Abstract:

Ancient Government and Society as Narrated in the Book of Mencius

Ancient Chinese history (2205 - 256 B.C.) has always been an intriguing field of study, particularly because of its lack of first-hand historical sources. The situation is made more difficult by the presence of several works of forgery which offer conflicting perspectives. Tremendous efforts were made by scholars all over the world to shed light onto this period of time, and together with the help of new archaeological findings, great results had been achieved.

*Mencius* is better known as an important book in Chinese Philosophy and it possesses great influence on Chinese thoughts till contemporary times. But this does not diminish its value as a historical asset. This essay looks into the ancient government and society based on this invaluable book, highlighting on important political policies and social institutions, which include the political and social hierarchy of the Zhou Dynasty (1122-256 B.C.) (周代
封邦建国与世袭宗法制），as well as agricultural policies（三代田赋制度）and the nature of kingship succession（上古王权的继承问题）in ancient chinese history.

Although there are still discrepancies on who the author of the Mencius is (probably jointly-written by Mencius and his disciples), but it was definitely written in the period of the Warring States（771-256 B.C.）which proves to be a pivotal point in the history of China. The chaotic political situation upsets the social stratum status-quo, and threw the people, especially the shi（士）class, into an identity crisis. In a frantic search for answers to their existence, they reflected upon history. Thus, Mencius is, unfortunately, not an objective account of history. In fact, there lies the possibility that the author may manipulate history to suit his political view（托古改制）. This essay does not hope to prove the genuinity of its historical accounts, but rather, to use it as a complementing reference in the study of ancient chinese history.