ABSTRACT

Yen Fu’s Critique of Lao Zi did not catch too much attention of scholars in the past. However, it plays a part in understanding the attitude of Yen Fu towards the East and the West, especially between traditional oriental thoughts and modern western ideologies.

We try to narrow down our study to several aspects like Tao (道), De (德), Intelligence (智), The Holy Man (圣人), Democracy (民主) and Liberty (自由). By drawing a comparison between the related portions of Lao Zi and the critiques of Yen Fu, we try to see how Yen Fu, as a scholar of Late Qing Dynasty, viewed the thoughts of Lao Zi. We also attempt to find out the possible meanings behind those critiques.

Yen Fu did not blindly follow the thoughts of others during the chaotic period of China around 1900’s. He tried to introduce the western thoughts and knowledge to his people with the mask of Lao Zi. Not only that, he even equalized some ideas like the origin of Heavens and Earth mentioned in Lao Zi to western thoughts. His comments on Lao Zi gave the readers an impression that the seeds of those modern western ideologies could be found in those old days. This is important to the Chinese people as they faced the invasions of other countries and were severely defeated by them. The people especially
those conservatives in the Qing dynasty by then could have the confidence to rise up, not only expelling the invaders but also strengthening the country.