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Yüan Chen on Heaven, Rulership, Ideal Government and Administration: A Study in T'ang Confucian Political Thought*

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Abstract

T'ang Confucianism has not been viewed as a distinctive body of thought as are Han Confucianism and Neo-Confucianism. Studies on T'ang Confucianism focus largely on ritual scholarship or on its connection to the later Neo-Confucianism. Ironically, the T'ang dynasty, despite its decline in mid-course, was most noted for Confucian statecraft and splendid civil and military accomplishments. It produced one of China's most enlightened monarchs (Emperor T'ang T'si-tsung), several other capable rulers and many competent ministers. Its government was imitated by Japan and other neighboring states. Its culture has elicited admiration not only from its neighboring people but also modern Chinese. It expanded its territory and was the most prosperous and advanced country in the world during its heyday. The political ideas behind the T'ang statecraft, however, have remained unexplored.

Studying the political ideas of Yüan Chen (779-831 A.D.), a prominent literatus and Confucian who was active in contemporary intellectual circles and deeply involved in top administrative decisions publicly and privately with the emperor, this paper explores T'ang Confucian statecraft (political ideas on governance). Focusing upon Yüan's ideas on Heaven, the ideal ruler, the ideal government and administration, this paper discovers that T'ang Confucian political thought was a synthesis of different schools of ideas with the *Taote ching*, occupying an especially crucial position. The popularity of the *Taote ching* in the preceding age and the T'ang imperial promotion of this classic, enabled its ideas to penetrate the minds of officials and emperors. The open and tolerant

Taoist attitude enabled free adoption of ideas on politics and allowed a benevolent Confucian government to operate on a pragmatic scale. This study thus explores the interaction of ideologies prior to and during the T'ang dynasty. In the process this paper also explores the dynamic nature of the *Tao-te ching* and the influence of this short, evasive, and subtle classic on T'ang imperial governance.

Outline

I. Introduction
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I. Introduction

Confucianism, the prominent ideology in Chinese civilization, has received considerable scholarly attention. Extensive studies have revealed both the substance and significance of Confucian ritual (Ebrey, 1991a, 1991b; Wechsler, 1985; Chow, 1994), self-cultivation, holistic humanism (Tu, 1976, 1979, 1985, 1992; Yü, 1992; Fingarette, 1972; Eno, 1990; Munro, 1985), as well as of Confucian religious dimensions (Taylor, 1986; De Barry, 1991; Tu, 1989; Ching, 1977). Studies on Confucianism also have been divided by period with emphasis on the classical (Schwartz, 1985; Graham, 1989; Mote, 1989; Creel, 1949; Fingarette, 1972; Hall and Ames, 1987; Waley, 1938; Lau, 1970, 1979; Legge, 1982, 1984; De Bary, 1991), the Han (202 B. C.–A. D. 220) (eclectic Han Confucianism) (Loewe, 1986; Ch'en, 1986; Kramers, 1986; Som, 1949; Hung, 1989; Dubs, 1938; Bilsky, 1975), and the late imperial periods (Neo-Confucianism) (Tu, 1976, 1977, 1979, 1980; De Bary, 1953, 1959, 1975, 1981, 1989a, 1989b; Liu, 1988; Chow, 1994; Cheng, 1991; Ebrey, 1991a, 1991b). Recent attention has focused on modern East Asia, attributing the region's present economic development to certain Confucian values such as diligence, frugality, educational attainment, strong family ties, and a sense of responsibility for the group and the whole populace (Krieger, 1991; Tai, 1989; Fei, 1988; Cheng, 1988; Metzger, 1988). [1]

Until the last decade, however, T'ang Confucian thought has received little scholarly attention because the T'ang dynasty (618-907 A. D.) was considered by many to be the golden age of Buddhism, with no great Confucian thinkers and no elaborated Confucian philosophy (De Bary, 1960, 1: 370). T'ang Confucianism has been described as a stagnated ideology used in the bureaucracy and in the family (De Bary, 1960, 1: 369-370).[2] E. G. Pulleyblank first discerned vital and

versatile intellectual activities in the post-An-Shih Rebellions era during the mid-to-late T'ang dynasty (Pulleyblank, 1960: 77-114). Recently, studies have explored Confucian rituals, Confucian scholars, Confucian canonical studies, state schools and historiography in the early T'ang dynasty (Wechsler, 1985; McMullen, 1988, 1989; Twitchett, 1992). In searching for the roots of Neo-Confucianism, scholars have also examined the thought of several prominent mid-to-late T'ang literati—Han Yü (786-824), Liu Tsung-yüan (773-819) and Li Ao (774-836) (Barrett, 1992; Chen, 1987, 1992; Hartman, 1986; McMullen, 1989).

Ritual and canonical studies have been considered important components of early T'ang Confucianism. Howard Wechsler studied early T'ang Confucian rituals and how they were employed by the rulers to legitimize and consolidate their power (Wechsler, 1985). Denis Twitchett described in detail the T'ang official historiography, and David McMullen depicted the early T'ang court's emphasis on Confucian canonical studies (Twitchett, 1992; McMullen, 1988). He also observed a secular and practical attitude toward the state among individual scholars in the mid-to-late T'ang dynasty (McMullen, 1988: 58-66, 83-112, 194-205, 234-262).

Studies on mid-to-late T'ang literati, however, mostly were cast in the light of the Neo-Confucianism of the later Sung (960-1279) and Ming (1368-1644) dynasties. Charles Hartman portrayed Han Yü as a forerunner of Neo-Confucianism who engaged in a life-long effort to restore the political, cultural and religious unity of the T'ang dynasty, which was shattered by the An-Shih Rebellions (775-763) (Hartman, 1986: 3-15, 128-141). This view was challenged by David McMullen, who considered Han Yü inconsistent, diversified and at times conservative or even reactionary. According to McMullen, Han Yü was not an innovative thinker ushering in Neo-Confucianism because his thought did not have the interior contemplation typical of the Neo-Confucians. Rather, his

thought was influenced by his contemporary intellectual environment (McMullen, 1989: 603-657). McMullen, however, did not specify what contemporary political thought had influenced Han Yü. T. H. Barrett, meanwhile, also studied Li Ao's connection to Neo-Confucianism and concluded that he was a forerunner of it because he first expressed (in his essay, "Fu-hsin shu,") the concept of self-cultivation which became the salient feature of later Neo-Confucianism (Barrett, 1992: 26-27). In his study of Liu Tsung-yüan, J. S. Chen portrayed Liu as an original thinker who attempted to revive the ancient Confucian *tao*—the *tao* of the sage rulers, Yao, Shun and Yü (J. S. Chen, 1992: 86). Peter Bol then studied the cultural transition from a literary view of culture to one that focused on interior ethical norms, with the T'ang and the Sung dynasties serving as the turning point (Bol, 1992: 1-23).

While these studies improve our understanding of the T'ang intellectual world, none has explored the Confucian political thought behind T'ang governance and administration. Most of the figures studied, such as Han Yü, Li Ao and Liu Tsung-yüan, were perceived as innovators or pioneers of future thought who exercised little influence in their own time. Timothy Barrett, for example, states that Han Yü's anti-Buddhism and his Confucian orthodoxy, along with Li Ao's concept of the inner self, were not shared by their contemporaries (Barrett, 1992: 21-32).

Contemporary T'ang political ideas, however, are relevant to understanding not only T'ang government but also traditional Chinese government. While the T'ang dynasty has been considered weak in Confucian political ideology, ironically it also has been most noted for the Confucian-like statecraft that produced splendid civil and military accomplishments. For example, the second T'ang emperor, T'ai-tsung (r. 626-649), was considered to be one of the most enlightened and accomplished monarchs in Chinese history, exemplifying the ideal Confucian

ruler. He and his many famous ministers created both domestic prosperity and foreign glory. The emperor was accepted as the universal ruler of the neighboring nomadic states when they presented him with the title, "Heavenly Khan." (Wechsler, 1974: 1-2, 101-105; 1979: 203-209, 219-235).

The dynasty also produced several other capable rulers and many outstanding ministers. Rulers such as Emperors Hsüan-tsung (r. 712-56) (at least during the first half of his reign), Te- tsung (r. 779-805) and Hsien-tsung (r. 805-20) all were noted for their ability (Twitchett, 1979: 333-463; Peterson, 1979: 464-537; Dalby, 1979: 561-634). T'ang political thought on governance, therefore, was far more vital and significant than has been realized.

To understand contemporary T'ang Confucian political thought, it is necessary to ponder the ideas of a scholar-official noted not for having extraordinary ideas but for being an active member of the contemporary intellectual world. Yüan Chen (779-831) is an ideal choice. Yüan Chen's political views were apparently admired by high officials in the government because he was chosen as a first-place candidate in Emperor Hsien-tsung's palace examination in 806 (Liu Hsün, 1975: 166: 4327; Ou-yang Hsiu, 1975: 174: 5223; Po Chü-i, 1979: 62: 1287; Hwa, 1984: 48). He also was active in the intellectual world. Yüan corresponded with and befriended the best known literati of his time, including Po Chü-i (772-846), Liu Yü-hsi (772-842) and, to a lesser extent, Liu Tsung-yüan and Han Yü. He also was familiar with and valued contemporary political views. In 806, when he and his best friend Po Chü-i prepared for the palace examination, they sought sound contemporary political opinions which Po later compiled into a treatise, "Ts'e-lin" ("Forest of Essays") (Po Chü-i, 1979: 62: 1287). Yüan later compiled a similar work, *Yüanshih lei shu*, as a reference for the civil service examination. The popularity of Yüan's work indicates both the influence of his views

and their acceptance by the people of his time.

Yüan, in fact, was a trendsetter who attracted large numbers of followers and imitators. He was one of the advocates of the *hsin yüeh fu* movement, promoting the employment of poems to remonstrate the ruler and high officials on the political and social ills of his time (Hwa, 1984: 115-126). His innovative poetic style—the "tz'u-yün" style—was in vogue among literati. He and Po were the two most popular poets of his time (Hwa, 1984: 3; Palandri, 1977: preface; Waley, 1970: 5-24; Watson, 1971: 179-188). Yüan, consequently, was in the forefront of his time.

Gifted as a great poet, Yüan Chen nevertheless considered himself to be a Confucian scholar-official and was born into a family with strong Confucian tradition. Although a thirteenth-generation descendant of the non-Chinese T'o-pa Wei imperial family, Yüan's father Kuan was an ardent Confucian who compiled Confucian work to teach his children (Hwa, 1984: 9-12; Yüan Chen, 1982: 59: 616-619). Yüan's mother, Lady Cheng, came from the famous Yung-yang Cheng family of the Shan-tung clans, professed to be the guardians of Confucian tradition (Hwa, 1984: 12-13; Ch'en ,1977: 1: 220-239). Yüan himself once acknowledged that his nature was not close to Taoism (Yüan Chen, 1982: 30: 352). In addition, Yüan received the *mingching* degree from the examination on the Confucian classics. Consequently, he was familiar with the T'ang official interpretations of Confucian classics contained in the commentaries of the *wuching chengi* (*The True Meaning of the Five Classics*) which every candidate for the *mingching* examination was supposed to study. In this way Yüan's career and family background placed him in the tradition of T'ang Confucianism.

A T'ang Confucian who was an intellectual leader of his time, Yüan provides a valuable source for the study of T'ang Confucian political thought for still another important reason. Yüan was a statesman who

had occupied the most important decision-making positions in the central government—first remonstrator, then chief Han-lin scholar, (often the emperor's most trusted private advisor), and finally chief minister (Hwa, 1984: 136-142, 150-161). Therefore, Yüan's political thought, while illuminating T'ang Confucianism, contributes as well to our understanding of the nature and the success of T'ang administration.

As Peter Bol demonstrated, the mid-to-late T'ang intellectual movement affected both the literary and intellectual spheres (Bol, 1992: 1-6). Yüan, as a famous poet and chief minister, provides a most valuable study of T'ang political ideas. Moreover, since Yüan was an intellectual of the Post An-Shih Rebellion era, his political ideas also provide insights into the highly diversified intellectual climate of the mid-to-late T'ang period, which was a political, economic, social and intellectual watershed in Chinese history.

As a study of a practical political thinker and practitioner, this paper will focus on Yüan's political views on four topics: Heaven, the ideal ruler, the ideal government and administration. The concept of Heaven is being considered because it is closely linked to the image, power, and role of the ruler, who was the most important person in traditional imperial China. Views on the ideal government and administration tell us not only the ideological basis of the state, but also how that ideology was carried out. Because Confucianism was not the only ideology in the T'ang dynasty—the T'ang government was tolerant of and promoted other ideas, such as, Taoism —this study of T'ang Confucian political thought also examines the interactions of ideas prior to as well as during the T'ang dynasty. This study argues that while the T'ang government employed Confucian classics in the civil service examination,[3] the mainstream of T'ang Confucian political thought was syncretic, with Taoism occupying a crucial position.

Contrary to the conventional belief that Taoism remained chiefly

a philosophy for the artistic, physical and spiritual nourishment of the individual, Taoism, especially ideas from the *Taote ching*, exercised profound political influence. The popularity of the *Taote ching* since the Han dynasty had enabled several key Taoist concepts, such as the concept of Heaven, ideal government and the *tao*, to become accepted cultural values. Moreover, since the Warring States Period (403-221 B.C.), continuous efforts had been made to adapt ideas of the *Taote ching* to governance. The consequence was the redefining of several Taoist ideas by incorporating Confucian and Legalist elements. Therefore a syncretic political thought already had developed prior to the T'ang dynasty. The special T'ang political situation enhanced the popularity of the *Taote ching* and enabled the application of this syncretism to government.

To study Yüan Chen's political ideas, therefore, it is necessary to trace the evolution and interaction of ideas prior to the T'ang dynasty. It is also essential to study the ideas of Yüan's contemporaries.

II. The Issue of Heaven

Most T'ang scholar-officials accepted the Taoist concept of Heaven. This T'ang perception of Heaven was the consequence of long-term development in thought and politics.

The Chinese character "Heaven," or *tien*, which alternatively had meant the physical sky, a personified supreme deity, an impersonal cosmic force, a natural heaven, and a moral heaven (Feng, n.d: 55), had been closely associated with political authority, just as the deities or the supreme god in pre-democratic Western civilization had been. In justifying their political power, early Mesopotamian and Egyptian rulers developed theocracy, combining political might with religious authority. Even in medieval and early modern Europe, rulers sought religious sanction for their power from the Pope. The theory of divine kingship—that

kings received their authority to rule from God and were responsible to him alone—flourished from the sixteenth–to early eighteenth-century Europe. It is difficult for one person or one lineage to maintain supreme political power against challengers by sheer physical strength or military force alone. Therefore the sanction of a supreme authority on the ruler became necessary to retain political control in pre-democratic society. Traditional Chinese rulers also functioned this way, although the forms of sanction varied, being conditioned by the special characteristics of early Chinese civilization and contemporary social and political developments.

In traditional Chinese politics, divine sanction was always linked in one form or another to a supreme deity or "Heaven." Because early political authority developed from family to state, the Chinese political sanction bore peculiar family-state characteristics (Keightley, 1990: 15-54; Chang, 1980: 210-219). In the earliest known historical dynasty, the Shang dynasty, the sanction came from the king's ancestors in the form of ancestor worship; the king consulted the ancestors in every matter of perceived importance. The Shang kings were also priests, and deceased kings were gods to be worshiped. Moreover, the supreme deity, Shang-ti, once might have been a progenitor of the Shang royal family; the Shang dynasty thus was a form of theocracy (Keightley, 1990: 22-46; Chang, 1980: 158-188, 202-219).[4]

Following this political-religious tradition, the early rulers of the Chou dynasty claimed to receive their Mandate from "*tien*" ("Heaven"), a supreme deity of the Chou time and probably a royal ancestor; each proclaimed himself to be the Son of Heaven. As the Confucian classic the *Book of Poetry* states, "August was King Wen, Continuously bright and reverent. Great, indeed, was the appointment of Heaven. There were Shang's grandsons and sons, Shang's grandsons and sons; Was their number not a hundred thousand? But the Lord-on-High gave his com-

mand (to Chou) and they bowed down to Chou." (De Bary, 1960: 1: 1). Again it states:

> Heaven produces the teeming multitude ···;
> Heaven, looking down upon the house of Chou,
> See that its light reaches the people below,
> And to protect the Son of Heaven,
> Gave birth to Chung Shan-fu (to help him) (Chan, 1963: 5).

