In this paper we unify the structures of various clean rings by introducing the notion of $P$-clean rings. Some properties of $P$-clean rings are investigated, which generalize the known results on clean rings, semiclean rings, $n$-clean rings, and so forth. By the way, we answer a question of Xiao and Tong on $n$-clean rings in the negative.

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1. Introduction

Throughout this paper $R$ denotes an associative ring with identity and all modules are unitary. We use the symbol $U(R)$ to denote the group of units of $R$ and $Id(R)$ the set of idempotents of $R$, $U_n(R)$ the set of elements which are the sum of $n$ units of $R$, $U_1(R)$ the set of elements each of which is the sum of finitely many units in $R$, $RE(R)$ ($URE(R)$) the set of regular (unit regular) elements of $R$, and $Peri(R)$ the set of periodic elements of $R$. The Jacobson radical and the prime radical of $R$ are denoted by $J(R)$ and $Nil^*(R)$, respectively.

Following Han and Nicholson [4], an element $x$ of a ring $R$ is called clean if $x = e + u$ where $e \in Id(R)$ and $u \in U(R)$. A ring $R$ is clean if every element of $R$ is clean. This notion was first introduced by Nicholson [5] as early as 1977 in his study of lifting idempotents and exchange rings. Since then, a great deal is known about clean rings and their generalizations (cf. [1–9]).

According to Ye [9], a ring $R$ is called semiclean if every element of $R$ has the form $x = f + u$, where $u \in U(R)$ and $f$ is periodic, that is, $f^p = f^q$ for two different positive integers $p$ and $q$. In [8], an element $x$ of a ring $R$ is called $n$-clean if $x = e + u_1 + \cdots + u_n$, where $e \in Id(R)$, $u_i \in U(R)$, and $n$ is a positive integer. The ring $R$ is called $n$-clean if every element of $R$ is $n$-clean for some fixed positive integer $n$. While $R$ is called $\Sigma$-clean, if the $n$ is a positive integer depending on $x$. Also Zhang and Tong in [10] defined $R$ to be $G$-clean, if each $x \in R$ has the form $x = a + u$ where $a$ is unit regular and $u \in U(R)$.

Motivated by the results of Han and Nicholson [4] on clean rings, Ye [9] on semiclean rings, Xiao and Tong [8] on $n$-clean rings and $\Sigma$-clean rings, and Zhang and Tong [10] on $G$-clean rings, in this paper we unify the structures of various clean rings by introducing...
2. P-clean rings

We start this section by the following definitions.

For two subsets \( A \) and \( B \) of a ring \( R \), the sum of \( A \) and \( B \) is defined as follows: \( A + B = \{a + b \mid a \in A, \ b \in B\} \). The sum of more than two subsets of an \( R \) can be defined inductively.

Let \( P \) be a property which is meaningful for elements of a ring. For any ring \( R \), let \( P(R) \) be the subset \( \{a \in R \mid a \text{ has property } P\} \) of \( R \).

**Definition 2.1.** Property \( P \) will be called admissible if the following conditions are satisfied.

1. For any ring homomorphism \( \sigma: R \to S \), \( \sigma(P(R)) \subseteq P(S) \).
2. For any rings \( R \subseteq S \), \( P(R) \subseteq P(S) \).
3. For any \( e \in \text{Id}(R) \), \( P(eRe) + P((1-e)R(1-e)) \subseteq P(R) \).

For convenience, an element of \( P(R) \) is called a \( P \)-element in \( R \). In this paper \( P \) will always be an admissible property.

**Proposition 2.2.** (1) If \( \sigma \) is a ring isomorphism from \( R \) onto \( S \), then \( \sigma(P(R)) = P(S) \).

(2) If \( e_1, e_2, \ldots, e_n \) are orthogonal complete idempotents, that is, \( e_i e_j = 0 \) whenever \( i \neq j \) and \( e_i^2 = e_i \), and \( e_1 + e_2 + \cdots + e_n = 1 \), then \( P(e_1 Re_1) + P(e_2 Re_2) + \cdots + P(e_n Re_n) \subseteq P(R) \).

