Abstract

To serve the imperial court had been the traditional career path of the Chinese intellectuals since time immemorial. But, early Ming’s intellectuals, especially those under the ruling epoch (1368-1398), Hong-wu (洪武) of Taizu (太祖), were characterized by the unwillingness to serve the imperial court. This is a unique phenomenon, attributing this topic its significance for analysis. This academic exercise is therefore an attempt to analyze the two choices of the early Ming’s intellectuals: whether to serve or not to serve the imperial court.

Chapter 1 is an introductory chapter to define the scope of analysis and the methodology applied. Chapter 2 is an examination of the philosophical background underlying Chinese intellectuals’ choice of to serve or not to serve from a theoretical perspective.

Chapter 3 offers an overall view of early Ming’s epoch, with special highlights on the intellectuals. The two characteristics of their choice to serve or not to serve the imperial court is unearthed: (1) majority of the imperial officials retired and lived in seclusion soon after; (2) majority of the intellectuals opted to live in seclusion.

Chapter 4 is the crux of the discussion involving the case studies of five representative intellectuals. This part of the discussion focuses on the analysis of differential reasons of each individual’s decision not to serve the Ming dynasty. Subsequently detecting the underlying principle of this phenomenon, that is individualism has come to light in the traditional culture of Chinese intellectuals.

Chapter 5, the concluding chapter, offers a summary explanation of the possible factors underlying the change of attitudes of the early Ming’s intellectuals towards serving the imperial court.

In this academic exercise, efforts has been put in to link the unwillingness of early Ming’s intellectuals to serve the imperial court with two factors: first, the evolution of the traditional culture of Chinese intellectuals and second, the despotic
approach of Taizu towards the intellectuals. However, discussion is restricted by the
length limitation, it is sincerely hope that this brief analysis will stimulate further
exploration in this interesting topic.