

A Study of T'ang Confucianism

—As seen through the Descendants of *Kong-zi* (孔子)—

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In the traditional study of the history of Chinese thought, T'ang Confucianism is not highly evaluated. There is a consensus among scholars that the three hundred year T'ang dynasty represents for Confucianism a period of decline falling between the summits it reached during the Han and Song dynasties. The author of the present paper is more or less in agreement with this view. What conditions were present during the periods when Confucianism flourished? As a matter of fact, among various Chinese schools of thought, Confucianism most positively expounds a teaching which may be characterized as "ruling the country and benefiting people." That is to say, as is perceived in the motto expressed in the *Great Learning* 大学 "cultivating oneself, governing the household, ruling the country and bringing peace to the whole world," it was Confucianism's original aim that the cultivation of one's personal virtues should necessarily be united with the objective of bringing about peace to society in general. Therefore it is Confucianism's contention that if any cultivation of personal virtues remains within each individual and is not extended to bringing about peace to the world at large, it is bound to fall into self-complacency. From such a viewpoint, the Han and Song intelligentsia who sustained those periods intellectually maintained their stance in full accord with the original aims of Confucianism. The

result was a natural predominance of Confucianism over other ideologies. It may be said that Confucianism did not flourish during the T'ang dynasty because the general interest of the intellectuals was rather oriented in personal directions, such as religion and art-rather than to the world at large.

The stagnancy of Confucianism during the T'ang dynasty was on one hand ultimately due to a lack of interest in the world at large among the intellectual classes who were in charge of the culture, but on the other hand the dictates of imperial policy leaned highly in favor of Confucianism. The education of intellectuals on the basis of Confucian thought may be seen as part of an attempt at replenishing the T'ang educational system which included the codification of the Confucian scriptures, the *Wu-jing zheng-yi* 五經正義 and the systematic examination of governmental officials. However, these positive policies to bolster Confucianism taken by the government were not enthusiastically received by the intellectual classes saturated with the aristocratic culture of the previous dynasty. It was only in the latter part of the T'ang that the revival of Confucianism began to be called for by men such as Han-yu 韓愈, and attempts to achieve this goal were not to bear fruit until the following dynasties.

Such, then, was the general tendency of T'ang Confucianism. In the present paper, however, I have tried to view the Confucianism of the T'ang period from a somewhat different angle,, by considering it as it appears in the actual descendents of Kong-zi (Confucius). An unbroken line of family succession has been maintained even to the present day,

with Mr. Kong De-sheng 孔德聖 being said to be the seventy-seventh head of the clan. The generations of the clan which lived during the T'ang dynasty, the thirty-third through the forty-second, were all favored with governmental protection. The historical records show unmistakably the various protective measures taken on behalf of the Kong family and the cult of Kong-tzu for the sake of reviving the fortunes of Confucianism. Buoyed by government support, Kong-tzu's descendants were always proud that Kong-tzu, the founder of Confucianism, was the founding patriarch of their clan. Kong Ying-da 孔穎達 of the early T'ang was representative. One of the most distinguished of all T'ang Confucian scholars, Ying-da was responsible for editing the *Wu jing zheng-yi* 五經正義, in which the self-confidence and pride of being a descendant of Kong-tzu is clearly in evidence. In addition to this, during the Tang dynasty Kong-tzu's descendants played a remarkable role in the study of Confucianism. Since no attempt has yet been made to consider Confucianism through a study of Kong-tzu's descendants, it is my hope that this paper may be of interest to students of Chinese thought and culture.