**Proof.** (1) By Definition 2.1, \( \sigma(P(R)) \subseteq P(S) \), hence \( \sigma^{-1}(\sigma(P(R))) \subseteq \sigma^{-1}(P(S)) \subseteq P(R) \). It follows that \( P(R) \subseteq \sigma^{-1}(P(S)) \subseteq P(R) \), which gives \( \sigma(P(R)) \subseteq P(S) \subseteq \sigma(P(R)) \) and so \( \sigma(P(R)) = P(S) \).

(2) We prove this by using induction on \( n \). In fact, the case \( n = 2 \) is condition (3) of Definition 2.1. Assume (2) holds for \( n - 1 \). Let \( e_1 + e_2 + \cdots + e_{n-1} = f \). Then multiplied by \( e_i \) on the two sides of the above equation, we have \( e_i f = f e_i = e_i \), which gives \( e_i = f e_i f \) and so \( e_i \in \text{Id}(f R f) \). Note that \( f R f \) is a ring with identity \( f \). It yields that \( P(e_1 Re_1) + P(e_2 Re_2) + \cdots + P(e_{n-1} Re_{n-1}) \subseteq P(f R f) \) by inductive assumption. On the other hand, \( f + e_n = 1 \) implies \( P(f f f) + P(e_n R e_n) \subseteq P(R) \) by Definition 2.1(3). Hence \( P(e_1 Re_1) + P(e_2 Re_2) + \cdots + P(e_{n-1} Re_{n-1}) + P(e_n Re_n) \subseteq P(f R f) + P(e_n R e_n) \subseteq P(R) \). \( \square \)

**Definition 2.3.** A ring \( R \) is called \( P \)-clean if every \( x \in R \) has the form \( x = p + u \), where \( p \in P(R) \) and \( u \in U(R) \).

**Lemma 2.4.** Let \( R \) be a ring and \( e \in \text{Id}(R) \). Then the following hold.

1. If \( u \in U(eRe) \) and \( v \in U((1-e)R(1-e)) \), then \( u + v \in U(R) \).
2. If \( e_1 \in \text{Id}(eRe) \) and \( e_2 \in \text{Id}((1-e)R(1-e)) \), then \( e_1 + e_2 \in \text{Id}(R) \).
3. If \( f \in \text{Peri}(eRe) \) and \( g \in \text{Peri}((1-e)R(1-e)) \), then \( f + g \in \text{Peri}(R) \).
4. If \( x \in \text{RE}(eRe) \) and \( y \in \text{RE}((1-e)R(1-e)) \), then \( x + y \in \text{RE}(R) \).
5. If \( x \in \text{URE}(eRe) \) and \( y \in \text{URE}((1-e)R(1-e)) \), then \( x + y \in \text{URE}(R) \).
6. If \( x \in U_n(eRe) \) and \( y \in U_n((1-e)R(1-e)) \), then \( x + y \in U_n(R) \).
(7) If \( x \in \text{Id}(eRe) + U_n(eRe) \) and \( y \in \text{Id}((1 - e)R(1 - e)) + U_n((1 - e)R(1 - e)) \), then \( x + y \in \text{Id}(R) + U_n(R) \).

(8) If \( x \in \text{Id}(eRe) + U_{2}(eRe) \) and \( y \in \text{Id}((1 - e)R(1 - e)) + U_{2}((1 - e)R(1 - e)) \), then \( x + y \in \text{Id}(R) + U_{2}(R) \).

**Proof.** We only prove (3) and (8), the others are very similar.

(3) Let \( f \in \text{Peri}(eRe) \) and \( g \in \text{Peri}((1 - e)R(1 - e)) \). Then there exist positive integers \( m > n \) and \( p > q \) such that \( f^m = f^n \) and \( g^p = g^q \). By Ye [9, Lemma 5.2], \( f^{n(m - n)} \) and \( g^{q(p - q)} \) are both idempotents. Set \( t = 2n(m - n) \) \( q(p - q) \). Then \( f^{2t} = f^t \) and \( g^{2t} = g^t \). Since \( fg = gf = 0 \), \( (f + g)^{2t} = f^{2t} + g^{2t} = f^t + g^t = (f + g)^t \). Hence \( f + g \in \text{Peri}(R) \).