The divine sanction of the Chou rulers was different from that of the Shang kings in two respects. First, while "Heaven" in early Chou was a personified supreme deity, it was not conceived of as interfering with actual affairs of state as it was by the Shang ancestors or Shang-ti. Second, although the kings of the Chou dynasty maintained the familia-state pattern and claimed to be Sons of Heaven, their divine sanction was conditioned by the virtue and accomplishments of the monarch rather than by the family line. As the *Book of History* states:

> They (descendants of Yin) became subject to Chou
> Heaven's Mandate is not constant···
> Don't you mind your ancestors!
> Cultivate your virtue. Always strive to be in harmony with Heaven's Mandate.
> Seek for yourself the many blessings . . . .
> In Yin you see as a mirror
> That the Great mandate is not easy (to keep) (Chan, 1963: 7).

Because of its emphasis on merits and virtue rather than family line, the Chou theory of the Mandate of Heaven provided the ground for the justification of any new dynasty that successfully controlled the country. All later emperors claimed to receive divine mandate to rule and each claimed to be the Son of Heaven. As the Mandate of Heaven was linked

to the personal virtue and merits of the emperor, it also became closely linked to Confucianism.

The concept of a willed Heaven long has existed in classical Confucian thought. Confucius, an admirer of the early Chou socio-political system, spoke of a personified "Heaven" (Graham, 1989: 17; Feng, n.d.: 82-83) who was purposive and the master of all things (Chan, 1963: 16). When Confucius was under siege in K'uang, he said, "If Heaven does not intend this culture to be destroyed, then what can the men of K'uang do to me?" (Lau, 1979: 96). One also finds such personification of Heaven in *The Analects*: "The kingdom has long been without the principles of truth and right; Heaven is going to use your master (Confucius) as a bell with its wooden tongue." (Legge, 1975: 164). Confucius' famous statement "while respecting [deities and] spiritual beings, to keep aloof from them,"only indicated his preference to avoid the issue of the deities and spirits; it did not deny their existence (Legge, 1975: 191; Eno, 1990: 99-130). Another prominent classical Confucian, Mencius, was very convinced of a personified Heaven. He stated that the sage king, Yao, could not yield the empire to Shun because an emperor could not give away an empire, only the Heaven could (Lau, 1970: 142-144). Mencius, known for his concern for the people, then tied the Mandate of Heaven to the people when he quoted from the *Book of History*, "Heaven sees with the eyes of its people. Heaven hears with the ears of its people." (Lau, 1970: 144).

This divine Heaven also frequently appears in other Confucian classics, such as *The Book of Poetry*, *Tsochuan*, and *Chunchiu*. (See *The Book of Poetry*, *Tsochuan*, & *Chunchiu*; Fu, 1977: 73-94). This early Confucian tradition of Heaven made it possible for later Confucians to incorporate the theory of the Mandate of Heaven into Confucian philosophy.

During the Han dynasty, Tung Chung-shu (c. 179-104 B.C.) linked

Confucianism to imperial rulers, making Confucianism a state ideology and the Mandate of Heaven a Confucian concept (De Bary, 1960: 162-165). In developing an ideology for the new imperial government, Tung incorporated the yin-yang theory and other philosophical elements into Confucianism and related the natural world to politics. Natural phenomena were linked to the Mandate of Heaven as a revelation of Heaven's will. Believing in an orderly natural world where things were related to and activated each other, Tung proposed the correspondence of men and nature, and considered portents and omens warnings from Heaven for the errors of the rulers (Loewe, 1986b: 733-739; Lo, 1978: 167-199; Wei, 1986: 65-100; Li, 1978: 61-92; De Bary, 1960: 162-169; Hu, 1971: 92-116; Feng, n.d.: 491-545; Feng, 1990: 32-48; Chang, 1990: 100-118). Tung was not the first Confucian to explore this theme of omens. The ideas of portents and omens were already in the Confucian classic, *The Doctrine of the Mean*, which states, "When a nation or family is about to flourish, there are sure to be lucky omens; When a nation or family is about to perish, there are sure to be unlucky omens" (Chan, 1963: 246).[5] As these omens only could be interpreted by Confucian scholars during the Han dynasty, the theory on portents which supported a ruler's mandate also restrained the ruler. Eventually, this theory of the correlative cosmology disintegrated, and apocryphal books were discarded for their runaway superstitions. Ultimately, these political superstitions were blamed for the decline of the Han dynasty (Hu, 1971: 117-201; Lo, 1978: 252-273; Feng, n.d.: 546-601; Loewe, 1986a: 683-702; Kramers, 1986: 747-755). The theory of the Mandate of Heaven, however, remained attached to Confucianism. Emperors of later dynasties continued to employ portents and omens to justify their rise to power, especially in the beginning of a new dynasty.

The T'ang dynasty experienced a paradoxical development of this Confucian concept of the Mandate of Heaven. On one hand, the court

exerted great effort to develop and improve state rituals to Heaven to legitimize authority of the emperor and the dynasty (Wechsler, 1985: 78-141). On the other hand, both emperors and officials in the early T'ang dynasty denounced portents and insisted on human accomplishments as the basis for the affairs of state (Wechsler, 1974: 80-81; Wang P'u, 1968: 28: 531-32; Wu Ching, 10: 39).

The early T'ang rulers were concerned especially with rituals concerning Heaven. Besides the regular sacrifices to Heaven which were performed according to the Han ritual texts with T'ang modifications, Emperor T'ai-tsung, Emperor Kao-tsung (r. 649-83) and Empress Wu (r. 684-705) also ordered the composition of the rituals of the special *fengshan* and *mingtang* ceremonies (Wechsler, 1985: 37-54, 176-89, 1979: 242-289). The former, a sacred ritual performed on Mount T'ai in Shantung, and the latter, an ancient state ritual, were to announce to Heaven the great prosperity and success of the dynasty. They were the most sacred sacrifices that a sovereignty offered to Heaven because they were the report of great success (Wechsler, 1985: 170-72). They therefore made the strongest claim of legitimation for the emperors (McMullen ,1988: 125-130). During the T'ang dynasty, Emperor Kao-tsung, Emperor Hsüan- tsung (r. 712-56) and Empress Wu all performed the *feng shan* ceremony, and Empress Wu also conducted the *mingtang* ceremony (Liu Hsün, 1975: 22: 862-872; Wang P'u, 1968: 7: 79-123; Wechsler, 1985: 167-189, 170, 192, 194; Guisso, 1979: 290-332). As a new dynasty, early T'ang rulers (especially Empress Wu, who usurped the throne and established a dynasty of her own) had a special need to legitimize their position.[6] The emphasis on canonical studies, the compilation of the history of the previous dynasties, and, above all, the composition and performance of the state ritual to Heaven were important steps toward legitimizing the new dynasty and reinforcing the dignity and prestige of the emperors (McMullen, 1988: 116).[7]

This need for legitimacy was reinforced by the ritual expertise of the T'ang officials. Many early T'ang court officials were descendants of the aristocratic families from East of the Mountain (*shantung*), or of Confucius and his favorite disciple, Yen Hui.[8] These families professed to be the guardians of Confucian tradition, especially of rituals (li) which were essential components of Confucianism and rules observed by prominent families (Ch'en, 1977: 1: 3-58, 220-223; Ebrey, 1978: 15-86; McMullen, 1988: 5-6; Bol, 1992: 6-18). These scholar- officials' emphasis on and expertise in ritual increased the early T'ang court's ritual scholarship, which resulted in two significant ritual texts: the *Chenkuan li* and the *Kaiyüan li* (Wang P'u, 1968: 36: 659-660; Wechsler, 1985: 40-45; 117-122). This combination of the imperial need for legitimacy and the ritual expertise of T'ang officials strengthened the development of the state cult of Heaven in the early T'ang dynasty.

Paradoxically, while both emperor and officials were convinced of the necessity of performing sacrifice to Heaven and took great pride in the participation of the ceremonies (Wechsler, 1985: 170-194), they nevertheless conceived the affairs of the state in terms of human efforts. Many were especially critical of the prognostication and apocrypha of the Han Confucianism, denouncing its correlative cosmology and disavowing portents as the indication of Heaven's will. Emperor T'ai-tsung, for example, discouraged officials' presentation of lucky omens and issued an edict announcing the irrelevance of omens to governance. He reasoned that peace and peril stemmed from a person's own actions, and fortune and calamity rested upon the act of the government (Wechsler, 1974: 81; 1985: 60, 75; Ssu-ma Kuang, 1972: 6056-6057; Wu Ching, 10: 39). The emperor had political reasons to discourage the correlative thinking: his own family claimed its legitimacy on the appearance of auspicious omens (Wen, 1: 6-12; Wechsler 1974: 14). Consequently he denounced the validity of omens to prevent potential power challenges. Moreover,

he also could prevent the officials' use of omens to restrain imperial authority, as was done in the Han dynasty.

The emperor's views were shared by other early T'ang Confucians. K'ung Ying-ta, for example, in compiling sub-commentaries for the Confucian classics, *Wu ching chengi*, attacked the Han prognostication tradition as shallow and unreliable (Wei Cheng, 1973: 32: 940-41; *Shu chu shu*, preface 2a, 8-14b). Lü Ts'ai, an official erudite at the court of T'ai-tsung, repudiated contemporary superstitions when he compiled the *Yinyang shu* (*Book on the Yin and Yang*) for the court (Wang P'u, 1968: 36: 651-656). This preference for reason over the supernatural gained momentum after the An-Shih rebellions.

In the post-Rebellions era of the early ninth century, the critique of political superstition not only intensified, but a debate also took place on the nature of Heaven and its relationship to humans. Liu Tsung-yüan wrote a long essay criticizing the *Kuoyü* (*Conversation of the State*), especially concerning its reference to omens and divine intervention (Liu Tsung-yüan, 1979: 44: 1265-1297, 45: 1299-1328). This book, written in about the fourth century B. C., was attributed to the author of the Confucian classic, the *Tsochuan*, and is a Confucian book. Moreover, Liu also criticized ideas in the treatise "Yüeh ling" ("Monthly Commands") from the Confucian ritual classic the *Li chi*, denouncing the practice of corresponding government actions to seasons (Liu Tsung-yüan, 1979: 3: 84-89). Liu's criticisms were in what Chen Jo-shui called the attack on the "Confucian mythology" in order to redefine Confucianism (Chen, 1992: 99-103, 116). The T'ang intellectual world, however, was versatile, and Liu's criticism indicated the existence of political superstition (McMullen, 1988: 72-82; Barrett, 1992: 14, 22). Moreover, superstitions did exist in T'ang popular belief just as in the popular beliefs of other dynasties.[9] Liu Tsung-yüan's opinions on divine intervention eventually led to a debate on Heaven in the early ninth century.

In a response to Han Yü's statement that Heaven had a will and would reward the good and punish the evil, Liu Tsung-yüan proclaimed that Heaven was part of natural phenomena, such as grass and fruit; it had no will and could not interfere in human affairs (Liu Tsung-yüan, 1979: 16: 441-443). His contemporary Liu Yü-hsi (772-842) supported his argument by explaining that every object had within itself a rule or pattern of actions. When two objects interacted, they also followed a fixed rule. Because some of these rules were difficult to perceive, people attributed the unknown to Heaven, claiming it punished or rewarded people (Liu Yü-hsi, 1975: 51-54). In Liu Tsung-yüan's and Liu Yü-hsi's views, Heaven only was different from grass or fruit in that it was gigantic in size (Liu Tsung-yüan, 1979: 16: 442-443). In other words, Liu Tsung-yüan perceived a natural Heaven which, unlike the Heaven of the Neo-Confucians of the later period, had no connection to moral or human affairs (Chen, 1992: 109-118). Because of his naturalistic notion of Heaven, Liu Tsung-yüan questioned the validity of sacrifice to Heaven, which he believed was irrelevant to real-life problems (Chen, 1992: 114-115).

Liu Tsung-yüan's view of Heaven was indeed radical because it repudiated the concept of the Mandate of Heaven. Eventually it led him to question the nature of the state and rulership. However, it was also a logical development of the views of Emperor T'ai-tsung and his officials when they denounced the relevance of omens to politics. Were the ideas of Liu Tsung-yüan and Liu Yü-hsi extraordinary, or did they represent the ideas of most of their contemporaries? What were his contemporaries' views on this issue of Heaven, and what were the factors that shaped those views? A study of Liu Tsung-yüan's contemporary, Yüan Chen, provides some answers.

Like Liu Tsung-Yüan, Yüan Chen did not believe Heaven was supernatural or that it affected human lives. While acknowledging the

function of Heaven in the natural world, he completely detached Heaven from human affairs. He maintained that Heaven did not reward the good nor punish the evil. Instead, it was humans who established morality and laid down solid foundations for the government and society.

Yüan Chen did not participate in the debate on the issue of Heaven, but expressed his ideas on Heaven in a *yüehfu* poem, "The Way of Heaven is Feeble." Yüan credited Heaven with two functions: first, the revolving of the day and night and the four seasons, and, second, the endowment of life to both plants and animals (23: 263). However, this Heaven was amoral. Yüan explained this from the reigns of the natural, the animal and the human worlds. In the natural world thunder, storms, and torrential rain often overshadowed the sun and good weather. In the animal kingdom the kind and the gentle often fell prey to the fierce, such as wolves, leopards, giant snakes, or even mosquitos and stinging bugs (23: 263-264). In human society sage rulers such as Yao and Shun could not perpetuate their lives, and sages like Confucius and Lao Tzu could not find employment. Yet notorious usurpers such as Wang Mang (d. A. D. 23), Tung Cho (d. 192 B. C.) and the tyrant Ch'in Shih-huang-ti (r. 247-210 B. C.) enjoyed decades of wealth and prosperity. Yüan contended that these happenings proved that Heaven did not interfere in human and natural worlds (23: 263-264).

Yüan argued that worldly accomplishments were the results of human efforts. Humans mixed flour to make pastry and noodles for sacrifice and food. Humans such as Confucius, Lao Tzu, and the Duke of Chou either bestowed works of great monument or laid down systems of government for posterity. Consequently, Yüan concluded that the way of Heaven was feeble and the way of the human was strong and he urged people to concentrate solely on the affairs of humans (23: 264).

Yüan's concept of Heaven was similar to the idea of the natural Heaven in the *Taote ching*. In the *Taote ching*, *tao* was the creator of

the multitude. The concept of Heaven was ambiguous, but both the *tao* and Heaven did not interfere in the operation of the animal and human world. The *Tao-te ching* states:

> The great *tao* flows everywhere· · · ,
> All things depend on it for life· · · ,
> It accomplishes its task, but does not claim credit for it· · · ,
> All things come to it and it does not master them (Chan, 1963: 157).

Again it states "Heaven and earth are not humane (*jen*); They regard all things as straw dogs." (Chan, 1963: 141).

