ABSTRACT

An outstanding reformist of the Northern Song Dynasty, Wang An-shi’s (王安石) political thoughts had epoch-making significance in the feudal society of China. Wang An-shi had been mistaken as a treacherous court-official after his death, not until Cai Shang-xiang (蔡上翔) of the Qing Dynasty, who wrote "Wang Jing Gong Nian Pu Kao Lue" (《王荆公年谱考略》) to clear his name. Xi-ning Reform, an important event in the Chinese history, was under Wang An-shi’s leadership. The New Laws proposed by him were the best indication of his political thoughts. This thesis first gives a brief account of Wang An-shi’s life and proceeds to understand his political thoughts through his pro-legalist ideas, the "San Bu Zu Si Xiang" ("三不足"思想), and the New Laws, whose purposes are evaluated.

Many scholars have attempted to understand the New Laws through Wang An-shi’s political thoughts. However, this thesis attempts the other way round. Some scholars advocate that Wang An-shi’s thoughts were derived from either Confucianism or Legalism. This thesis, however, attempts to elucidate that Wang An-shi was a trained Confucian but he was also deeply influenced by legalist ideas. Besides, from what he had done as far as the New Laws were concerned, it is found that he had an inclination towards the legalist’s way of government. Though his political thoughts are epoch-making, there exists imperfections. This thesis therefore seeks to provide an objective evaluation of Wang An-shi’s political thoughts.
This thesis comprises seven chapters:

(1) Introduction.

(2) Historical background and the variety of political thoughts of the Northern Song Dynasty.

(3) Understanding Wang An-shi’s political thoughts through his pro-legalist ideas, "San Bu Zu Si Xiang" ("三不足"思想) and the New Laws.

(4) A general discussion of his pro-legalist ideas.

(5) Imperfections of his political thoughts and their consequences.

(6) Conclusion.

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