

The opening to the chapters of biographies called "Forest of Confucians" was translated by Hellmut Wilhelm in "On Ming Orthodoxy," *Monumenta Serica* 29 (1970): 1-26, on pages 3-5. It is posted here by kind permission of the Monumenta Serica Institute, granted January 27, 2015.

Ever since Ssu-ma Ch'ien and Pan Ku established special coverage of the Forest of Confucianists in which they described the way of how, with the rise of Han, the Confucianists cultivated and clarified the art of the Classics and how the Court expanded and fostered educational institutions so that they were brought into consonance with the policy of the period, later historians have continued this genre and composed chapters describing how the scholars embraced and bequeathed the Classics, establishing thereby a tradition in which they succeeded each other as their only occupation. In the Sung History the orthodox tradition 道學 and the Forest of Confucianists were dealt with separately in order to make clear that the trend of I and Lo 伊洛淵源⁶ was the most correct one in its reception and maintenance of the system of the founding fathers of Confucianism and that its interpretation of the way of the world and the mind of men was superior, so that of their writings, even though they are numerous, none can be discarded.

Emperor T'ai-tsu of Ming rose from the status of a commoner and pacified the world. These were times in which military force reigned supreme. However, he too summoned eminent Confucianists to discuss with them ethical questions, to clarify the art of government, and to establish indoctrination 教化, so that the great model for the entire dynasty could be gloriously perfected. And even at this time, when the innate abilities (of the Emperor) carried the day, the contributions of the Confucianists were not without ancillary merits. In the establishment of the examination system for the recruitment of eminent scholars

the import of the Classics was put first, and in the peaceful ages that followed literary education expanded vastly so that high officials who ascended to employment through literary merits held honored positions at Court numerous like a forest.

Then, in the times of Ying-tsung⁷ Hsieh Hsüan 薛瑄⁸ from Ho-chin 河津 deliberated on state affairs on the basis of pure Confucianism, and even though he was finally not employed, he was recognized as the highest authority on account of his purity of character and dedication to scholarship. Wu Yü-pi 吳與弼 was recommended as a famous Confucianist and the Son of Heaven endowed him with emoluments. Discarding the routine ritual he was summoned to an audience to face the Emperor. From this interview Wu's fame spread and his reputation rose even beyond his actual worth. From this time on, increasing importance was attached to the examination system and the status of Confucian scholarship did slightly decline. Beginning with Ch'en Hsien-chang 陳獻章⁹ such extraordinary ceremonial occasions (to honor Confucianists) fell to disuse.

For, the Confucianists of early Ming had all been continuators and heirs of the Chu Hsi school; what this school had bequeathed they carried on without deviation. Ts'ao Tuan 曹端¹⁰ and Hu Chü-jen 胡居仁¹¹

followed these tracks diligently, toed the line respectfully, and accepted the orthodox tradition of the former Confucianists not daring to change or alter anything. A division within scholarship started with Ch'en Hsien-chang and Wang Shou-jen. Those who followed Ch'en as their spiritual ancestor are called the Chiang-men 江門 school, they trod a lonely path and their tradition did not reach very far. Those who followed Wang Shou-jen as their spiritual ancestor are called the Yao-chiang 姚江 school. They established principles of their own and turned their backs on Chu Hsi. Disciples of this school were found everywhere in the world and their tradition continued for over a century. The more their doctrine expanded the more evil they became. Since Chia-ching and Lung-ch'ing times (1522-1572) those who still ardently believed in the Ch'eng-Chu tradition and were not distracted by heretical doctrines were few in number. In summary, Confucianists of Ming time, in following the lead of the I-Lo School and investigating the secrets of human nature and destiny, readily opened the door to deviating paths resulting from tiny mistakes. As errors were transmitted and repeated they moved farther and farther away from truth. Of those specialized in the classical tradition none achieved professional fame during more than 270 years, and the classical scholarship did not come up to the refinement of Han and T'ang. Concentrating on the concepts of human nature and reason they continued the dregs of Sung and Yüan. When critics say that when the examination system flourishes Confucian scholarship declines, is that not valid?