Not only were Yüan Chen's ideas close to the *Tao-te ching*, but he also apparently held great respect for Lao Tzu, whom he referred to as the sage and mentioned twice in his short poem. Yüan placed the name Lao Tzu second only to Confucius (23: 263). In addition, a careful study of ideas in "Ts'e-lin," prepared by both Yüan Chen and Po Chü-i, reveals strong influence from the *Tao-te ching* (Po Chü-i, 1979: 62-65: 1287-1377).

This apparent influence of the *Tao-te ching* on Yüan's ideas was not a special personal preference, but a reflection of a prevailing intellectual trends during the T'ang dynasty. Taoism, especially *the Tao-te ching*, was extremely influential during the T'ang dynasty. Barrett, McMullen, and Jo-shui Chen have all stated that during the T'ang dynasty intellectuals turned to Taoism or Buddhism for philosophical or ultimate values (McMullen, 1988:82; Barrett, 1992:82; Chen, 1992:87). Jo-shui Chen further stated that in early T'ang, when mentioning *Tao*, Confucian classicists adopted the Taoist definition. Moreover, although he argued that Liu Tsung-yüan was in the mainstream of Confucianism, Chen also acknowledged that Liu Tsung-yüan was influenced by Lao Tzu's ideas on modesty and submissiveness, and that Liu once said,

"there were no basic differences between Confucianism and the thought of Lao Tzu." (1992: 87, 170-171). Likewise, Ch'en Yin-k'o contended that although Po Chü-i claimed to believe in Buddhism, his ideas were Taoist in essence, embracing especially the concept of "being contented" from the *Tao-te ching* (Ch'en, 1975: 327). Although Ch'en's views were challenged by Lo Lien-t'ien, who contended that Po Chü-i was influenced more by Chan Buddhism than by Taoism, (1992: 407-463) it should be noted that Chan Buddhism was sinicized with especially strong Taoist influence. Similarly, while Yüan claimed to be a Confucian who by nature was not close to Taoism, he too was unconsciously adopting ideas from the *Tao-te ching*, which had permeated the thought of the T'ang intellectual world.

The strong influence of the *Tao-te ching* on the T'ang intellectual world was the consequence of both the long-term development and the conscious promotion of the T'ang emperors. Ideas from Lao Tzu had been in vogue since the early Han dynasty. The government of Emperors Wen (180-157 B. C.) and Ching (157-141 B. C.) of the Han dynasty was administered under the guiding principles of Huang-Lao, attributing these principles to the ideas of Lao Tzu and the mythological ruler Huang ti. The later establishment of Confucianism as the state orthodoxy during the reign of Emperor Wu (141-87 B. C.) did not eliminate Taoist influence, especially since Han Confucianism was a syncretism (Chan, 1963: 289; Hu, 1971: 86-166; De Bary, 1960: 146- 148). Even during the reign of Emperor Wu, Taoist ideas could be discerned in the writings of Ssu-ma Ch'ien (*Shih-chi*) and Tung Chung-shu (Ssu-ma ch'ien, 1972: 63: 2139-2143; Yü M. K., 1992: 209-222).

When Confucianism declined along with the fall of the Han dynasty, Taoism emerged. Consequently, during the Period of Division (316-589), intellectuals pursued Taoism with great vigor and developed a new form of philosophical inquiry—the *hsüan-hsüeh*—that focused on the discus-

sion of the *Tao-te Ching*, the *Chuang-Tzu*, (another Taoist classic), and *The Book of Change*, (a Confucian classic that deals with divination, cosmology and the concept of change) (Lo, 1989: 91-119). Taoism was the dominant intellectual concern throughout the Period of Division in philosophy, religion, personal nourishment and hygiene, and arts and literature (Hsiao, 1977: 364-365; Feng, n.d.: 602-660). The popularity of Taoism and especially the *Tao-te ching* carried into the T'ang dynasty. In early T'ang, for example, both Emperor T'ai-tsung and his officials (such as Wei Cheng) held Taoist concepts as shown by their political discussions recorded in the *Chen-kuan cheng-yao* (Wu Ching, *CKCY*; Hwa, paper manuscript on *CKCY*; Ch'ing, 1980: 304-335; Huang, 1991: 269-349).

This historical development of the Taoist influence was further strengthened by the conscious promotion of the T'ang emperors. The T'ang emperors, in an attempt to exalt imperial prestige above their aristocratic bureaucrats who came from lineages of conspicuous pedigree, traced their ancestors to Lao Tzu, the alleged author of the *Tao-te ching* (Sung Min-ch'iu, 1972: 78: 442-443; Twitchett, 1973: 62-66; Ch'en, 1977: 1: 220-223). Lao Tzu supposedly shared the same last name (Li) as the imperial T'ang emperors and was most revered because of the extraordinary popularity of his book in the precedent ages. T'ang emperors honored Lao Tzu with an imperial title and, especially in early T'ang, ranked Taoist priests above Confucians and Buddhists when the three schools engaged in debates at court (Sung Min-ch'iu, 1972: 78: 442-443; Lo, 1955: 159-161). In addition, the *Tao-te ching* was also employed as a civil service examination test for sixty-six years (Wang P'u, 1968: 50: 865; Huang, 1991: 354-358; Hwa, 1992). Just as Confucianism was confirmed as state orthodoxy when Confucian classics were tested in civil service examinations for the selection of officials, so were the *Tao-te ching's* ideas when they became an examination subject. The promotion of Taoism reached

its peak during the reign of Emperor Hsüan-tsung (r. 712-56) in mid-T'ang. In order to restore the prestige of the imperial T'ang house after the usurpation of Empress Wu, who used Buddhism to legitimize her rule, Emperor Hsüan-tsung promoted the Taoist religion and the classic the *Tao-te ching* (Barrett, 1992: 16-17). He personally wrote a commentary on the *Tao-te ching* and ordered every household to store a copy of it. He proclaimed that the *Tao-te ching* was suitable for governance.[10] Strong imperial patronage and the popularity of the *Tao-te ching* since the Han dynasty made ideas from the *Tao-te ching* conventional beliefs during the T'ang dynasty. Although scholars considered themselves Confucians rather than Taoists, and although the government upheld the Confucian ideas of a government of benevolence for the people, the Confucian ideas of benevolence and morality were not mentioned very often. When referred to at all, they were usually embroiled in practical administrative measures or in conjunction with Taoist ideas. In the *Chen-kuan cheng-yao*, for example, there are four short entrances under the section "Benevolence and righteousness," and they contain a strong pragmatic overtone with Taoist reference.[11] Taoist ideas permeated T'ang culture and were unconsciously absorbed by T'ang intellectuals. Even the post-Rebellion intellectuals employed Taoist concepts in their reinterpretation of Confucianism. As Barrett has indicated in his study of Li Ao's *Fu-hsing shu*, the term *fu-hsing* was of Taoist rather than Confucian origin (Barrett, 1992: 26-27). Consequently, Taoist ideas exercised a stronger influence on T'ang culture than has been realized.[12]

This strong influence of Taoism suggests the need to reexamine the nature of Buddhist influence on T'ang society. The T'ang dynasty was indeed a "Buddhist age," with the development of many new Buddhist schools and a large number of believers and sympathizers. However, the central Buddhist concept of quietude and the elimination of worldly concerns was not visible in T'ang culture, which valued merits, accom-

plishments, worldly success, and profit. Fu Lo-cheng, for example, wrote extensively about the T'ang search for fame and success (Fu, 1977: 117-119). In his study of Buddhist education, Eric Zurcher admits that the "Indian cosmology was not absorbed" and that "in regard to the state and ideology, Buddhism remained marginal" (Zurcher, 1989: 23). The reason for this was that T'ang Buddhism was sinicized.

Several factors contributed to this development. First, the T'ang Buddhists lost their ideological resources when Buddhism in India was absorbed by Hinduism. To develop their own ideas, the Chinese naturally drew from their own familiar environment. Second, there was a steady development of sinicizing Buddhism, especially from the sixth century on, when the number of monks from socially prestigious families rapidly increased (Zurcher, 1989: 23-26; Ch'en, 1964: 57-212). These *sangha*, while helping spread Buddhism, also changed the nature of it; they brought to the monasteries their family cultural heritage, fine literary culture and literati social circle. Third, the pace of sinicization of Buddhism accelerated during the T'ang dynasty.[13] The T'ang emperors periodically held debates among Confucians, Taoists and Buddhist monks at court with the intention of harmonizing the three teachings (Lo, 1955: 159-176). Prominent Buddhist monks, therefore, had to know the Confucian and Taoist ideas very well to participate in these debates. Sangha not only learned Confucian texts but also taught them in some monasteries. Zurcher suggests that the study of Confucian texts in the monasteries can be traced back to the fourth century (Zurcher, 1989: 35-36). He also has demonstrated that in the late T'ang dynasty, Buddhist monasteries in the Tun-huang area offered secular elementary education to local students; the texts included not only the premier "Thousand character classic," but also the Confucian classics the *Analects*, *The Classic of Filial Piety*, *The Book of Poetry*, and *The Book of History*. He suggested that this educational role might spread to other regions as

well (Zurcher 1989:39-50). Chinese sangha therefore assisted in promoting Confucian and secular values. Finally, in conjunction with the above developments, monasteries during the T'ang dynasty became the centers of scholarship that attracted literati of different beliefs to their temples. Yü Ying-shih compared the importance of T'ang monasteries to the Sung private academies, and Yen Keng-wang listed some 200 literati who studied in the monasteries who later became prominent poets or government officials (Yü, 1992: 300-301; Yen, 1992b: 1-58). Almost all T'ang poets and prose writers befriended or at least visited with monks; this association is presented in the *Completed T'ang Poems* and the *Completed T'ang Prose*. Even the anti- Buddhist Han Yü and Li Ao associated themselves with monks and Yüan Chen also exchanged several poems with monks (Lo, 1955: 173-193; Hartman, 1986: 93-104; Yüan Chen, 1982: 14: 159, 16: 186-187). During the T'ang dynasty, the Buddhist monks were among the best educated people because, as discussed before, many were recruited from prestigious families. Moreover, the government, in its attempt to control and regulate religion, imposed clerical exams testing literary proficiency, thus elevating the literary quality of sangha and facilitating their participation in the contemporary literary world (Zurcher, 1989: 27-28; Weinstein, 1987: 3-59).

These developments softened the influence of Indian ideology on T'ang Buddhism. Consequently, the Buddhist concepts of karma, reincarnation, compassion and ritual acquired popularity during the T'ang dynasty, but T'ang Buddhism did not minimize the Confucian worldly emphasis on merits, accomplishments and success (Fu, 1977: 117-142).

In addition, while many Buddhist monks absorbed the Indian ideology, more Chinese literati apparently appreciated Buddhism in a Taoist context. Buddhist ideas have always been closely linked to Taoism in China. When Buddhism was first introduced to China, it was understood through the concepts and terms of Taoism rather than through

Indian ideas. Moreover, Ch'en Yin-k'o had already noticed that while Po Chü-i claimed to be attracted by Buddhist ideas and befriended Buddhist monks, his central concept was Taoist. Similarly, Liu Tsung-yüan revealed his strong Taoist sentiment in explaining why he was attracted to Buddhism and associated with monks: "The Buddhists do not love official appointments, do not compete for their talents, but enjoy mountains and rivers and love peace and leisure. I am tired of the strife and conflicts among people. For these reasons I associate with the monks" (Liu Tsung-yüan, 1979: 25: 673-674) This passage echoes the Taoist ideas of contentment and love of nature that are clearly reflected in many of Liu's essays on nature. As to the central Buddhist idea of detachment from this world in the pursuit of a monastic life, Liu shared Han Yü's opposition on the ground that it was at the expense of family and farming (Liu Tsung-yüan, 1979: 25: 674).

As a practical people who valued worldly affairs, the T'ang Chinese could not really embrace the other worldly concepts of Buddhism. A significant component of Taoism is a philosophy of retreat in times of trouble; in this regard, it bears similarity to Buddhism, but Taoism still treasures this world and is ready to return to worldly affairs and adapt to circumstances. The development of Zen Buddhism was the best testimony to the strong influence of Taoist ideas, especially ideas from the *Tao-te ching* on T'ang Buddhism. It also reveals both the extent and limitation of Buddhist influence on T'ang culture. Therefore, Taoist ideas were at least compatible with, if not more influential than, those of Buddhism on T'ang China.

Since ideas from the *Tao-te ching* were major cultural values in the T'ang dynasty, it is not surprising that Yüan Chen, Liu Tsung-yüan and Liu Yü-hsi adopted the naturalistic notion of Heaven from the *Tao-te ching*.

The adoption of the Taoist naturalist notion of Heaven had profound

political rather than metaphysical impact on T'ang. Because Heaven was irrelevant to human affairs, people needed to focus on their own business to improve their lot. This was why Yüan Chen argued that humans were able to improve their own lives, benefit others, and establish accomplishments. Consequently, he urged them to concentrate on human affairs. The repudiation of the purposeful Heaven thus promoted humanism—one manifestation of which was the reforming mood and grave concern for social problems during the post-755 era. This push for reform was not just a response to the deteriorating situation following the An-Shih rebellions. Rebellions and dynastic decline do not necessarily promote reforms; the fall of the Han dynasty only sent intellectuals to the study of Taoist metaphysics in the form of "Pure-talk," not reforms (Kuang, 1979: 269-284; Lo, 1989: 91-148; Feng, n.d.: 602-660; Lü, 1977a II: 1371-1394; Hu, 1971: 228-242).The creative and innovative ferment of the post-755 age were inspired both by the humanism and the T'ang tolerant intellectual climate. Although the An-Shih rebellions were a catalyst, the seeds of change were planted when T'ang intellectuals adopted the Taoist concept of a natural Heaven.[14]

The repudiation of the Confucian purposeful Heaven also had a profound influence on the image of rulers. A purposeful Heaven justified the Mandate of Heaven. As Heaven became irrelevant to human affairs, a logical development was to speculate about the role of the ruler and the origins of the state. Therefore, Liu Tsung-yüan, advanced in thought for his time, pondered the questions of the origin of the state and the role of the ruler. In his essay, "Discourse on Feudalism," Liu maintained that rulers were chosen because they could settle conflicts between groups, winning the support of others because of their virtues. Those with virtue could have their descendants succeed them (3: 69-77). With this explanation Liu Tsung- yüan completely negated the notion of divine sanction and focused on the ruler's personal virtue and merits.

T'ang emperors exalted Lao Tzu and his book, the *Tao-te ching*, to enhance imperial prestige in order to consolidate their position; paradoxically, its success undermined the very foundation they wanted to strengthen and projected a new image of rulership. Yüan Chen's concept of an ideal ruler was the next subject of inquiry.

III. Rulership

The Chinese ruler was the center of imperial government; his power and role dictated the course of the government. Understanding the perception of rulers is important for understanding the nature of government and politics.

T'ang concepts of rulers and their relationship to officials were the consequences of both the accumulative developments of the previous ages and the specific socio-political environment of the T'ang dynasty. Therefore, before discussing Yüan Chen's ideas, it is necessary to trace the evolution of the concept of the emperor.

The power, role and legitimacy of the ruler received grave attention even in the pre-imperial time. As discussed earlier, both the Shang and Chou rulers employed religious sanction to justify their positions. The Shang dynasty was a religio-familio state with the ruler also the head of the patriarchal family, and their ancestors provided the divine sanction of legitimation (Keightley, 1990: 31-32). The Chou dynasty inherited this familio-religious structure but employed the concept of The Mandate of Heaven to justify their replacement of the Shang.[15] This theory of legitimation was adopted by all later emperors because of its flexibility and political convenience. Each emperor performed sacrifices at a round altar of Heaven to confirm his legitimate position in public ritual.[16]

Because of the importance of the ruler's position, during the Eastern Chou dynasty philosophical schools in one form or another sought

to define the role of the ruler, as well as the relationship between the ruler and officials. Confucius, while supporting the Chou familio- feudal political structure, expected the ruler to be a moral exemplar and maintain a proper relationship with officials. Confucius said, "When a prince's personal conduct is correct, his government is effective without the issuing of orders. If his personal conduct is not correct, he may issue orders, but they will not be followed" (Legge, 1975: 266) The relationship between the ruler and his officials is described this way: "A Prince should employ his ministers according to the rules of propriety; ministers should serve their prince with faithfulness" (Legge, 1975: 161) The Confucian officials did not give personal loyalty to the ruler; rather, they were faithful to the right causes. Therefore Confucius told his disciples: "Make sure that you are not being dishonest with him when you stand up to him" (Lau, 1979: 128).

