ABSTRACT

Wang Chong (王充) was one of the remarkable philosophers of the Later Han. By using the method of inductive and deductive reasoning, this study aims at examining his ideas on way of heaven, human nature and fate. The discussion in this dissertation focuses primarily on Wang’s Lun-heng (《论衡》).

According to the Confucian postulation advocated by the early Han philosophers, Heaven dictates the human world. Thus cosmic order, moral and social-political status are unified. But the failure of Wang Mang (王莽) evoked a critical and discriminating spirit in the thinkers of Later Han. Among the galaxy of thinkers, Wang Chong exuded rays of peculiar charm. He argued against the idea that Heaven can influence and dictate human world. Thus he opined that the “fate” of an individual man or of the society and state as a whole was determined by the workings of nature or the chance of events over which men, even the Sage-ruler, had no control. What was left to the control of the individual man in this world, according to Wang Chong, was his moral intention, determination and effort. These, he affirmed, were for each man to decide and control, and hence were the only elements intrinsic to the individual human being.

This research highlighted Wang Chong’s peculiar insight and outstanding courage as a critical philosopher.