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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
- II. The Issue of Heaven
- III. Rulership
- IV. On the Ideal Government
- V. On Administration
- VI. Conclusion

## 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

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### 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。