Another prominent classical Confucian, Mencius, also expected rulers to be courteous toward officials, but went further in placing people above the ruler: "The people are the most important element in a nation, the spirits of the land and grain are the next; the sovereign is the least important" (Legge, 1975: 483). He also perceived that the relationship between officials and ruler was conditional: "When the ruler regards his ministers as his hands and feet, the ministers regard their ruler as their heart and bowels. When the ruler regards his ministers as his dogs and horses, the ministers regard their ruler as a stranger. When the ruler regards his ministers as dust and grass, the ministers regard their ruler as a brigand or foe" (De Bary, 1960: 1: 96-97).

Mencius' arguments were revised by the rational classical Confucian Hsün Tzu, who exalted the position and power of the ruler. Hsün Tzu believed that conflicts among people due to their natural emotion and desires were inevitable; therefore, he regarded the ruler as the source of order, goodness and harmony. In order to carry out his mission ef-

fectively, the ruler should have absolute authority: "The Son of Heaven has the most lofty position; his authority is uncontestable" (*Hsün Tzu*, 84-104, 171-182; Knoblock, 1988: 11: 9: 85-112; 12:170-191). That is, "Only the sage (king) can make distinctions in the human world" (*Hsün Tzu*: 92).

Based on Hsün Tzu's conception of human nature as evil, the Legalist Han Fei Tzu promoted royal absolutism: the ruler was to employ rewards and punishments to control his officials and to regulate the populace with harsh but impartial laws. In his model, the ruler shared no power with officials but employed *shu* (devices) to prevent usurpation and encroachment (Shao, 1987: I: 184-186, II: 1845-846, 891-892). The Taoist philosopher Lao Tzu on the other hand, promoted a humble ruler who ruled by the principle of non-interference.

The creation of an imperial dynasty in 221 B. C. greatly enhanced the position and power of the ruler, who became the head of a vast, unified and centralized empire. To reflect this grandeur, the first emperor of China, Ch'in shih huang-ti, combined the words used for deities and mythological early rulers to form the title *huang-ti*, emperor. As a Legalist and a competent ruler, the first emperor attributed his accomplishments to his personal merits. Documents dated shortly after the founding of the Ch'in dynasty almost entirely credited the unification to the personal merits of the first emperor; there was no mention of Heaven (Loewe, 1986: 726-746). When the Han dynasty replaced the Ch'in and adopted Confucianism as the state orthodoxy, the position of the ruler was redefined to reflect contemporary thought and the greatness of the empire. The Chinese emperor was elevated to the reign of cosmos and became a universal ruler who was a link in the trinity of Heaven, Man and Earth. As the chief Han Confucian Tung Chung-shu stated, "Heaven, earth and man are the basis of all creatures. Heaven gives them birth, earth nourishes them and man brings them to the completion."[17] The

emperor was the bridge in this trinity: "Those who in ancient times invented writing drew three lines and connected them through the middle, calling the character "*wang*" ("king"). The three lines are Heaven, Earth and Man, and that which passes through the middle joins the principles of all three⋯. Thus the king is but the executor of Heaven. Heaven, earth and man are one" (De Bary, 1960: 163-165). The ruler's function was to coordinate and harmonize the three.[18] Probably because China had been an agricultural state which relied heavily on favorable natural conditions for good harvests to support the populace, Chinese rulers since the earliest times were regarded as coordinators between humans and nature. The Chinese ruler did not employ magic to coordinate the three spheres; he did it with his personal virtue. With a cultivation of virtue and good rule, the emperor was supposed to minimize natural disasters (Heaven), generate abundant harvest (Earth), and bring about a prosperous and harmonious human society (Man).

As discussed earlier, Tung Chung-shu used a correlative cosmology and Confucianism to both support and define the authority of the emperor. While the ruler was the recipient of the Mandate of Heaven, he was made to heed the natural phenomena which were expressions of warnings from Heaven. Moreover, while Confucianism strengthened the ruler's position by confirming his indispensable leadership in the Confucian hierarchy, it also placed restraints on him by insisting he be virtuous and concerned for the causes of the people. Tung's concept of a universal and cosmic ruler, alone with the rest of Confucian state ideology, were accepted by rulers of all later dynasties.

Subsequent Chinese emperors all claimed to be recipients of the Mandate and employed Confucianism as the state ideology. A new dynasty typically circulated tales of unusual natural phenomena to indicate a receipt of the Mandate from Heaven. Moreover, Confucianism exercised an increasingly prevalent influence in late imperial China. However,

thoughts about the ruler's authority, his relationship with officials and the nature of his reign and administration varied as a result of different political situations. With institutional changes and the rise of Neo-Confucianism, beginning with the Sung (960-1279) dynasty, for example, the emperor became increasingly authoritarian, reaching a climax in the Ming dynasty (1368-1644). Yet it was the T'ang emperors, not the Sung or Ming monarchs, who were commemorated for brilliant rule and successful reigns. What was the T'ang perception of an ideal ruler as perceived by Yüan Chen?

Yüan Chen believed in a natural Heaven which did not affect human affairs; his views of the ruler consequently focused on practical governance. This paper discovers that Yüan Chen took Emperor T'ai-tsung (r. 626-49), the most enlightened second T'ang emperor, as a model—envisioning a ruler who shared power with, sought remonstrance from and was courteous toward officials. These ideas can be traced to the earlier eclectic Taoist writings of the *Lü-shih ch'un-ch'iu* and the *Huai-nan tzu.* The popularity and influence of the *Tao-te ching* in the preceding age promoted numerous efforts to adapt its ideas to practical governance. In defining the role of the ruler and adapting the Taoist ideal government of *wu-wei* (literally meaning a government of non-action) to the contemporary political reality, political retainers and Taoist admirers since the Warring States Period borrowed Confucian, Moist and Legalist ideas to develop the image of a pragmatic and responsible monarch and government. The popularity of Taoism during the T'ang dynasty, and the flexible intellectual climate, enabled the emperor and officials to adopt this political syncretism.

Yüan Chen recognized the paramount importance of the ruler, but did not think he should rule alone. He reasoned that the emperor, being secluded in the palace, knew little about events in the empire:

> If the ruler only hears with his own ears, sees with his

> own eyes, and thinks with his own mind, he will not be able to hear within ten steps, or see after one hundred steps. He will not know what happens beyond the court and the palace, not to mention within the huge empire (the four seas) or his complex administration (Po Chü-i, 1979: 1371).

Consequently, the emperor needed the assistance of his officials to administer the empire. He acquired this assistance through the employment of worthy persons and the acceptance of remonstrance.

Yüan believed a good ruler should pay particular attention to remonstrance, which he considered vital to the success of a reign. It was through remonstrance that the emperor broadened his vision, extended his knowledge, noticed occurrences and developments in the empire, and learned of the soundness and errors of his policies. Yüan believed a good ruler should follow the people's wishes to govern. The ruler needed to be informed of the desires and grievances of his people. He acquired this information through suggestions and criticism. Yüan therefore eagerly asked Emperor Hsien-tsung to seek remonstrance (Yüan Chen, 1982: 370-373, 377-378). He argued that with active imperial encouragement the honest courtiers would be eager to contribute their wisdom, whereas petty officials would present true advice for profit (Yüan Chen, 1982: 370-371).

When he was still in a low administrative position, Yüan employed poetry to inform the emperor about conditions in society, constituting what I would call a "poetic remonstrance." Yüan, Po Chü-i and a number of literati imitated folk songs and composed the socio-political *yüeh-fu* poems to depict social problems and the grievances of the people, hoping they would reach the ears of the emperor and top ministers and result in reform. As Yüan wrote in the preface of his hsin *yüeh-fu* (new *yüeh-fu*) poems, he composed poems to address the most urgent

problems of his time. He reasoned that the great prosperity of the three dynasties (Hsia, Shang and Chou—the Confucian golden age) was attained because "literati discussed affairs of state and commoners voiced complaint" (Yüan Chen, 1982: 24: 277). This view was also stated in the "Ts'e-lin": "I heard that the sage king consulted others to mend his fault ···. He established officials to collect poems. Therefore voices of songs and chants, words of satire were collected daily from below and presented annually to the ruler. In this way those who spoke committed no fault and the one who heard could caution himself" (Po Chü-i, 1979: 65: 1370).

Yüan Chen took Emperor T'ai-tsung (r. 626-649) as his model ruler and credited the emperor's splendid reign to his exceptional encouragement and tolerance of remonstrance. Emperor T'ai-tsung rewarded remonstrators, tolerating the frank criticism of Wang Kuei and Wei Cheng (580-643) and taking remonstrators to banquets, excursions, dinners and the palace (Wechsler, 1974: 106-134; Yüan Chen, 1982: 371, 373, 377-378). In addition, he hesitated to utter any word in public without the scrutinies and endorsement of Wang Kuei and Wei Chen (377-378). Therefore, "Within three or four years the empire was harmonious. It was not only the result of Emperor T'ai-tsung's wisdom, but also the result of the contributions of his subordinates which made the empire thrive" (377-378).

Emperor T'ai-tsung not only patronized remonstrators, but he also instructed his descendants to seek remonstrance. He emphasized the importance of remonstrance in the *Ti-fan* (*Models for Rulers*), a treatise on the essence and skill of being a good ruler which he wrote for his heir, the future Emperor Kao-tsung (r. 649-83) (T'ang T'ai-tsung *Ti-fan*, 2: 5a-8a; Ssu-ma Kuang, 1972: 196: 6191, 6195-97).[19] Emperor T'ai-tsung related the ruler's attitude toward remonstrance to the rise and fall of a dynasty, "The ruler, being in a lofty position, is unable to see and

hear well · · ·. Therefore he is humble for loyal and fair words· · ·. Even a humble servant · · ·, if he has good points, the emperor should not reject him" (T'ang T'ai-tsung, 5: 5b-6a).

If the emperor tolerates frank criticism, "the loyal ministers will devote their hearts and the wise men their wisdom. The officials will conceal nothing from the ruler and the ruler's grace will shine on all" (T'ang T'ai-tsung, 5: 6b-7a). Yet a bad ruler is different:

> He relies on his power and employs punishment to repulse remonstrance. Great ministers suppress their words for fear of dismissal and junior officials are mute for fear of their lives. The emperor is ignorant about affairs of the empire yet thinks his virtue exceeds the three sage rulers and the five emperors. Eventually his actions lead him to the destruction of the dynasty. This is the evil consequence of rejecting remonstrance (T'ang T'ai-tsung, 5: 7b-8a).

Emperor T'ai-tsung's words carried great weight in the minds of the later T'ang emperors because the Chinese respected ancestors, especially such a celebrated one. The *Ti-fan*, a handbook for Emperor T'ai-tsung's heir, was apparently learned by all later T'ang emperors. Moreover, Emperor T'ai-tsung left another important work for royal descendants. His words and deeds appeared in another collection, the *Chen-kuan cheng-yao* (*Essentials of Governance of the Chen-kuan Period*), a collection of political discussions between the Emperor and his officials. This book became an important political reference for his descendants. The Yüan scholar Kuo Chih, in his preface to the *Chen-kuan cheng-yao*, describes the importance of this collection for later T'ang rulers: "Descendants of the T'ang royal family considered it rules from the ancestor and wrote it on the room divider screen and carved it on the desk" (Wu Ching,

CKCY: 4) Consequently, seeking remonstrance was a dominant political concern of the T'ang dynasty.

Following Emperor T'ai-tsung's example, subsequent T'ang emperors established concrete measures to solicit remonstrance and public opinions. Empress Wu added a total of twenty new positions for junior remonstrators during her reign (Wang P'u, 1968: 56: 965-66). She also established four boxes at court to collect suggestions, criticism of policies, or personal grievances (Wang P'u, 1968: 55: 956).[20] During Emperor Tai-tsung's reign (r. 762-79) four additional remonstrators were appointed to be stationed in the palace to remonstrate the emperor (Wang P'u, 1968: 56: 965-966). In addition, a remonstrating drum was set up for people with grievances to strike so as to bring their complaints to the court (Wang P'u, 1968: 55: 956-59; Po Chü-i, 1979: 64: 1334). Although no other T'ang emperors could match Emperor T'ai-tsung's receptiveness toward remonstrance, they did at the very least, tolerate remonstrance. Yüan Chen's emphasis on remonstrance therefore reflected a prominent political tradition of the T'ang dynasty.

Yüan Chen himself was probably inspired by the *Chen-kuan cheng-yao*, to which his arguments bear a striking resemblance. Ch'en Yin-k'o, in his study of Po Chü-i's satirical poems, traced Po's ideas from the *Chen-kuan cheng-yao*. He contended that Po once worked in the Imperial library and should have seen this important work (Ch'en, 1965: 130-143). Yüan's first appointment was in the Imperial library working together with Po. Yüan apparently saw the *Chen-kuan cheng-yao* because he both adopted Emperor T'ai-tsung's reasoning and took him as a model. Yüan's later appointment as remonstrator of the left (*tso shih-i*) during the reign of Emperor Hsien-tsung reinforced his determination to follow the example of Emperor T'ai-tsung and Wei Cheng.

Yüan also seemed to be influenced by ideas from the *Ti-fan*. Besides urging the heir to encourage remonstrance, the *Ti fan* also explores the

theme of ruling with the assistance of officials. It states, "A ruler has the responsibility to manage the three reigns (Heaven, Men and Earth) and four seasons. How can he be successful by relying on his own effort without the assistance of others?" (T'ang T'ai-tsung, 2: 4b). It also states, "A state must employ fine and faithful officials to assist in governance. When the ruler employs the right persons, the empire will attain peace and prosperity" (T'ang T'ai-tsung, 1: 9b). In this way the *Ti-fan* echoes ideas from the *Chen-kuan Cheng-yao.* As a remonstrator who had the duty to correct the errors of the court and the emperor, Yüan Chen would be familiar with ideas from the *Ti-fan*, an important imperial instruction on rulership.

Besides accepting remonstrance and employing capable officials, Yüan also expected emperors to be tolerant and polite to officials. The "Ts'e-lin" states:

> With courtesy a ruler acquires a worthy person⋯. Therefore when you condescend and face west to serve him, you find a teacher. When you serve him yourself with disposition, you gain a friend. Through treating him with proper politeness, you obtain an official⋯. Through sitting by the end table holding a cane and ordering him, you get a lackey. Those who acquire teachers can become an emperor; those who gain friends can become a king; those who obtain officials can assume hegemony and those who get lackey will have chaos⋯. Without reverence to the worthy people, without the assistance of the teachers and friends, how can the ruler create a good order and complete the great transformation of the people (Po Chü-i, 1979: 64: 1334)?

Yüan, therefore, asked the ruler to tolerate remonstrance even though

the suggestions might not be suitable. Yüan himself had no fear of the emperor. When he was Emperor Hsien-tsung's remonstrator, he audaciously criticized the emperor's neglect of remonstrators: "If your majesty regards us as useless and unqualified to serve you, you should not have given us this office nor put us at court. However, if your majesty intends to extend your view and be informed about the principles of governing, you should not despise or discard us like this" (Yüan Chen, 1982: 28: 378).

