

**The Parent King; Any Offspring?
-On the Progress and Limits of Classical
Constitutionalism in Pre-Qin
Confucianism(Part I)**

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Abstract

From Confucius to Mencius, the concept of a parent king evolved from emperors fulfilling moral duties into ones who owed an obligation to their subjects. Mencius' admonishment that a parent king cannot be a commander of man-eating beasts is rooted in a *li* taboo against human sacrifice as a ceremonial exercise conducted by the parent king. The institution of parent king gradually shifted from emphasizing the legitimacy of the ruler under a patriarchal clan system to tracing the source of the ruler's legitimacy to a proven mandate from heaven. But the humanism inherent in the benign parent king inevitably shook the hierarchical foundation of the *li* institutions of Confucianism.

Keywords: the parent king, mandate from heaven, humanism, human sacrifice, *li* between the state and its individual subjects