes that the monarch, subjects and people are all equal in politics. To elucidate this theory in more detail, Gu conducted a lot of investigations on the origin of words. The basic method is to reveal the original meaning of the words by investigating their historical origin and to cancel the hierarchical characteristics. The Chinese word “Jun”, for example, is usually considered the unique monarch’s title, which reflects the monarch’s supreme ruling status compared with the subjects. Gu traced its usage in different periods, and pointed out that its unique usage was formed in history and it was also applied to refer to subjects. Officials in the Han dynasty all called their masters “Jun”, and the army with their heads wrapped in green scarves also called their masters “Jun”. This conceptually eliminates the monarch and subjects’ unequal status (Li, 2014, p. 87).

Considering the state’s efforts to combat confusion since ancient times, Wang Fuzhi did not directly point the finger of criticism at the monarch himself but paid more attention to the stability and survival of the political order. He believes that although some monarchs ruled brutally, there is still a basic social order after all. The people suffer from it, but there is always a limit. However, when the world is in chaos, death and migration, rape and plunder become the norm, and the people have no space to live, people will understand that a tyrant is better than no king. The actual purpose of respecting the monarch is to serve the people. For Wang, the relationship between monarch and subject is considered a means to discipline the monarch’s rule. If the monarch makes mistakes, the officials should give advice. Even if he was convicted and relegated, or even killed, he could not keep silent for the sake of protecting himself, let alone abandon his official position and escape. It can be seen from this that Wang became a supporter of imperial power from the people’s perspective, and only advocated

the limitation of monarchy, but did not entirely oppose it. In the agricultural patriarchal society, the Monarch-Subject Principle and the Father-Son Principle are the only feasible and optional governance methods and order. The Wang's thought has its transcendence but also reflects the limitations of the era (He; Gao; Wang, 2022, p. 32).

CONCLUSION

Huang Zongxi, Gu Yanwu, Wang Fuzhi and others lived in the chaotic era between the Ming and Qing Dynasties. The rise of peasant uprisings, the fall of the Ming dynasty and the introduction of Western science made them reflect deeply on the feudal autocratic monarchy at that time, form a new ideological system with modern significance on this basis, and become the harbinger of progressive thought in the late Qing dynasty. In modern China, after the collapse of the imperial power, the ethics of loyalty to the monarch naturally dissipated due to the loss of the object of loyalty. However, we still need to absorb the ideological nourishment of the Ming and Qing dynasties and guard against the revival of the traditional thought of loyalty to the emperor. On the other hand, it is also necessary to transform the concept of loyalty by Wang Fuzhi and others into the spirit of sticking to political morality and responsibility, and actively cultivate modern political ethics and professional ethics such as loyalty and honesty.

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