Again, Yüan's inspiration derived from Emperor T'ai-tsung. Emperor T'ai-tsung was noted for his gracious treatment of officials. The *Chen-kuan cheng-yao* records many such events. For example, Emperor T'ai-tsung personally extracted the dirty blood of an injured general with his mouth, cut his beard as an medical ingredient for another general, and wept for the death of a trusted minister, disregarding other officials' warning that it was unlucky to cry on that particular day (Wu ching, *CKCY*: 2: 42-43; 6: 193-194). This concept of imperial grace and courtesy toward officials came to be expected by Yüan's contemporary officials. Po Chü-i, for example, in one of his *yüeh-fu* poems, reasoned the rapid success of Emperor T'ai-tsung as stemming from his being one in heart with the people" (3: 54-55). Another contemporary, Liu Tsung-yüan, stated "The sage was able to establish the empire because of benevolence and righteousness" (31: 77-78).

Emperor T'ai-tsung not only inspired Yüan's concept of a sincere and courteous ruler, but also influenced later T'ang emperors in their tolerance and courtesy toward officials. Following the examples of Emperor T'ai-tsung, the T'ang rulers rarely humiliated officials and were normally tolerant of criticism. Once while remonstrating with Emperor Hsien-tsung, Po Chü-i flatly stated, "Your majesty is wrong." Emperor Hsien-tsung was angered at his insolence, but after a consultation with his chief minister, he treated Po as usual (Ssu-ma Kuang, 1972: 138:

7676-7677). Emperor Mu-tsung often encountered strong remonstrance for his pleasure-seeking. He failed to accept the remonstrators' advice but rewarded them lavishly for their words (Ssu-ma Kuang, 1972: 241: 7783-7784). It is well known that while the chief ministers of the Sung dynasty stood to discuss court politics with the emperor and the Ming officials suffered public whipping at court, the T'ang chief ministers could sit with the emperor to discuss affairs of state while enjoying a cup of tea (Ch'ien, 1976: I). This strong tradition of tolerance and courtesy was the strength of T'ang politics. The officials were eager to render their opinions, which contributed to the splendid administration of the dynasty.

No rulers of any other dynasty could rival Emperor T'ai-tsung in seeking remonstrances. Given that even commoners generally dislike criticism, why did a powerful and accomplished ruler like Emperor T'ai-tsung actively seek remonstrances, even complaining when he did not receive one (Wu Ching, 1: 14, 2: 46-50, 52-53)?

One possible explanation of Emperor T'ai-tsung's enlightened policies and tolerant attitude can be seen in the background of the T'ang officials' class. Because the T'ang officials came from aristocratic families with social status sometimes higher than that of the emperor, the emperors treated them with respect.[21] The social status of the aristocratic families apparently constituted a threat to the emperor; both Emperor T'ai-tsung and Empress Wu, for example, ordered recompilation of social rank of prominent clans and insisted on following official status rather than social prestige (Twitchett, 1973: 47-85; Wechsler, 1973: 87-120; 1979: 136-241, 242-279, 290-321).

It also can be argued that because Emperor T'ai-tsung seized power by killing his brothers and forcing the abdication of his father, he was eager to leave a good image in history to counterbalance these acts. The late Wechsler noted the emperor's great concern about his own

image in history (Wechsler, 1974: 80-83). The emperor insisted on seeing the historian's records of his reign, and ordered the presence of court historians in the audience to record political discussions (Ssu-ma Kuang, 1972: 197: 6203).

Although both interpretations give insight, there are important ideological factors unaddressed. Emperor T'ai-tsung also genuinely believed in the benefit of including officials' wisdom in the running of government. In 634, for example, the emperor told high officials "Officials often trembled when they presented affairs to me. If they were afraid during such routine presentations, how much more will it be when they have to argue against my policies? Therefore I have never displayed anger even if I do not like their words. If I began to scold them who, then, dare to speak again?" (Wu Ching, 2: 52). His most outspoken remonstrator, Wei Cheng, confirmed this when he stated, in 632, "The reason that I dare to criticize your majesty is because you encouraged me to speak out. If you do not accept my words, how do I dare to offend your Majesty?" (Wu Ching, 2: 32). Moreover, even when he had superior civil and military accomplishments, Emperor T'ai-tsung still sought criticisms and complained when he did not hear them: "Recently none of you have remonstrated against my faults. Surely there must be some mistakes. If you thought the mistakes were minor and ignored them, soon they will become major problems and they will not be able to be rectified." (Wu Ching, 1: 26, 23). In addition, Emperor T'ai-tsung not only sought remonstrance himself but also instructed his heir in the *Ti fan* about the need to employ worthy persons and encourage remonstrance. His officials shared his views, which are reflected in their writings (Wei Cheng, *Wei Cheng-kung chien lu*).

The ideas of accepting remonstrance and employing worthy officials were not new. Rulers in the Han dynasty and preceding eras had accepted remonstrances and employed worthy persons (Wang Ch'in-jo,

1967:101: 1201-1205, 102: 1216-1222). Yet none matched the tolerance and openness of Emperor T'ai-tsung, nor did any advocate remonstrances or encourage officials to criticize the throne. In this regard Yüan and Emperor T'ai-tsung's efforts were truly unusual. What were the intellectual sources that shaped Emperor T'ai-tsung's beliefs?

Emperor T'ai-tsung's words bear a striking resemblance to passages in two eclectic Taoist works, the *Lü-shih ch'un-ch'iu* and the *Huai-nan tzu*. The former was attributed to scholar retainers of Lü Pu-wei, chief minister of the state of Ch'in in the Warring State Period (403-221 B. C.); the latter was the joint effort of the scholar retainers of King Huai-nan, who ruled a small princely kingdom of the Han dynasty (202 B. C.-A. D. 220). Both works advocate the necessity of seeking officials' wisdom. The *Lü-shih ch'un-ch'iu* proposes that the ruler should "have no knowledge and no action" but entrust the work of governance to officials because "the effort from one person's ears, eyes, heart and wisdom is insufficient (*Lü-shih ch'un-ch'iu*: 17: 1049). Moreover, one person's knowledge is limited and his view shallow. It is impossible to rely on limited and shallow knowledge and preside over the empire, settle different customs, and administer all the people (Lü-shih ch'un ch'iu, 17: 1065, 1029-1066)."[22] Similarly, the *Huai-nan tzu* states, "Human intelligence is rather limited in its capacities to deal with things" (Ames, 1994: 175). If a ruler hopes to rely on himself to rule the whole world rather than following the proper way, then "he will soon reach the end" (*Huai-nan-tzu*, 9: 70; Ames, 1994: 175). However, "when exercising the combined strength of others, he will always win. When employing the wisdom of the many, nothing will be unaccomplished" (*Huai-nan tzu*, 9.70).

The concept of remonstrance also appears in these two collections and was most vigorously promoted in the treatise, "Rulership of the *Huai-nan tzu*:

Of old, when the emperor would hold court, the high

> ministers would offer honest admonition, the learned scholars would chant the odes, the music masters would sing their criticisms, the common people would communicate their opinions, the court historians would chronicle errors in judgment, and the court chefs would reduce the number of dishes at meals, but still this was not enough. Thus Yao set up a drum for those offering bold admonition. Shun established a notice board for criticisms. T'ang instituted an independent judicial authority, and King Wu provided a small drum to warn him against rashness. Before an error could show itself there was already a safeguard against it. The sage's attitude toward goodness is that there is nothing so small that he will not promote it; his attitude toward mistakes is that there is nothing so trivial that he will not correct it" (Ames, 1994: 203-204).

Ideas from the *Lü-shih ch'un-ch'iu* and the *Huai-nan tzu* had direct influence on Emperor T'ai-tsung, his officials, and later T'ang rulers and officials because excerpts of these books (especially those on remonstrance and the employment of worthy persons discussed above) were included in the collection the *Ch'ün-shu chih-yao* (*Essentials of Government from Various Books*). Following the order of Emperor T'ai-tsung, Wei Cheng compiled excerpts from various books and presented the collection the *Ch'ün-shu chih-yao* to the emperor for his consultation (Wechsler, 1985: 113; Wei Cheng, 1962 *Chü-tzu chih-yao* preface). As an imperial reference, phrases and concepts from this collection inevitably influenced Emperor T'ai-tsung. Moreover, this collection also reflected the beliefs of his officials in general (and Wei Cheng in particular) since the selections, designed to influence the emperor, were surely those that they considered significant to governance. Both the *Lü-shih ch'un-ch'iu*

and the *Huai-nan tzu* were written by retainers of top political practitioners for practical governance. Both contain strong Taoist ideas. Hsiao Kung-ch'üan, for example, attributed the concepts of "treasuring life" and "emphasis on self" —the Taoist ideas—to the themes of *Lü-shih ch'un-ch'iu* (1976: 334-340) and contended that the "*Huai- nan tzu* was the Taoist orthodoxy" during the Han dynasty (1976: 340). However, these two collections were known to be eclectic and to include ideas from other schools, such as Confucianism, Moism and Legalism (Hsiao, 1976: 332-344).

Both Confucius and Mo Tzu (470-391 B. C.) promoted the concept of employing capable ministers to assist the ruler. Confucius trained his ideal man, "chün-tzu" (the superior man), for this purpose. The Confucian Hsün Tzu also has stated, "Promote the worthy and capable," and, "if he (the ruler) desires to establish his fame and meritorious accomplishments, 'nothing' is as good as advancing the worthy and bringing the capable into one's service" (Knoblock, 1988: 2: 94, 97). Moreover, this concept was most notable in the work, *Mo Tzu*: "A kingdom which does not preserve its elite will be destroyed. To see the worthy and not bother to employ them will slow the work of the ruler···. No kingdom can survive if it is slow in the employment of the worthy and neglects the use of the *shih* (scholar-officials)" (Mo Ti, 1:1a). The *Mo Tzu* devoted a whole treatise to advocating the need to employ the worthy and provide them with work that matches their specialties (Mo Ti, 2: 1a-12b; Graham, 1989: 45-47).

The idea of remonstrance is also a Confucian idea. Both Confucius and Mencius encouraged remonstrance. Confucius said that "a minister serves his ruler with loyalty," yet the Confucian loyalty was not personal devotion but devotion to high principles. Therefore when Tzu-lieu asked how a ruler should be served, Confucius replied, "Do not impose on him, and moreover, withstand him to his face" (Legge, 1975: 285). Mencius

went further. He argued that the high ministers who were noble and relatives of the ruler should dethrone the king if he refused to heed their repeated remonstrance to mend his grave mistake (Legge,1975: 5: 392-393). The Confucian classic the *Book of History* also states, "A piece of wood will become straight after the application of the ruler. Similarly a ruler becomes a sage when he listens to remonstrance." Elsewhere it states that a ruler "verifies his words and deeds with the officials and forsakes his own ideas to follow the others" (Wang Ch'in-jo, 1967: 101: 1201). In addition, remonstrance was a common practice in the earlier society of the Spring and Autumn period (722-481 B. C.). The Confucian classic the *Tso Ch'uan*, which describes affairs of this time, lists numerous examples of official remonstrances against rulers (Tso Chiu-ming, 1: 18-19; 2: 61-62; 4: 166-167, 179, 182-183, 191).

The idea of accepting remonstrance was also put forth by the Legalist philosopher, Han Fei Tzu, and by Mo Tzu. In a treatise "The Ten Mistakes of (the Ruler)" Han Fei Tzu stated that "to neglect the remonstrance" was the seventh mistake and "to fail to listen to loyal officials to mend mistakes" was the eighth (Shao, 1987: 6: 804-805). Likewise, Mo Tzu also urged the acceptance of remonstrance in his treatise of "Shang-tung"(Conforming Upward) (Mo Ti, 3: 1a-12b).

The promotion of remonstrances and the actual acceptance of them by the ruler, however, are two different matters. Remonstrance words are offensive and not easily taken, especially by powerful monarchs. The Legalist monarch was an absolute monarch whom no one dared to offend. During the reign of the second Ch'in emperor, for example, when Legalism was the government ideology, no one dared to inform the emperor of the trouble in the empire (Bodde, 1986: 81-90). Similarly, strong remonstrances were hard to make in a strong Confucian government. The Confucian emphasis on hierarchy (especially Hsün Tzu's exaltation of the ruler's position), and the Confucians' adoption of the Legalist con-

cept of a revered and lofty ruler since the Han dynasty (Yü Ying-shih, 1976: 31-41) made it difficult for officials to offend rulers with stubborn remonstrance. In late imperial China, when Confucianism became the dominant political ideology, Chinese emperors were not receptive to remonstrances, but were more authoritarian.[23]

While remonstrance is not mentioned in the *Tao-te ching* and does not seem to be in accord with the Taoist ideal of a passive and inactive government, the Taoist ideal ruler was most receptive to it. On one hand, Taoism encouraged rulers to be humble. The *Tao-te ching* states, "Therefore in order to be the superior of the people, one must, in the use of words, place himself below them. And in order to be ahead of people, one must in one's own person, follow them" (Chan, 1963: 171) Elsewhere this Taoist classic argues, "Therefore humble station is the basis of honor. The low is the foundation of high. For this reason kings and barons call themselves the orphaned, the lonely one, the unworthy. Is this not regarding humble station as the basis of honor? Is it not?" (Chan, 1963: 159). Being humble and staying in a low position, a Taoist ruler would have no problem either accepting the wisdom of others or accepting remonstrance. On the other hand, the *Tao-te ching* also cautions rulers to be constantly on guard to ward off danger: "Deal with things before they appear. Put things in order before disorder arises···. If one remains as careful at the end as he was at the beginning, there will be no failure" (Chan, 1963: 169-170).[24] A Taoist ruler will most likely heed constant reminders of mistakes. Therefore the concept of remonstrance, rooted in the traditions of Confucianism, Moism and Legalism, became most workable in a Taoist atmosphere.

Eclectic Taoist works like the *Lü-shih ch'un-ch'iu* and the *Huai-nan tzu* are rich in pragmatic guidelines for governance because they were written by a large numbers of political retainers who had political experience and were interested in practical application. The cosmopolitan

atmosphere of the T'ang dynasty and the imperial promotion of Taoism (and especially the *Tao-te ching*) enabled the ruler and officials to appreciate works of other schools, especially the eclectic but pragmatic Taoist collections such as the *Lü-shih ch'un-ch'iu* and the *Huai-nan tzu*. Many of these works already had absorbed Confucian ideas but presented them in a pragmatic and detailed political application, which satisfied both the ideological and practical needs of the dynasty.

Yüan Chen's concept of a courteous ruler can be found in the work of Chi Kang, a Taoist scholar of the Period of Division (221-589). In a treatise Chi Kang stated:

> When the sage had to preside over the empire, he took the hearts of the multitude as that of his own. He followed the *tao*, tolerated the nature of others and enjoyed his life with theirs. He refrained from activities and considered the empire a public affair. Although occupying the position of a ruler, he was like a plain scholar when receiving envoys from other states. Although wearing a dragon gown and elaborate clothing, he acted as if a commoner. Therefore the ruler and officials forgot their distinctions when they were together and people in the empire were contented.[25]

Chi Kang envisioned a Taoist humble ruler who was even more modest than Yüan's ideal ruler. The political environment of the Period of Division had reinforced the popularity of the Taoist ideas. Amidst political disorder, with the coexistence of different kingdoms and the rise of prominent aristocratic families, the ruler's position had been weakened. Thus, the Taoist notion of a modest ruler who shared power with officials and accepted their criticism and remonstrances was most popular during this period.

In sum, Yüan Chen's concept of an ideal ruler, derived from the deeds of Emperor T'ai- tsung, had its intellectual precedent in the preceding age as a result of the flourishing of Taoist ideas, the appropriation of Taoist concepts to contemporary political realities and the consequent development of syncretism. The rise of the aristocratic families and prolonged political division from 221 to 589 had already undermined the authority and prestige of rulers, thus facilitating the adoption of this Taoist concept of a humble and democratic ideal ruler.

