ABSTRACT

Gu Yanwu (1613-1682), one of the foremost scholars of the seventeenth century in China, was born into a wealthy Jiangsu family whose status and influence were declining. His childhood was made unusual by the presence of his foster mother; her influence on Gu was immense. In his youth and early adulthood Gu studied for the civil examinations. His participation in interest groups such as the Fu-she was more oriented toward literary than political goals. In his late twenties, when he still had not advanced beyond the preliminary stages in examinations, Gu began to turn his attention to scholarship as a means of alleviating the empire's problems, which culminated in the collapse of the Ming dynasty in 1644.

This Academic Exercise is a detailed study of Gu Yanwu's political thought. Although works have been done on this topic, none of them point out the central themes of Gu's political ideas so as to link up the vein of his thought. This paper is an attempt to supply the deficiency.

There are six chapters in this study. The first chapter discusses the aims and the methodology of the study. The second chapter gives a brief account of the life and thought of Gu Yanwu. The third chapter explores the central themes of Gu's political thought. The fourth chapter is an in-depth analysis of his political ideas. The fifth chapter reviews the characteristics of his political thought with reference to the development of Chinese political thought. The last chapter concludes with a critical evaluation of Gu Yanwu's political thought and his position in Chinese history, in particular the Ming-Qing transitional period. It is hoped that this study will provide a deeper understanding of Gu's political ideas and shed light on the study of Ming-Qing intellectual history.