(8) Assume \( x \in \text{Id}(eRe) + U_{2}(eRe) \) and \( y \in \text{Id}((1 - e)R(1 - e)) + U_{2}((1 - e)R(1 - e)) \). Then \( x = f + u_1 + \cdots + u_n \) and \( y = g + v_1 + \cdots + v_m \) where \( f \in \text{Id}(eRe) \), \( g \in \text{Id}((1 - e)R(1 - e)) \), \( u_i \in U(eRe) \), and \( v_j \in U((1 - e)R(1 - e)) \). It is easy to show that an \( n \)-clean element is \( m \)-clean whenever \( n \leq m \), since for any \( e \in \text{Id}(R) \), \( e = (1 - e) + (2e - 1) \) where \( 1 - e \in \text{Id}(R) \) and \( (2e - 1)^2 = 1 \). So without loss of generality, we can assume \( n = m \).

Using (1), \( f + g \in \text{Id}(R) \). And from (6), \( u_i + v_i \in U(R) \). Hence \( x + y = (f + g) + (u_1 + v_1) + \cdots + (u_n + v_n) \in \text{Id}(R) + U_{2}(R) \).

Using Lemma 2.4, it is easy to check that for any ring \( R \), \( 0, \text{Id}(R), \text{Peri}(R), U(R), RE(R), URE(R), U_n(R), \text{Id}(R) + U_{n-1}(R) \) for \( n \geq 2 \), \( \text{Id}(R) + U_{2}(R) \) are all subsets of \( R \) defined by a suitable admissible property \( P \).

From the above arguments, the following proposition is immediate.

**Proposition 2.5.** Let \( R \) be a ring. Then the following conclusions hold.

1. \( \text{Id}(R) \)-clean rings are precisely clean rings.
2. Pri\( (R) \)-clean rings are precisely semiclean rings.
3. \( \text{Ure}(R) \)-clean rings are precisely \( (S, 2) \)-rings.
4. \( \text{Ure}(R) \)-clean rings are precisely \( G \)-clean rings.
5. \( \text{Id}(R) + U_{n-1}(R) \)-clean rings are precisely \( n \)-clean rings when \( n \geq 2 \).
6. \( \text{Id}(R) + U_{2}(R) \)-clean rings are precisely \( \Sigma \)-clean rings.

Note that here an \( (S, 2) \)-ring is a ring in which every element can be expressed as a sum of two units of \( R \). While in some literature it referred to a ring in which every element can be written as a sum of no more than two units.

**Proposition 2.6.** Any homomorphic image of a \( P \)-clean ring is \( P \)-clean.

**Proof.** Let \( R \) be a \( P \)-clean ring and let \( f : R \to S \) be a ring surjective homomorphism. Then for any \( y \in S \), there exists \( x \in R \) such that \( f(x) = y \). Since \( R \) is \( P \)-clean, \( x = p + u \) with \( p \in P(R) \) and \( u \in U(R) \). Hence \( f(x) = f(p) + f(u) \). Obviously \( f(u) \in U(S) \) and \( f(p) \in f(P) \subseteq P(S) \) by Definition 2.1, the proof is complete.

**Proposition 2.7.** A finite direct product \( R = \prod_{i=1}^{n} R_i \) of rings \( R_i \) is \( P \)-clean if and only if each \( R_i \) is \( P \)-clean.

**Proof.** If \( R \) is \( P \)-clean, then each \( R_i \) is \( P \)-clean by Proposition 2.6. Conversely, assume each \( R_i \) is \( P \)-clean, and \( x = (x_i) \in R \). Then \( x_i = p_i + u_i \) with \( p_i \in P(R_i) \) and \( u_i \in U(R_i) \).
for each $i$. By Proposition 2.2, we can identify $R_i$ with $(\ldots, 0, R, 0, \ldots)$ canonically. Let $e_i = (\ldots, 0, 1, 0, \ldots)$. Then $(p_i) = (p_{i1}, 0, \ldots, 0) + (0, p_{i2}, \ldots, 0) + \cdots + (0, 0, \ldots, p_i) \subseteq P(e_{i1}R_1) + P(e_{i2}R_2) + \cdots + P(e_{in}R_n) \subseteq P(R)$. Now $x = (x_i) = (p_i + u_i) = (p_i) + (u_i)$ with $(p_i) \in P(R)$ and $(u_i) \in U(R)$, so we are done.