The perception of an ideal ruler reveals an important aspect of T'ang political thought. However, to see the full range of T'ang political beliefs, it is necessary to understand the guiding principles and the ideals that the ruler and officials pursued. Yüan Chen's concept of an ideal government is therefore of great significance.

IV. On the Ideal Government

Government and governance were major concerns of Chinese thought because Chinese philosophies focused mainly on worldly affairs. Confucianism and Taoism, the two most prominent philosophies, adopted different approaches to governance and held different ideals. The Confucians' primary concern was a government for the people (Legge, 1975: 130-132, 138, 440-441, 460-462, 483). Confucius aspired to an ideal government in which a virtuous ruler and officials presided over an affluent and harmonious populace. The ruler first provided his people with a good livelihood, then educated them with proper decorum (*li*) and harmonized their emotion through music (Legge, 1975: 54, 146, 169, 194, 211, 254, 257, 264, 354). Proper decorum was especially pertinent for the Confucians. Confucius conceived of a society mainly in terms of human relations, which he classified into five categories. He believed a good government and society could be achieved when everyone behaved

according to one's position in a relationship (Legge, 1975: 161, 169, 256). Under Confucius' ideal government, "The aged will be settled, friends will be entrusted with sincerity, and the youth will be treated tenderly" (Legge, 1975: 183).

Taoists opposed the Confucian virtues and social restraints (*li*). Lao Tzu believed morality, wisdom and knowledge promoted strife and disturbance (Wang Pi, 1972: 9-12, 35-41). He also argued that proper decorum (*li*) was the wearing thin of loyalty and sincerity (Wang Pi 1972: 75-82). For Lao Tzu, people were originally virtuous and harmonious (Wang Pi, 1972: 72-82, 116-119). Greed and corruption developed when they acquired knowledge, learned the distinctions and treasured precious goods (Wang Pi, 1972: 22-23, 35-36). Therefore he proposed to "abandon sageliness and discard wisdom" and to "abandon humanity and discard righteousness" (De Bary, 1960: 1: 55; Chan, 1963: 149). The Taoist ideal government was a small state of primal simplicity in which the people's basic needs were met, but under which they were restrained from knowledge, desire, and a high civilization (Wang Pi, 1972: 154-155; Chan, 1963: 175). The sage ruler ruled by *wu-wei* (non-action, or spontaneity) but was able to achieve a perfect rule (Wang Pi, 1972: 9-11). He did not interfere in the affairs of the people and the people attained self-transformation (Wang Pi, 1972: 116-119; Chan, 1963: 166-167). In this ideal society, the people "will find relish in their food and beauty in their clothes, will be content in their abode and happy in the way they live" (Lau, 1963: 142). They would be so content that they would have no desire to communicate with their neighbors, nor would they notice the presence of their ruler (Wang Pi, 1972: 33-35, 154-155; Chan, 1963: 148, 175).

Traditional Chinese administration was considered to be based on the principles of Confucianism because Confucian classics were used for civil service examinations. Elements of Legalism, which stressed the im-

partial application of laws to maintain order and strengthen the state, however, often were modified and then employed in actual administration (De Bary, 1960: 123). At times Taoist ideas also found their way into Confucian government. The dynastic history recorded the reigns of Emperors Wen and Ching of the Han dynasty as two notable examples of the Taoist rule of non-interference; they officially practiced the ideas of *Huang-Lao* (Huang-ti, the Yellow Emperor, and Lao Tzu).[26]

What was the concept of an ideal government in T'ang as perceived by Yüan Chen? Yüan's ideal government was a government of *Huang-Lao*. In the "Ts'e-lin" it states:

> To make people frugal and simple (*pu*) with pure custom and in harmony, nothing is better than the way of Huang-Lao. It promotes leniency, simplicity and frugality. It does not exalt cleverness, wisdom or ability. Those who used it well attain the good governance of purity and quietude whether in a district, a province, a kingdom or all under the Heaven···. Tsao Tsin learned it, therefore the kingdom of Chin attained great harmony. Emperor Wen of the Han Dynasty acquired it, he had no need to apply punishment. All these were accomplished through purity and quietude. Therefore the *Lao Tzu* says 'I take no action and the people of themselves are transformed. I love tranquility and the people of themselves become correct. I engage in no activity and the people of themselves become prosperous. I have no desire and the people of themselves become simple' (Chan, 1963: 167). These four things are the essence of Huang-Lao (Po Chü-i, 1979: 62: 1298).

The Huang-Lao ideas, according to Yüan Chen and Po Chü-i, are

the ideas of Lao Tzu. They are different from those contained in the silk manuscript excavated in 1973 from Mawangdui, the only available source that scholars believe reflects the thought of Huang-Lao. Ideas in the silk manuscript indicate a synthesis of classical Taoism and Legalism (Peerenboom, 1993: 1-2). The manuscript supports the Legalist rule of laws: "Laws are good governance," and "Governing according to the law, one will not be disordered" (Peerenboom, 1993: 78). Moreover, the silk manuscript exalts the position of the ruler. Although Yüan and Po recognized the importance of laws in their other writings, they did not give law the most important position nor did they elevate the position of the ruler.[27] The concept of Huang-Lao is explained differently among scholars in different periods. People in the T'ang dynasty generally seemed to employ the term "Huang-Lao" to indicate Taoism. Besides the "Ts'e-lin", the Sung dynasty encyclopedia, the *Ts'e fu yüan-kuei*, designates a whole section to discuss "the T'ang promotion of Huang-Lao." The content, however, focuses mainly on the promotion of the *Tao-te ching* and religious Taoism (Wang Ch'in-jo, 1967: 53-54: 585-609).

Yüan particularly emphasized the Taoist theme of light taxes, few desires and non-interference.[28] The "Ts'e-lin" asks the ruler to levy light taxes, to be frugal and to avoid harsh governance. It pleads with the emperor "to sympathize with the people's poverty and reduce the expenses, to worry about people's hunger and lighten the grain taxes, and to have concern for people's shivering in cold and to reduce the taxes on clothing" (Po Chü-i, 1979: 62: 1296). Moreover, it states, "For a fast attainment of good governance, it is necessary to avoid disturbing people and to promote simple and easy administration" (Po Chü-i, 1979: 62: 1298). Throughout the "Ts'e-lin" and Yüan's own writings, these themes of reducing taxes and governmental interference had been repeatedly stated (Po Chü-i, 1979: 62: 1297, 1298, 63: 1312, 1314-1317, 1320-1321).

While Yüan embraced the Taoist concepts, he nevertheless perceived them in the Confucian ideal. In one of Yüan's *yüeh-fu* poems he attributed the Taoist rule of *wu-wei* to a Confucian sage ruler. Citing the government of the Confucian sage ruler Yao as an example of *wu-wei*, Yüan argued that the people of this sage ruler, being left alone, were so content that they did not notice his presence. In a *yüeh-fu* poem "Hsün-hsi" ("Taming the Buffalo"), Yüan reasoned:

> Therefore governing is similar to taming animals; reward is not required. Noninterference is essential; not depriving surpasses bestowing. Do not relinquish your food and clothing; just leave the men to farm and the women to weave. The people of the sage ruler Yao did not notice his existence; they merely chatted in leisure and played the music. By observing the taming of buffalos and elephants, one knows the simple rule to govern a state (Yüan Chen, 1982: 24: 284).

By claiming the government of the Confucian sage ruler Yao as an example of noninterference, Yüan attempted to bring the Taoist ideal into the Confucian tenets.

There is no mention of Yao practicing non-interference in either the Confucian *Analects* or the *Mencius*. However, the *Analects* does compliment another sage ruler, Shun, for practicing *wu-wei*. The *Analects* states, "One who put in order by doing nothing (*wu-wei*), would not that be Shun? What is there that he did? Just assumed a respectful posture and faced south" (Graham, 1898: 14). Confucius probably meant that Shun's virtue (*te*) transformed the people; this would reflect the Confucian belief in the moral transformation of the people by the ruler who sets up good examples for the people to follow. Shun was noted for his filial piety—for that he was chosen by Yao as his successor. Thus Con-

fucius' *wu-wei* is based on ethics and differs from the non-interference emphasis of the *wu-wei* in the *Tao-te ching.*

Yet Confucian thought, while placing emphasis on morality and benevolence, shared with Taoism the same concern for lightening the burden of the people. Yüan's concept of light taxation and the limitation of the ruler's desires, which were greatly emphasized in the *Tao-te ching*, is compatible with the Confucian ideal of a prosperous people with a good livelihood. Moreover, these ideas were presented in the thought of Mencius, who was especially concerned for the benefit of the people (Legge, 1975: 460-462, 491). Mencius stated, "If your Majesty will indeed dispense a benevolent government to the people, being sparing in the use of punishments and fines, and making the taxes and levies light, so causing that the fields shall be plowed deep, and the weeding of them be carefully attended to···. In such a case, who will oppose your Majesty?" (Legge, 1975: 135-136). Mencius even mentioned once that "To nourish mind, there is nothing better than to make the desires few" (Legge, 1975: 497). This similarity helped to blur the distinctions between these two ideologies in the minds of the T'ang literati. Moreover, as mentioned above, the T'ang intellectual world favored the accommodation of ideas because the T'ang emperors regularly held debates among the Taoists, Confucians and Buddhist monks with the intention of bridging ideas and resolving differences (Lo Hsiang-lin, 1955: 159-176). Yüan's free blending of Confucian and Taoist ideas, thus, was a reflection of this syncretic mode.

Yüan's concept of *wu-wei*, however, did not entail a government of non-action. Rather his sage rulers governed and were responsive to the people. When Yüan promoted the concept of non-interference, he mainly was concerned with harsh governmental demands on the people. He was fully aware of the complexity of his contemporary government and of the necessity of governance. Yüan promoted a sage ruler who followed

the people's wishes to issue orders so that his rule appeared as effortless as *wu-wei*. Like other literati of traditional China, Yüan attributed this idea to antiquity:

> I heard that when the three *huang* ("August Ones") were rulers, they had no fixed mind (or ideas) (hsin), but regarded the ideas of the people as their own. When the five *ti* ("Legendary Emperors") were rulers they had no fixed desires (*yü*) but took the people's desires as their own (Po Chü-i, 1979: 62: 1293) (my emphasis).

Yüan then explained that because their orders were issued in accordance with the wishes of the people, the people were willing to comply with the rulers, making the rulers' work appear effortless:

> By following the people's mind to issue orders, then without being harsh the society was in order. By following people's wishes to teach them, then without any labor the task was accomplished. Therefore, orders were not heard, yet the people followed; reward and punishment did not need to be applied, yet the people obeyed. This is the reason that the three *huang* and five ti administered well with *wu-wei* (Po Chü-i, 1979: 62: 1293).[29]

Yüan's phrase can be traced to a passage in the *Tao-te ching* that contains the same phrase Yüan employed: "The sage [ruler] has no fixed (personal) ideas; He regards the people's ideas as his own" (Chan, 1963: 162).

Yüan Chen's explanation, however, seems to be different from the interpretations of both Wang Pi and Ho-shang Kung, the two famous commentators of the *Tao-te ching*. According to Wang Pi (226-249), the renowned commentator, the Taoist passage meant that the sage made

no distinction among people. Accordingly the people would not scheme and would follow their natural capacities (Wang Pi, 1971: 98-102; Hwa, 1992: 11). Ho-shang Kung whose commentary was very popular during the T'ang dynasty, explained that the sage ruler followed what the people thought to be convenient (Cheng Ch'eng-hai, 1970: 297-303). Ho-shang Kung, however, went on to stress the guiding role of the ruler—educating and transforming the people (Cheng, 1970: 297-303; Hwa, 1992: 11; Chan, 1991: 119-158). Consequently, there is a difference in spirit between Yüan's ideas and those of Ho-shang Kung; Yüan, as reflected in his efforts in composing the *hsin-yüeh-fu* folk poems, would like the ruler to heed people's feelings and suffering, and modified his policies accordingly.[30]

Yüan's concept of following the wishes of the people incorporated the Confucian concern for the people but nevertheless differed from the Confucian themes. Confucius emphasized the guiding role of the ruler—not people's opinions or wishes. Confucius believed that "the people may be made to follow a path of action, but they may not be made to understand it" (Legge, 1975: 211). He also argued that "The virtue of the gentleman (Confucius's ideal man) is like wind, (and) the virtue of the small man (commoner) is like grass," therefore one should "let the wind blow over the grass and it is sure to bend" (Legge, 1975: 259).[31] Confucius and Confucians expected the rulers to establish a benevolent rule from above; they exemplified and established virtue and propriety for the people to follow (Legge, 1975:146, 266, 268). The relationship between rulers and their subjects, in other words, was paternalistic, not democratic.[32] Yüan thus apparently still drew his inspiration from other sources.

The concept "following people's wishes" appears in two eclectic collections, the *Kuan Tzu* and the *Lü-shih ch'un-ch'iu*. The *Kuan Tzu*, which claims to be written by the retainer-scholars of the statesmen

Kuan Tzu of the Spring and Autumn Period, was proved by scholars to contain writings of the Huang-Lao scholars and the Legalist writings of the Warring States Period, and possibly even of the Ch'in dynasty (221-207 B. C.) (Hsiao, 1976: 193; Ch'en L. K., 1991: 110-113). The *Kuan Tzu* above all advocates the concept of "following the people's wishes (*shun-ming*)." It contends that the ruler who does so can administer the state easily: "A ruler's order can be carried out and prohibitions be observed because they order on what people like and prohibit what people detest" (Li Mien, 1990: 64: 940) Accordingly, "an intelligent monarch follows people's hearts, satisfies people's natures and sentiment, and issues orders according to people's wishes. Therefore order will be carried out and punishment does not need to be applied" (Li Mien, 1990: 30: 517). In another section the book says, "the government survives because it follows people's hearts; (and) it collapses because it violated them" (Li Mien, 1990: 1: 2).

While both Yüan and the *Kuan Tzu* promoted the idea of following people's wishes, there are fundamental differences between them. Yüan Chen wanted to follow people's wishes to improve their lives as revealed in his *yüeh-fu* poems; the *Kuan Tzu* promoted the idea of "*shun-ming*" so that orders could be carried out easily. Therefore, although the *Kuan Tzu* promoted the wishes of the commoners, its primary goal was for the ruler and the state (Hsiao, 1976: 197-198).

Another eclectic work, the *Lü-shih ch'un-ch'iu*, devotes a section on "following the wishes of the people" (*Lü-shih ch'un-ch'iu*, 9: 478-480). The *Lü-shih ch'un-ch'iu*, however, was more interested in winning the heart of the people to enrich the country and to consolidate the position of the ruler rather than to seek the interest of the people: "The ancient rulers attained fame and achievements by following the people's wishes. Many others in the past had attained great merits because they won people's hearts with their virtue. None could achieve success while

losing the hearts of the people (9: 478-479)."[33]

While these earlier works facilitated the formation of Yüan's ideas, Yüan's concept of "following the wishes of the people" was a response to the special socio-political condition of the mid-to-late T'ang dynasty. During the mid-to-late T'ang dynasty, there was a strong concern about social problems and the plight of the commoners (Waley, 1970: 109-114; Palandri, 1977: 76-84). The An-Shih rebellions and the subsequent warfare created grave human sufferings. In their fleeing and exile, the scholar-officials were near the common folks and observed their burden and plight. Their own distress made them keenly aware of others' suffering.[34] Moreover, the popularity of Buddhism and Taoism enhanced their sympathy for the commoners. The Buddhist notion of compassion reinforced the concern for human distress, while the Taoist ideal of a primal society melting down social distinctions drew them closer to the people. This change of mood was reflected in the sudden flourishing of poems of social concern in mid-to-late T'ang China (Kuo Mou-chien, 1979: 90-99: 1263-1405; Hwa, 1984: 115-132). Yüan's ideas about "following the wishes of the people" were a reflection of this larger socio-political and intellectual phenomena.

