
“The term ‘Tao-hsüeh 道學 faction’ (tang 黨) originated in the Yüan-yu period (1086-93), and the faction blossomed in the Ch’ün-hsi (1174-89) period. Its followers were exceedingly numerous, tightly closing ranks. That this was taken advantage of to cheat the world, that is really something to sigh over and to grieve at!”¹ Such late Sung voices, critical of the so-called Neo-Confucian school, challenge the orthodox view of *Tao-hsüeh* (True Way Learning) and its rise during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Needless to say, this view, contained in the Sung dynastic history (*Sung shih* 宋史) and focused on Chu Hsi (1130-1200) and his ‘great synthesis’ (*chi ta-ch’eng* 集大成) of *Tao-hsüeh* thought, exerted an overriding influence on the perception of the evolution of Sung-Ming Confucianism in later times. Its impact is also detectable in Western research. It is the main concern of *Confucian Discourse and Chu Hsi’s Ascendancy* to redirect the focus on the historical context of the emerging *Tao-hsüeh* “fellowship” in the Southern Sung dynasty, in order to bring to light the original diversity prevailing within this group, and to place Chu Hsi in the intellectual milieu of the second half of the twelfth century. In this, the book gives central stage to a key issue in Sung intellectual history – a field that has seen a number of important works in recent years.²

At the core of *Confucian Discourse* lies the question of how *Tao-hsüeh* Confucianism became the state orthodoxy – a question that was discussed by the late James T.C. Liu in his classical article published some twenty years ago.³ Reconsidering this question, Professor Tillman unrolls a colourful and most fascinating picture of intellectual history in twelfth-century China. In contrast to Liu’s pioneering article, which is primarily oriented toward the political context, Tillman focuses on the internal development of the early *Tao-hsüeh* tradition, exploring the leading *Tao-hsüeh* Confucians’ world of thought against the historical background of the evolving *Tao-hsüeh* community.

Tillman’s “new approach”⁴ stands out against previous works on the topic in that it rigorously dispenses with the term ‘Neo-Confucianism’ of Western coinage. Far from disregarding those scholarly achievements through which the notion of Neo-Confucianism gained popularity,⁵ Tillman insists on setting aside this

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term because he regards it as too vague and diffuse and as rather independent of any particular Chinese terms and contexts. Advocating a “rectifying of names”, he proposes using instead the more specific terms “conventional Confucianism”, “Sung learning” (Sung-hsüeh 宋學), “Tao-hsüeh”, and “Ch’eng-Chu orthodoxy” (pp. 2-3). Reserving “Tao-hsüeh” for one particular wing of Sung learning, he introduces the term “fellowship” to describe the twelfth-century group of Tao-hsüeh scholars as forming “a network of social relations” and as developing “a sense of community with a shared tradition that distinguished them from other Confucians” (p. 3).

Building on this “rectification of names”, Tillman aims at drawing a clearer picture of the historical evolution of Tao-hsüeh from a loose association of individual scholars with divergent ideas to a gradually expanding, more self-conscious fellowship toward a school of thought eventually recognized as state orthodoxy. A deeper understanding of the historical context, Tillman contends, opens up fresh insights into the philosophical issues of Tao-hsüeh thinkers. Confucian Discourse is an elaboration of this “new approach” on a grand scale. The historical perspective is addressed in the “Introduction”, the “Conclusion”, and in the highly perceptive remarks which introduce the four parts of the book. These are congruous with Tillman’s periodization of the history of Tao-hsüeh in the Southern Sung.

Of these four periods, the first period of Emperor Kao-tsong’s long reign, 1127-1162, and the closing era after the reversal of the ban against Tao-hsüeh, 1202-1279, are treated rather briefly (32 pages altogether). Thus, the main emphasis is on the two inner periods, from 1163 to 1181 and from 1182 to 1202. The first inner period, that is, all of the second period, witnessed the solidification of the Tao-hsüeh fellowship. In accordance with a common view in late Southern Sung, this period is described as being dominated by Chang Shih 張栻 (1133-80), Lü Tsu-ch’ien 呂祖謙 (1137-81), and Chu Hsi. In the latter inner period, that is, all of the third period, Chu Hsi explicitly claimed the mantle to lead the Tao-hsüeh fellowship. Lacking Lü’s status, prestige, and personality, Chu’s conduct in exerting this role caused tensions within the fellowship, notably with Ch’en Liang 陳亮 (1143-94) and Lu Chiu-yüan 陸九淵 (1139-93), and provoked resentment in the broader scholarly community. This resentment eventually precipitated the ban against Tao-hsüeh from 1197 to 1202.