It should be noted that Proposition 2.7 is not true for an infinite direct product of rings $R_i$. For example, the ring $\mathbb{Z}$ of integers is a $\Sigma$-clean ring, but $\mathbb{R} = \prod_{i=1}^{\infty} \mathbb{Z}$ is not $\Sigma$-clean since $(1, 2, \ldots, n, \ldots)$ is obviously not $\Sigma$-clean.

**Proposition 2.8.** The ring $R$ is $P$-clean if and only if the ring $R[[x]]$ of formal power series over $R$ is $P$-clean.

*Proof.* If $R[[x]]$ is $P$-clean, then $R$ is $P$-clean by Proposition 2.6. Now if $R$ is $P$-clean, then for any $f(x) \in R[[x]]$, $f(x) = a_0 + a_1 x + \cdots + a_n x^n + \cdots$. By assumption, $a_0 = p + u$ with $p \in P(R)$ and $u \in U(R)$. Hence $f(x) = p + u + a_1 x + \cdots + a_n x^n + \cdots$ with $p \in P(R) \subseteq P(R[[x]])$ and $u + a_1 x + \cdots + a_n x^n + \cdots \in U(R[[x]])$, as desired.

The following corollary extends [8, Proposition 2.5] which states that for a commutative ring $R$, $R$ is $n$-clean if and only if $R[[x]]$ is $n$-clean.

**Corollary 2.9.** $R$ is $n$-clean ($\Sigma$-clean) if and only if $R[[x]]$ is $n$-clean ($\Sigma$-clean).

It has been proved by Han and Nicholson in [4] that if $e$ is an idempotent in a ring $R$ such that $eR$ and $(1 - e)R(1 - e)$ are both clean rings, then $R$ is clean. Hence the ring of $n \times n$ matrices over $R$ is clean. Similar results hold for semiclean rings, $n$-clean rings, and $\Sigma$-clean rings. We now extend these results to $P$-clean rings.

**Lemma 2.10.** Let $e \in \text{Id}(R)$ be such that $eR$ and $(1 - e)R(1 - e)$ are both $P$-clean rings. Then $R$ is a $P$-clean ring.

*Proof.* For convenience, write $\bar{r} = 1 - r$ for each $r \in R$. We use the Pierce decomposition of the ring $R$:

$$R = eR + e\bar{r}e + \bar{e}Re + e\bar{r}e.$$ (2.1)

Let $x = a + b + c + d$ where $a \in eR$, $b \in e\bar{r}e$, $c \in \bar{e}Re$, and $d \in \bar{e}R\bar{e}$. By hypothesis, write $a = p + u$ where $p \in P(eR)$ and $u \in U(eR)$ with inverse $u_1$. Then $d - cu_1 b \in \bar{e}R\bar{e}$, so write $d - cu_1 b = q + v$ where $q \in P(\bar{e}R\bar{e})$ and $v \in U(\bar{e}R\bar{e})$ with inverse $v_1$. Hence $x = (p + q) + u + b + c + v + cu_1 b$ and it suffices to show that $u + b + c + v + cu_1 b$ is a unit in $R$. To this end compute

$$\begin{align*}
(u + b + c + v + cu_1 b)(u_1 + u_1 bv_1 cu_1 - u_1 bv_1 - v_1 cu_1 + v_1) \\
= (e + bv_1 cu_1 - bv_1) + (-bv_1 cu_1 + bv_1) + (cu_1 + cu_1 bv_1 cu_1 - cu_1 bv_1) \\
+ (-cu_1 + 1 - e) + (-cu_1 bv_1 cu_1 + cu_1 bv_1) = 1.
\end{align*}$$ (2.2)

Similarly, $(u_1 + u_1 bv_1 cu_1 - u_1 bv_1 - v_1 cu_1 + v_1)(u + b + c + v + cu_1 b) = 1$.

Note that $p + q \in P(eR) + P(\bar{e}R\bar{e}) \subseteq P(R)$ by Definition 2.1, the proof is complete.

Using Lemma 2.10, an inductive argument gives immediately.
Theorem 2.11. If \( 1 = e_1 + e_2 + \cdots + e_n \) in a ring \( R \) where \( e_i \) are orthogonal idempotents and each \( e_i R e_i \) is \( P \)-clean, then \( R \) is \( P \)-clean.

The following two results are direct consequences of Theorem 2.11

Corollary 2.12. If \( R \) is a \( P \)-clean ring, so also is the matrix ring \( M_n(R) \).