In sum, Yüan's ideal government was a creative synthesis of both Confucian and Taoist ideas and was a reflection of the socio-political environment of his time. He perceived an ideal government of Huang-Lao mainly in the ideas of the *Tao-te ching*. The contemporary popularity of the Taoist ideas, the social dislocation brought about by the An-Shih Rebellions, and the military campaigns launched by Emperor Hsien-tsung in his efforts to rejuvenate the dynasty made Yüan long for the Taoist government of peace, quietitude and non-interference. This ideal Taoist government was in accordance with the Confucian ideal of a prosperous populace. Moreover, Yüan possessed the Confucian ultimate concern for the people. Yüan's government was strong, positive and actively in-

volved in the worldly affairs. It was a government of Confucian spirit with flexibility and quietitude from Taoism. The open and tolerating atmosphere of the time, especially the imperial promotion of synthesis, enabled Yüan to borrow freely from different ideologies and to construct a creative combination without even being aware of the sources of his concepts.

V. On Administration

The T'ang government was noted for fine statesmanship that yielded results. Besides examining political principles and ideals, therefore, it is necessary to examine its concrete administrative propositions. Yüan Chen's ideas on good administration, laws the recruitment and evaluation of officials, and the Confucian *li* (ritual) will now be considered.

In administration Yüan was pragmatic and flexible, incorporating ideas from Legalism into the Confucian government.

Following orthodox Confucian thought, Yüan emphasized the importance of the administrator rather than the system or the regulations. In response to a chief minster's inquiry into the contemporary problems of taxation, Yüan argued that the problem rested not in the tax system, but in its implementation. People prospered under competent administrators, but suffered exploitation when the unqualified ruled (Yüan Chen, 1982: 34: 395-397).

Yüan's emphasis on the administrator, however, differed considerably from that of the conventional Confucians. While Confucians required officials to be virtuous, Yüan demanded they be competent and be appointed according to their specialties. In an answer to his palace examination in 806, Yüan argued that the government should expand its examination beyond generalities. He criticized the contemporary accentuation on the *chin-shih* examination and concluded:

> It is often impossible to catch a single bird with many nets. To use one net and to try to catch all animals, big and small, flying and running, how is it possible? Using this literary examination and trying to recruit all talent—how can it be sufficient? (28: 336-337)

Yüan proposed testing candidates on different subjects, recruiting them according to their ability and expertise and promoting them according to their administrative accomplishments. More specifically, Yüan recommended including in the exam practical administrative subjects such as the T'ang dynastic laws and regulations, government institutions, T'ang rituals, and the history of the previous dynasties (28: 337). He also suggested differentiating the successful degree holders of the *ming-ching* and *chin-shih* examinations into the following categories: those who perceived the fundamental principles of statecraft, those who understood the meaning of the passages of the classics, and those who were merely proficient in literary composition (28: 337).

Yüan detached virtue from politics and concentrated on performance. He proposed abolishing the placement examination which tested a person's character, calligraphy, speech and hypothetical administrative judgement called *p'an* (28: 337). Yüan opposed the Confucian bias against the merchants. T'ang laws barred merchants from taking the examination but Yüan proposed to permit all but criminals and slaves to take the civil service examination—ability, not background, was all-important (28: 337). Yüan also suggested annual reviews of officials' performance, which would guide promotion (28: 337). He urged district officials and court officials to recommend capable persons to the court and to be personally responsible for their proteges' behavior (28: 337). Although Yüan did not use virtue as a criteria for service, he did not tolerate malfeasance. He was most vigorous in the persecution of official corruption during his tenure as an examination official in 809-810 (Hwa,

1984: 83-92; Peterson, 1973: 34-78). In his system of supervision, evil or corrupt officials were to be detected and removed.

Yüan's contemporaries shared his pragmatism. Han Yü, while promoting the exaltation of the position of the ruler, stated, "A person cannot know everything. Therefore, it is appropriate to let each use his talents to complement one another" (Hsiao Kung-ch'üan, 1976: 407).

Yüan's pragmatic ideas on administration were reflected in the actual T'ang government as well. By Yüan's time the court had taken measures to recruit officials on the basis of specific knowledge. During Emperor Te-tsung's reign (779-805), T'ang ritual and T'ang law codes became examination topics (Wang P'u, 1968: 97: 1396). In 821, during Emperor Mu-tsung's reign (820-24, when Yüan was in power), several dynastic histories were added as subjects of examination (Wang P'u, 1968: 97: 1398).

Pragmatism was also exercised in official employment, especially during Emperor T'ai-tsung's reign. In his *Ti-fan*, the emperor delineated his pragmatic approach toward officials as follows:

> In employing officials, a good ruler is like a skillful carpenter. The curved wood can be used as a wheel; the long wood can be used as a pillar; the short wood can be used as eaves. Whether they are curved, straight, long or short, they all can be utilized. A good ruler adopts the same manner to employ his officials. From the wise he takes their wisdom; from the slow-witted, their muscle; from the brave, their gesture of fierceness; from the timid, their cautiousness. Whether they are wise, slow-witted, brave or timid, they all can be of some use. Therefore a skillful carpenter has no discarded wood and a good ruler has no discarded literatus (T'ang T'ai-tsung, 2: 1b-2a).

This passage is extremely interesting because it clearly indicates Emperor T'ai-tsung's policy to employ all capacities, whether virtuous or not, to perform the work that best suits them. His view departed widely from the traditional Confucian ideal. Emperor T'ai-tsung's pragmatic employment of officials contributed to the sound administration of his reign, which was noted for the presence of numerous capable ministers. The emperor set the precedence for Yüan's pragmatic tone in administration and undoubtedly established a model that later T'ang emperors followed.

Emperor T'ai-tsung's pragmatic statement in the employment of officials bears a striking resemblance to the treatise, "The Art of Rulership," in the eclectic Taoist collection the *Huai-nan-tzu*:

> The superior ruler in his use of men is like the skilled workman in the disposing of his wood. Large pieces are used for boats and beams; small pieces are used for oars and joists; long pieces are used for eaves and rafters; short pieces are used for gargoyles and decorative designs. All of these pieces irrespective of their size find their niche, and all of the carpenter's instruments and templates have their application (Ames trans., 1994: 188).

Both the *Ti-fan* and the *Huai-nan tzu* employed the same metaphor, the carpenter. Moreover, this particular section of the *Huai-nan tzu* was included in the *ch'ün-shu chih-yao* presented to Emperor T'ai-tsung (*Ch'ün-shu chih-yao*, 204). Therefore the *Ti-fan* apparently derived this idea from the *Huai-nan tzu.*

This pragmatic idea of employment was not unique to the *Huai-nan tzu*; it also was presented in the works of others, such as the Taoist philosophers Hsiang Hsiu and Kuo Hsiang during the Period of Division.

In their commentary to the *Chuang Tzu*, they stated, "Everything has its own ability···. Therefore those who are skilled in the employment of people let those who can make squares make squares and those who can make circles make circles. Let each use his ability and all will be settled" (Ho C. C., 1984: 100-101).

This pragmatism also can be discerned in the work of the Han eclectic Confucian Tung Chung-shu. Although a Confucian, Tung's ideas had strong elements of the Huang-Lao school (Yü M. K., 1992: 214-216, 217-222). Tung states that a ruler "appointed officials according to abilities and virtue" (Yü M. K., 1992, 216; Wei C. T., 1986: 24-32, 145-170). Likewise, the *Huang-ti ssu-ching* from the silk manuscript of the Mawangdui conveys similar ideas: "There is a constant way of employing officials. That is to employ them without exceeding their abilities" (Yü Ming-kuang, 1992, 216).

This pragmatic view on employing people, however, was most elaborated in the work of the great Legalist master Han Fei Tzu. The *Han Fei Tzu* states:

> Everything has its appropriate usage and every talent has its appropriate usage. Employ them in what suits them the best, then both the ruler and officials can practice *wu-wei*. Therefore the rooster was in charge of the crowing at dawn and cats have the duty of catching mice. Employ people according to their abilities and the ruler is able to do nothing (Shao, 1987: 7: 857).

Again, it states, "(A ruler who) employs officials according to their ability is said to be practicing the normal way" (Shao, 1987: 7: 846). In this way, "officials presented words and rulers employed them accordingly and demanded results" (Shao, 1987: 7: 853)

The same ideas were presented in the words of other Warring States

scholars Shen Pu-hai and Shen Tao, from whom Han Fei Tzu derived his ideas of the *shih* and *shu* (Feng, n.d.: 389-392). Most scholars classify Shen and Shen as Legalists, although some see them as Huang-Lao scholars (Wu K., 1985: 78-79; Hsiao, 1976: 225-226; Ch'en L. K., 1991: 149-194).[35] The difference in the classification indicates the close interactions and ambiguity between the Legalist and Taoist ideas. While Legalism and Taoism may share ideas, it is more relevant to this paper that both Legalism and Taoism contain strong pragmatic elements.

Behind the notion of pragmatism was the concept of change and adjustment. Legalists recognized the need to use different methods to meet different situations. They argued against the Confucian imitation of the sage rulers of antiquity. The *Han Fei Tzu* states, "A ruler administers with laws. Good administration develops when the laws change with the time. Otherwise there is chaos···. Thus in his governance a sage ruler issues laws and orders to meet the time and environment" (9:1028). It goes on: "A sage ruler does not follow ancient examples and laws but considers the current situation and governs accordingly" (1: 22-23). Han Fei tzu's recognition of the individual's special skills and his flexible approach in employment is a reflection of such pragmatic Legalist ideas.

The Legalist idea of pragmatic response to change echoes ideas in the *Tao-te ching.* The *Tao-te ching* perceives the principles of change in all affairs. The *Tao-te ching* states, "A whirlwind does not last a whole morning, nor does a rainstorm last a whole day" (Chan, 1963: 151). It also states, "Sharpen a sword-edge to its very sharpest, and the (edge) will not last long. When gold and jade fill your hall, you will not be able to keep them" (Chan, 1963: 143). Because of the constantly changing nature of life, the *Tao-te ching* proposes to yield, to be lowly in order to preserve or to advance: "To yield is to be preserved whole, to be bent is to become straight. To be empty is to be full, To be worn out is to

be renewed" (Chan, 1963: 151). The best way for a ruler to handle this changing state of nature, according to the *Tao-te ching*, is this: "In handling affairs, he treasures competence; in his activities, he treasures timeliness" (Wang Pi, 1972: 16-17 (ch.8)). The grand historian Ssu-ma Ch'ien had apparently noticed this similarity between Legalism and Taoism when he proclaimed that the thought of Han Fei tzu was close to that of Huang-Lao—that is, to the ideas of Huang-ti and Lao Tzu (Ssu-ma Ch'ien, 1972: 63: 2139-2156). This was further proven by the two treatises in the *Han Fei Tzu* on the interpretation and elaboration of the *Tao-te ching*. (Despite scholars' disagreement on the authorship of these treatises, they were written by the Legalists.) Taoism and Legalism, although seemingly contrasting ideologies in terms of governmental action (the *wu-wei* of Taoism versus the rigid application of laws in Legalism), thus share fundamental ideas about accommodating the changing political environment. This may explain why the Huang-Lao scholars, the Legalists, the Taoists and the eclectic Taoist collections all incorporated a timely and pragmatic approach in the recruitment of officials. During the T'ang dynasty, rulers and officials naturally succumbed to an administrative pragmatism that was rooted in the *Tao-te ching*, promoted in the Legalist works and elaborated in the eclectic Taoist collections.

As a reflection of this general mood of pragmatic response to changing situations, Yüan developed a synthesis, embracing elements from Legalism, Confucianism and Taoism, and then proposed to use them at different times to meet different situations. In the "Ts'e-lin", Yüan and his friend Po Chü-i recognized the usefulness of the Legalist law and contended that law and punishment were as important as the Confucian propriety (*li*) and the Taoist *tao* (Po Chü-i, 1979: 65: 1356). Each principle was necessary for a particular situation and was to be employed accordingly. Yüan states:

> There are three principles to achieve good governance

> (the Confucian *li*, the Legalist punishment (*hsing*), and the Taoist *tao*)· · · ; none can be discarded nor can they be employed together. They need to be employed according to the situation at hand· · ·. Therefore an emperor observes the condition of the state and applies the *li* or punishment accordingly (Po Chü-i, 1979: 64: 1352-53).

Punishment was best to curb evil wrongdoing. Then, after regulations had been established and the society returned to a good order, it was necessary to employ norms of propriety to enable people to express emotions properly. However, to achieve harmony and restore the people to purity and honesty, nothing was better than the Taoist *tao*: (Po Chü-i, 1979: 65: 1356). "The punishment is the gate of propriety and propriety the roots of *tao*."(Po Chü-i, 1979: 65: 1356). In this way Yüan blended Confucianism, Taoism and Legalism, and employed each in different situations.

Confucius and Han Fei Tzu would not have agreed on Yüan's syncretic approach for they each would have denied the validity of the other's methods. Confucius argued that law and punishment made people find loopholes and could not prevent evil actions. Confucius made this point forcefully: "If the people are led by law, and uniformity is sought through punishment, they will try to avoid the punishment and have no sense of shame" (Legge, 1975: 146). He reiterates, "If they be led by virtue, and uniformity is sought through the rules of propriety, they (the people) will have a sense of shame, and moreover will become good" (Legge, 1975: 146, the English translation is mine).

Legalism, by contrast, emphasized the universal and impartial application of laws to govern the state. Han Fei Tzu, based on his teacher Hsün-Tzu's theory of evil human nature, ignored human consciousness or kindness. Han Fei Tzu argued: "Men become naturally spoiled by love, but are submissive to authority" (De Bary, 1960: 133). Thus,

"when the sage rules the state, he does not count on people doing good of themselves, but employs such measures as will keep them from doing any evil." Accordingly, a sage ruler "does not busy himself with morals but with laws" (De Bary, 1960: 127). What is more, Han Fei Tzu argued that it was impossible to wait for the coming of sage rulers because they were a rare occurrence. The establishment of governance on clear rules and laws enables a ruler of moderate intelligence to rule well: "To wait for a ruler with the ability of Yao and Shun is like waiting for a fine meat to feed a person about to starve to death" (Shao, 1987: 1: 64-66). Therefore, Han Fei Tzu argued for the employment of reward and harsh punishment to govern: "Therefore a bright ruler sharpens his laws and harshens his punishments···. Rewards should be abundant and faithful so people will benefit from them, and punishments should be harsh and surely applied to make the people afraid··· (In this way) worthy and evil will all devote themselves to work for the ruler" (Shao, 1987: 1: 35-36).

While Confucius and Han Fei Tzu disagreed on ideas, later thinkers and administrators found usefulness in the ideas of both. Prior to the T'ang dynasty, there emerged a gradual recognition of the positive values of the Legalist rule of law, and thus it was incorporated into the Confucian government. The harsh rule and the consequent destruction of the Ch'in dynasty (221-207 B. C.) based on Legalism prevented any later rulers from adopting a pure Legalist rule. The necessity of applying a rule of laws to a sophisticated and vast empire, however, always preserved Legalist ideas in Chinese government. Scholars of the Huang-Lao philosophy, while based on ideas of Taoism, had already embraced the Legalist concept of laws and punishment. Moreover, the eclectic Lü-shih ch'un-ch'iu and Huai-nan-tzu also adopted the Legalist preference for impersonal supervision of officials. During the Period of Division, for example, the deterioration of political order called for strong laws and flexible measures; both Ts'ao Ts'ao (192-220) and Chu-Ko Liang relied

heavily on Legalist ideas and the rule of laws to administer (Ho C. C., 1984: 67-69). Ts'ao Ts'ao also publicly proclaimed that he sought men of ability regardless of their personality. During this period, Confucian scholars like Heng Fan, Fu Hsüan, and Yüan Huai all recognized the importance of law and punishment, and thus promoted the combined use of punishment and benevolence (Ho C. C., 1984: 74-93). These earlier developments, along with the T'ang tolerant intellectual climate, enabled Yüan Chen to recognize and value the rule of law and the use of punishment in governance.

