Abstract

This dissertation aims to examine the influence of the Qing sceptical scholarship on the School of Ancient History Criticism (古史辨 派) which had inherited the academic tradition of “scepticism of the past and exposition of the spurious”(疑 古 辨 伪). The scope of this research is restricted to the Qing era, mainly due to its influential role in contributing to the emergence of the modern doubters of antiquity.

The study attempts to analyze the unique features of scepticism in the Qing scholarship by looking at the changes in sociopolitical conditions which had greatly affected the thoughts of the intellectuals. Qing scholars who were disturbed by the near dissolution of the Confucian order, called for the rediscovery of the Confucian classics. Their emphasis was then placed on textual authentication and, at the same time, the academic tradition of “scepticism of the past” began to re-emerge. Except the high Qing era which saw the rise of evidential scholarship, scepticism had remained prominent throughout the whole Qing period.

Among the Qing scholars, three individuals were specially pointed out by Gu Jie Gang(顾 颜 刚), the founder of the School of the Ancient History Criticism, as the main figures whose thoughts had influenced him greatly. The works of Yao Ji Heng (姚际恒) had prompted Gu to adopt a sceptical view on Confucian classics, whereas Cui Shu (崔述) had raised doubts about later commentaries on Confucian classics. Cui, who was recognized as a “scientific historian of ancient history”, had pointed out that the more remote from a given event, the more complex becomes the information about that event. This assertion later became the main source of Gu’s famous stratification theory. Despite his political motives, Kang You Wei’s (康 有
studies of spurious canonical literature had inspired Gu to take a sceptical view of the past. Kang had concluded that the Ancient-text canon was completely forged by Liu Xin (刘歆) during the reign of Wang Mang (王莽), while those texts which the Modern-text School had claimed as the legitimate canon were the product of the imagination of Confucius. In making these claims, Kang had brought huge destruction on a large part of the Chinese ancient history.

The School of Ancient History Criticism which was influenced greatly by the Qing scholars, had made revolutionary contribution to the Chinese historiography. However, relying only on findings from historical documents seems to be insufficient. For the construction of the Chinese ancient history, the search for corroborative evidence from archaeological findings is clearly needed.