Corollary 2.13. If \( M = M_1 \oplus M_2 \oplus \cdots \oplus M_n \) are modules and \( \text{end}(M_i) \) is \( P \)-clean for each \( i \), then \( \text{end}(M) \) is \( P \)-clean.

Since any homomorphic image of a \( P \)-clean ring is again \( P \)-clean, with Theorem 2.11, this gives the following.

Corollary 2.14. If \( A \) and \( B \) are rings and \( V = _AV_B \) is a bimodule, the split-null extension \( R \) is \( P \)-clean if and only if both \( A \) and \( B \) are \( P \)-clean, where

\[
R = \begin{pmatrix} A & V \\ 0 & B \end{pmatrix}.
\]  

In particular, induction shows that for each \( n \geq 1 \), a ring \( R \) is \( P \)-clean if and only if the ring of all \( n \times n \) upper triangular matrices over \( R \) is \( P \)-clean.

Let \( R \) be a ring and let \( I \) be an ideal of \( R \). We say \( P \)-elements in \( R/I \) lift modulo \( I \), if for any \( p \in P(R/I) \) there exists \( a \in P(R) \) such that \( \pi(a) = p \) where \( \pi \) is the canonical ring homomorphism from \( R \) onto \( R/I \).

We close this section with the following proposition whose proof is very easy.

Proposition 2.15. Let \( R \) be a ring and let \( I \) be an ideal contained in \( J(R) \). If \( R/I \) is a \( P \)-clean ring and \( P \)-elements lift modulo \( I \), then \( R \) is a \( P \)-clean ring.

3. Some remarks

It is known by [4, Proposition 6] that a ring \( R \) is clean if and only if \( R/I \) is clean for any ideal \( I \subseteq J(R) \) and idempotents lift modulo \( I \). Xiao and Tong [8] naturally claimed that they do not know whether for any \( n \)-clean ring \( R \), idempotents of \( R/I \) lift modulo \( I \) where \( I \) is any ideal of \( R \) contained in \( J(R) \). The following counterexample shows that the answer is negative.

Example 3.1. There is a 4-clean ring \( R \) in which idempotents of \( R/J(R) \) cannot be lifted to \( R \).

Proof. Let \( R \) be the subring of rational numbers \( Q \) given by \( R = \{\frac{m}{n} \in Q \mid (m,n) = (n,6) = 1\} \). Then \( R \) has only two maximal ideals: \( 2R \) and \( 3R \), so \( J(R) = 6R \). Denote the ring of integers modulo \( n \) by \( \mathbb{Z}_n \), then \( R/J(R) \cong \mathbb{Z}_2 \times \mathbb{Z}_3 \), which has four idempotents. But \( R \) has only two idempotents. This shows that idempotents of \( R/J(R) \) cannot be lifted to \( R \) modulo \( J(R) \). But it can be shown that \( R \) is a 4-clean ring.

Clearly, \( x = m/n \in U(R) \) if and only if \( (m,6) = (n,6) = 1 \). Now for any \( x \in R \), \( x \) has the form \( x = 3^p 2^q m/n \) where \( (m,6) = (n,6) = 1 \). If \( p, q \geq 1 \), then \( 3^p 2^q m = (3p 2^q - 1 + 1)m = (3^p 2^q - 1)m + m \in U_2(R) \), so \( x \in U_2(R) \). If \( x = 3^p m/n \) with \( p \geq 1 \) and \( (m,6) = (n,6) = 1 \), then \( 3^p m = (3^p - 2 + 2)m = (3^p - 2)m + m \), which implies \( x \in U_2(R) \). Similarly, in
the case of \( x = 2^q m/n \) where \((m,6) = (n,6) = 1\) and \( q \geq 1\), then \( 2^q = 2^q - 3 + 3 = 2^q - 3 + 1 + 1 + 1 \). It follows that \( x \in U_4(R) \). Since any \( n \)-clean element must be \( m \)-clean for any \( n \leq m \) (cf. the proof of Lemma 2.4(8)), \( R \) is a 4-clean ring from the above arguments. This ring \( R \) is clearly a \( k \)-clean for any \( k \geq 4 \) as the proof shows.

The following two results are obtained by Xiao and Tong [8] for commutative rings, now we extend them to 2-primal rings (rings whose prime radical coincides with the set of nilpotent elements).