Yüan Chen and Po Chü-i not only recognized the importance of the Legalist concept of law and punishment, but also promoted the status of law. They wished to elevate the examination of the law to prominence to attract competent candidates (Po Chü-i, 1979: 65: 1357). The government could then recruit the best candidates and appoint them as censors or judges (Po Chü-i, 1979: 65: 1357). Normally censors and judges were generalists; they were the successful candidates of the *ming-ching* or *chin-shih* examinations. Since these people dealt with the law and its enforcement, Yüan and Po suggested they be recruited from a special examination on law. They argued that with the appointment of competent law enforcement officials, the law would become clear, fair and efficient, and consequently the empire would be in order (Po Chü-i, 1979: 65: 1357). Yüan's and Po's attention to law and their preference for specialists could not be better expressed.

This recognition of the importance of laws was common among mid-to-late T'ang scholars. Liu Tsung-yüan, for example, in discussing the origins of the state, maintained that when the people fought among themselves and did not listen to reason, "they had to be brought to fear with pain. Therefore rulers rose and a government with punishment was established" (Liu Tsung-yüan, 1979: 3: 69-70). In the late T'ang dynasty, Lin Shen-ssu especially emphasized the employment of punish-

ment (Hsiao Kung-ch'üan, 1976: 414). Pulleyblank discerned the rise of "Neo-Legalism" in the post-An-Shih Rebellion Period (Pulleyblank, 1960: 77-114). The decline of the dynasty and its administration made scholar-officials keenly aware of the need to enforce laws to maintain order. Therefore, besides adopting pragmatic ideas from Legalism in the employment of officials, the eclectic T'ang intellectuals also recognized the positive values of the law and of punishment in Legalism.

Yüan Chen's pragmatic approach to administration was influenced by the Legalist ideas which favored practical administration, specialization, and the rule of law to meet changing situations. The prevalent influence of the *Tao-te ching* (which recognized the fluctuation of worldly affairs), the open and syncretic intellectual climate of the T'ang dynasty, the pragmatic administration of Emperor T'ai-tsung, and the social and political dislocation following the An- Shih Rebellions—all contributed to Yüan's pragmatic and syncretic administrative approaches.

VI. Conclusion

With the popularity of the *Tao-te ching* in the T'ang dynasty (as a result of earlier development and the promotion of the T'ang emperors), Yüan and most of his contemporaries, adopted the Taoist concept of a natural Heaven and concluded that a man made his own fortune; Heaven could not reward the good or punish the evil. This concept had a tremendous impact on politics because once Heaven was detached from human affairs, men had to solve their own problems. The tolerant T'ang intellectual climate further promoted creative innovation. Consequently, reform movements sprouted following the An-Shih Rebellions; confronting serious socio-political problems, T'ang literati devoted themselves to solving the problems with their own efforts.

The concept of a natural Heaven also repudiated the most important

political theory, the idea of the Mandate of Heaven and therefore posed a serious question regarding the role and power of the ruler. Since the Warring States Period and following the spread of the *Tao-te ching*, intellectuals interested in Taoism began to redefine the role of the ruler and to borrow elements from other schools to apply Taoist ideas in practical administration. Consequently, a number of eclectic Taoist collections appeared, such as the *Kuan Tzu*, the *Lü-chih ch'un-ch'iu*, and the *Huai nan tzu*. The open and tolerant political and intellectual climate of the T'ang dynasty facilitated the adoption of these eclectic ideas. Emperor T'ai-tsung and his officials were influenced by these eclectic Taoist works, since they were included in Emperor T'ai-tsung's political reference, the *Ch'ün-shu chih-yao*. The emperor's splendid administrative accomplishments, and the Chinese reverence for ancestors, made his ideas revered by all later T'ang emperors and officials. Yüan Chen was not an exception.

In the concept of ideal government, Yüan adopted the Taoist government of *wu-wei*. However, Yüan did not promote a return to the simple society of the antiquity. Rather, his ideal government was a government that reduced taxes, corvee labor, and refrained from interfering with people's life. Moved by the plight of commoners following the An-Shih Rebellions and the subsequent military campaigns, Yüan asked the ruler to follow people's wishes to issue order. In this way, the contemporary social and political conditions affected Yüan's concept of an ideal ruler, and his ruler had a strong Confucian spirit—caring for the well being of the people.

Yüan favored administrative pragmatism. He advocated procedures to employ and supervise officials according to their specialties and performances. This pragmatism in administration was not a Confucian idea, which favors generalists with excellent morality. Rather, it was contained in Legalist ideas which placed emphasis on actual adminis-

tration, laws, and the necessity to meet changing situations. Because both Confucianism and Taoism provide only guiding principles of governance rather than detailed administrative rules, Legalist ideas, since the Ch'in dynasty, had been incorporated into the sophisticated imperial government to govern a vast empire. During the T'ang dynasty, Legalist pragmatism was favored for two reasons. First, the prominence of Taoism, which was tolerant in ideas and flexible in application, facilitated the adoption of different ideas. Second, the decline of the dynasty following the An-Shih rebellions created the need for strong laws and the necessity of flexible pragmatism to meet the changing social and political situation. Therefore, T'ang literati, especially the mid-to-late T'ang scholar-officials, adopted the Legalist pragmatism and succumbed to the Legalist emphasis on laws and punishment.

From the above study, it is apparent that T'ang Confucianism was a synthesis which blended elements from Confucianism, Taoism, Legalism and Moism for practical administration. While other socio-political factors were important, the influence of the *Tao-te ching* was crucial in the T'ang adoption of these synthesis. Scholars and Taoists since the Warring States Period have been pondering the major thesis of the *Tao-te ching*. The prevailing modern view, proposed by Hsiao Kung-ch'üan and D. C. Lau, regards "preserving self" as the major theme of this classic (Hsiao, 1976: 165-169, 339-341; Lau, 1963: 28-33). In addition to this thesis, I believe one of the most significant concepts of the *Tao-te ching* is its recognition of the constant change in events and developments. Consequently, it is flexible, tolerant, and ready to incorporate other elements to meet the reality of the time. This notion of being responsive to change means pragmatism when applied to governance. Therefore, T'ang Confucianism did not build grand theories but was responsive to specific situations and achieved excellent results. Maybe this is what the *Tao-te ching* means when it states:

"*Tao* is empty (like a bowl), It may be used but its capacity is never exhausted" (Chan, 1963: 141). Perhaps the grand historian Ssu-ma Ch'ien already had noticed this dynamic flexibility of the *Tao-te ching* when he recorded a legendary description of Lao Tzu by Confucius "I know a bird can fly, a fish can swim, and an animal can walk. Those that can walk can be caught, those that can swim can be netted, and those that can fly can be shot. As for a dragon, I do not know how it rides the wind and cloud, ascending the sky. Today I saw Lao Tzu. Is he a dragon?" (Ssu-ma Ch'ien, 1972: 63: 2140).

Notes

1 Many economists, however, considered the cultural influence irrelevant to economic development.

2 The T'ang dynasty still employed Confucian classics for official recruitment, and Confucian rituals were observed in the families most notably in the families of the scholar-officials.

3 T'ang examines studied the official commentaries of the five Confucian classics. These commentaries, however, incorporate views of different schools.

4 Sarah Allan further hypothesized that in the Shang origin myth the king was the son of Sun, which gave rulers a powerful divine sanction (1991: 172).

5 There is the possibility that this idea was added by Han scholars since *chung yung* contains different ideas and their origins cannot be verified.

6 Emperor Hsüan-tsung restored the T'ang dynasty following the usurpation of Empress Wu and prevailing political influence of her daughter, Princess T'ai-ping. Consequently, he felt a need to legitimize the Li royal house after twenty years rule by Empress Wu.

7 This concern for legitimacy can be further discerned from the *Ti-fan* (*Models for Rulers*), written for the heir of Emperor T'ai-tsung. The *Ti-fan* states that the position of emperor could not be attained by human efforts. It then cited examples of good omens surrounding the rise of previous rulers as evidence.

8 The great Confucian scholar K'ung Ying-ta (574-648) was said to be the descendant of Confucius (McMullen, 1988: 32, 273-274), while Yen Shih-ku (581-648) came from a clan that claimed descent from Yen Hui, Confucius' famous disciple (McMullen, 1988: 72; Liu Hsün, 1975: 73: 2594-2596).

9 On T'ang superstition see, Lü, 1977b: 2: 1399-1412.

10 His commentary, however, also incorporated Confucian ideas. Although the *Tao-te ching* attacked the Confucian ritual (*li*) and benevolence, it recognizes their values (Huang, 1991: 379-381).

11 In the first entrance the emperor was advised to seek worthy people to accomplish a government of benevolence and righteousness. In the second entrance the emperor explained the rule of benevolence and righteousness by using the Taoist phrase *an-ching* (quietude) and the Taoist concept of a lenient government: "Follow the people's heart and eliminate harshness, avoid eccentric practices and people will surely be in peace and quietude (*an-ching*)." In the third and fourth entrances it emphasizes the creation of a peaceful and happy life for the people. See Wu Ching, *CKCY*, 5: 13.

12 It is probably not accidental that the T'ang dynasty was also the golden age of Chinese poetry producing many outstanding poets including a Taoist poetic genius, Li Po. Chinese poetry had been associated with Taoism because it inspired free flow of inspiration.

13 Tsung-mi for example also embraced Confucian and Taoist ideas. See Gregory, 1991: 285-295; Weinstein, 1973: 265-307; Wright, 1990: 112-123; Ch'en, 1964: 213-386.

14 This interpretation explains why during the late T'ang and Northern Sung dynasty, when Heaven was removed from human affairs, reforming activities were strongest. Wm de Barry detected a similar reforming mood during late Tokugawa period when Neo-Confucian humanism flourished in Japan (De Bary, 1953: 81-111, 1959: 25-49).

15 The Chou Heaven was probably an anthropomorphic ancestor of the Chou royal lineage. Later on, Heaven could denote a supreme deity of the Universe, a material Heaven, a natural Heaven or a supreme cosmic force of morality depending on the addresser, whether he was a protagonist for the throne, a religious Taoist, a philosophic Taoist or a Confucian of the different periods and schools. (Feng, n.d.: 54-55).

16 Here the Heaven was in general referred to as the ***hao-t'ien shang-ti*** (Deity of the Vast Heaven). For a full length treatment of the suburban sacrifices, see Wechsler, 1985: 107-112.

17 Tung "The Threefold Obligations of the Ruler," from the *Ch'un-ch'iu fan-lieu*, (Sec. 19, 6: 7a-8a), in De Bary, 1960: 162.

18 The Twelve Imperial emblems: sun, moon, constellation, mountains, dragons, pheasants, bronze libation cups, water weeds, flames, seeds of grain, ax, and a *fu* symbol (a mark of distinction), which were embroidered on the imperial robes of all Chinese emperors, also indicated the ruler's connection to the natural world (Wechsler, 1985: 33-34).

19 This treatise, although attributed to Emperor T'ai-tsung, may not be written by him. Nevertheless, the emperor definitely approved ideas there which bore his name.

20 However, she probably also used these measures to control officials and eliminate opposition.

21 See Ch'en Yin-k'o's discussion on T'ang aristocratic families in Ch'en Yin-k'o, 1977, vol. 1: 153-274. Many T'ang officials were indeed from prominent lineages, because the civil service examination had not yet recruited sufficient officials from less prominent clans. Mao Han-kuang,

1988: 189-197; Ebrey, 1978: 15-33, 87-119.

22 Han Fei Tzu probably was one of the first people to explore the complexity of the concept of *wu-wei* in the *Tao-te ching*. He accommodated the concept of *wu-wei* to legalism by promoting an inactive ruler who ruled with the wisdom and ability of officials.

23 The disappearance of the aristocratic families with high social status strengthened the power of the emperor. Moreover since the Sung dynasty institutional changes had concentrated power in the hands of the emperor.

24 Early Confucians also promoted modesty and cautiousness. However, imperial Confucianism placed greater emphasis on the authority and position of the ruler. See Yü Ying-shih, 1976: 47-75.

25 Hsiao Kung-ch'üan, 1976: 369-370; For the political thought during the Period of Division see Lo Kuang, 1978: 538-682.

26 Huang-ti, the Yellow emperor, was a mythological ruler of antiquity. Neither the dynastic history nor other writings describe the ideas of "Huang-Lao." However, the recently discovered silk manuscripts in the Mawangdui of the Han tomb are believed to contain Huang-Lao ideas. The discoveries prompted an intense scholarly interest in these writings. The prevailing view is that these Huang-Lao ideas contain Legalist concepts and they exalt the position of the ruler. Yü Ying-shih, 1976: 26, 40-42; Huang Chien, 1991: 171-180; Ch'en Li-kuei, 1991: 39-108; Wu Kuang, 1985: 137-151; Yü Ming-kuang, 1992: 209-222; Peerenboom, 1993: 51-97.

27 See the later discussion on laws and the previous discussion on the ideal ruler.

28 While the *Tao-te ching* promotes an ideal primal society, it also recognizes the political reality. This classic persistently promotes the themes of light taxes, frugality and little interference with the lives of people.

29 For studies on the various concepts of *wu-wei* see Graham, 1989: 232-234, 385; Schwartz, 1985: 186-192; Liu, 1989: 41-56.

30 See my paper manuscript, "Yüan Chen (779-831), The Poet-Statesman:

A Study of the Interaction between Poetry and Politics during the Early Ninth Century China."

31 The Chinese text is in Legge's book and the English translation is mine.

32 Although early Confucians encouraged criticisms of politics, there is evidence that they solicited criticism from the noble *shih*, rather than from commoners. See Yü Ying-shih, 1976: 12.

33 The idea of *shun-ming* also appeared in *Chung-shuo* and is attributed to the Sui Confucian scholar Wang Tung. The authenticity of this book, however, has been questioned by scholars. See Wang Tung, *Chung-shuo* and Yin Pan-li, 1984.

34 The famous poet of social concern, Tu Fu, was a good example. His poems depict both his own suffering and the hardship of the people he encountered.

35 The *Han shu* classified most of them as Legalist, Also see Jan Y. H., 1991: 65-79.

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從元稹對天、人君、理想政府和行政的觀點來看唐朝的儒家政治思想

華莉莉

摘要

唐朝的儒家思想不像漢朝的儒學或宋明理學那麼突出，可是唐朝卻產生了英明的君主(如唐太宗、前半期的唐玄宗、唐德宗、唐憲宗)和許多傑出的大臣(魏徵、房玄齡、杜如晦、姚崇等)。雖然安史亂後日漸衰微，唐帝國卻是以富足、繁榮、強大著稱。元稹歷經諫官、翰林承旨學士、宰相、刺史、觀察史，參予政府高階層的政策與行政，他的思想不是劃時代而是屬於典型的唐文化。本文從元稹對天、人君、理想政府、行政的觀點來探討唐朝君臣、執政者的政治思想。

元稹和當代君臣的思想明顯的展示唐代的儒家政治思想包容其他學派，其中道家尤其是《道德經》佔極重要地位。此文除了分析唐朝和唐以前不同思想的交流演變，也分析《道德經》的一些含義和對唐朝政治的影響。