**Proposition 3.2.** For any 2-primal ring \( R \), the polynomial ring \( R[x] \) is not \( \Sigma\)-clean.

**Proof.** Assume the contrary, then \( x = e(x) + u_1(x) + u_2(x) + \cdots + u_n(x) \) where \( e(x) \in \text{Id}(R[x]), u_i(x) \in U(R[x]) \) for each \( i \), and \( n \) is a positive integer. Let

\[
\begin{align*}
e(x) &= e_0 + a_1 x + \cdots + a_m x^m, \\
u_1(x) &= u_{10} + u_{11} x + \cdots + u_{1m} x^m, \\
\vdots \\
u_n(x) &= u_{n0} + u_{n1} x + \cdots + u_{nm} x^m.
\end{align*}
\]

(3.1)

Since \( R \) is 2-primal, a polynomial over \( R \) is invertible if and only if its constant term is in \( U(R) \) and the other coefficients are in \( \text{Nil}_s(R) \) by [3, Theorem 2.4], so \( u_{ij} \in \text{Nil}_s(R) \) for each \( j \geq 1 \). Hence \( x = e(x) + u_1(x) + \cdots + u_n(x) \) gives \( a_1 + u_{11} + \cdots + u_{1n} = 1 \), so \( a_1 \) is a unit in \( R \), and \( a_2 + u_{12} + \cdots + u_{n2} = 0 \) implies \( a_2 \in \text{Nil}_s(R) \). On the other hand, \( e(x)^2 = e(x) \) implies \( e_0^2 = e_0 \), and \( e(x)^2 = e_0 + (e_0 a_1 + a_1 e_0) x + (e_0 a_2 + a_1^2 + a_2 e_0) x^2 + \cdots + a_2^m x^m \). So \( a_2 = e_0 a_2 + a_1^2 + a_2 e_0 \) by comparing the coefficient of \( x^2 \) in \( e(x)^2 = e(x) \). Note that the sum of a unit and a nilpotent element must be a unit and \( e_0 a_2 + a_2 e_0 \in \text{Nil}_s(R) \). It follows that \( a_2 \in U(R) \). This is a contradiction, and the proof is complete.

From Proposition 3.2, the following corollary is immediate.

**Corollary 3.3.** For any 2-primal ring \( R \), the polynomial ring \( R[x] \) is not \( n \)-clean.

We conclude this paper with the following proposition.

**Proposition 3.4.** For any 2-primal ring \( R \), the polynomial ring \( R[x] \) is not semiclean.

**Proof.** Assume the contrary, then \( x = p(x) + u(x) \) where \( p(x) \) is a periodic element and \( u(x) \) is a unit. Let \( p(x) = p_0 + p_1 x + \cdots + p_n x^n \) and \( u(x) = u_0 + u_1 x + \cdots + u_n x^n \). Since \( R \) is 2-primal, \( u_i \in \text{Nil}_s(R) \) for each \( i \geq 1 \) by [3, Theorem 2.4]. By comparing the coefficient of \( x = p(x) + u(x) \), we have \( p_1 + u_1 = 1 \), which implies \( p_1 \) is a unit in \( R \), and \( p_i + u_i = 0 \) gives \( p_i \in \text{Nil}_s(R) \) for each \( i \geq 2 \). Clearly we can assume that \( p(x)^s = p(x)^t \) for positive integers \( s > t \geq 2 \). Then a routine calculation shows that the coefficient of \( x^s \) in \( p(x)^s \) is

\[
\sum_{i_1 + i_2 + \cdots + i_s = s} p_{i_1} p_{i_2} \cdots p_{i_s} = p_1^s + a \quad \text{for some} \; a \in \text{Nil}_s(R).
\]

(3.2)
While the coefficient of $x^s$ in $p(x)^t$ is

$$\sum_{j_1+j_2+\cdots+j_t=s} p_{j_1} p_{j_2} \cdots p_{j_t} = b$$

for some $b \in \text{Nil}_*(R)$. \hfill (3.3)

Comparing the coefficients of $x^s$ on two sides of $p(x)^t = p(x)^t$, we have $p_1 \in \text{Nil}_*(R)$, which is a contradiction. \hfill \Box

The above result is obtained by Ye [9] only for a commutative ring.

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