

Tai Chen's Choice between Philosophy and Philology

Tai Chen 戴震 (1724-1777) presents two entirely different images in the intellectual history of the mid-Ch'ing period: that of a classical philologist and that of a Confucian philosopher. During his own time, it was Tai the philologist who received universal recognition in the scholarly world. On the other hand, Tai the philosopher was largely ignored or even denounced by his contemporaries. Chang Hsüeh-ch'eng's 章學誠 (1738-1801) great appreciation of Tai's philosophical writings was not shared at all by such common friends as Chu Yün 朱筠 (1729-1781) and Shao Chin-han 邵晉涵 (1743-1796). In modern times, it is largely owing to the efforts of such scholars as Chang Ping-lin 章炳麟 (1869-1935), Wang Kuo-wei 王國維 (1877-1927), Liu Shih-p'ei 劉師培 (1884-1919), Liang Ch'i-ch'ao 梁啟超 (1873-1929), and Hu Shih 胡適 (1891-1962) that Tai the philosopher has become the focus of intellectual attention. By contrast, Tai's philological accomplishments are more often praised than seriously studied, with the notable exception of his collated text of the *Shui-ching chu* 水經注 (*Commentary to the Classic of Waterways*).¹

In the present study, I propose to examine philosophy and philology

¹This modern interest in Tai's collated text of the *Shui-ching chu* has been sustained by the famous controversy concerning whether or not Tai's work was purloined from Chao I-ch'ing's 趙一清 (1711-1764) *Shui-ching chu shih* 水經注釋 prior to its publication. Starting in 1943, Hu Shih spent almost two decades in a special investigation of this *cause célèbre*. He brought to light numerous pieces of evidence that convincingly demonstrate that all the major discoveries about this text had already been made by Tai before he could have had access to Chao's manuscripts. Moreover, contrary to the charge that Tai made false references to the *Yung-lo ta-tien* 永樂大典 text to cover up his plagiarism, Hu Shih was able to show that on a number of occasions Tai followed the *Yung-lo* text even to a fault. Although the whole matter is too complicated to be dealt with adequately here, it is nevertheless clear that the case usually lined up against Tai is based only on some misinterpreted circumstantial evidence. It is also interesting to note that modern scholars such as Meng Sen 孟森 and Wang Kuo-wei 王國維, who charged Tai with plagiarism, were invariably unsympathetic toward Tai's anti-Neo-Confucian philosophical point of view. It is only fair that any responsible scholar who still wishes to press the same charge against Tai must of necessity take full account of Hu Shih's findings. See Hu Shih, "A Note on Ch'üan Tsu-wang, Chao I-Ch'ing and Tai Chen: A Study of Independent Convergence in Research as Illustrated in Their Works on the *Shui-ching chu*," in Arthur W. Hummel, ed., *Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing Period* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Govt. Printing Office, 1944) 2, pp. 970-82; and *Hu Shih shou-kao* 胡適手稿, series 1-5 (Taipei: Hu Shih chi-nien kuan, 1966-1969).

as the two basic constituent elements in Tai's system of Confucian learning. By "philosophy" and "philology" I refer to what Ch'ing scholars called, respectively, "moral principles" (*i-li* 義理) and "evidential investigation" (*k'ao-cheng* 考證 or *k'ao-chü* 考據).

The emphasis of this study is placed on the development of Tai's thought during the last two decades of his life when he was, by general suffrage of the scholarly world, the foremost leader of the philological movement. Tai's involvement in this learned movement is an event of singular importance not only in his own intellectual life, but in the development of the movement as well. While the movement provided Tai with a solid philological foundation upon which his philosophical edifice was eventually built, in turn he also helped shape the character of the movement in its mature stage by supplying it with a much needed philosophical justification.

Tai first came to Peking in 1754. He had no sooner made his initial contact with the academic circles in the capital than he was hailed as the archphilologist of the day. A first-hand account of Tai's sudden rise to fame is given in Ch'ien Ta-hsin's 錢大昕 *Chronological Autobiography* as follows:

Nineteenth year (*chia-hsü*; 1754) of Ch'ien-lung, aged twenty-seven *sui*. His Excellency Ch'in Hui-t'ien 秦蕙田 (canonized as Wen-kung 文恭) of Wusih invited me to participate in his *Wu-li t'ung-k'ao* 五禮通考 (*Comprehensive Study of the Five Rites*) project. Tai Tung-yüan 戴東原 of Hsiu-ning 休寧 came to the capital for the first time. He visited me at my residence and we talked all day. I was greatly impressed by the depth and breadth of his learning. The following day I recommended him to His Excellency, who cordially agreed to take a ride with me to pay Tai a personal visit. His Excellency then praised him on all occasions. Henceforth Tai's name was known throughout China.²

Needless to say, what made both Ch'ien Ta-hsin and Ch'in Hui-t'ien so excited about their discovery of Tai was not the latter's sophistication in Confucian thinking, but his many-sided accomplishments in the broad field of Ch'ing philology, including mathematics, astronomy, historical geography, etymology, and phonology. So when Tai finally accepted Ch'in

Hui-t'ien's invitation to work on the *Wu-li t'ung-k'ao* project, he was put in charge of the section on "astronomical calculations."³

Tai's early public image as an archphilologist remained unchanged till the end of his life; it only continued to grow as his influence in the scholarly world increased with time. In 1773 he was appointed a compiler of the *Ssu-k'u ch'üan-shu* 四庫全書 project without a *chin-shih* 進士 degree, a fact that fully testifies to his stature as a leading classical philologist. During the period 1773-1777, when he was working on this project, according to Tuan Yü-ts'ai 段玉裁, works assigned to him for editing fell mainly into the following categories: astronomy, mathematics, historical geography, etymology, and linguistics.⁴ In 1755 Tai wrote to a friend that the *tao* 道 of the sage is to be found in the texts of the Six Classics, which must be subjected to both philosophical and philological analyses. The Han Confucianists were philologically correct but philosophically unsound, whereas the Sung Confucianists were philosophically sound but philologically incorrect.⁵ The implication is, of course, that it is ideal to be in possession of the virtues of both and the vices of neither. But it is clear that in 1777, as in 1754, he was respected in the academic circles in Peking only as a classical philologist. Tai, much to his dismay, was never taken seriously by his colleagues as a Confucian philosopher.⁶

Yet during the same period that Tai was philologically active and productive, he was also philosophically creative. His *Yüan shan* 原善 was first drafted sometime before 1763 and then expanded and revised in 1766; *Hsü-yen* 緒言 was written in 1769 when he was working on a local history project in Shansi; and *Meng-tzu tzu-i shu-cheng* 孟子字義疏證, his crowning achievement in Confucian philosophy, was completed only a few months before his death. Moreover, it has recently come to light that sometime between 1769 and 1777 he also revised the *Hsü-yen* text and changed its title to *Meng-tzu ssu-shu lu* 孟子私淑錄, which was later incorporated into the final version of *Meng-tzu tzu-i shu-cheng*.⁷ Although Tai was working simultaneously in the fields of philology and philosophy, his philological studies were always enthusiastically received, while his philosophical adventures failed to evoke a positive response from his fellow scholars. Chang Hsüeh-

² Ch'ien Ta-hsin, *Chu-ting chü-shih tzu-ting nien-p'u* 竹汀居士自訂年譜 (rpt. Hong Kong: Chung-wen shu-tien, 1974), p. 12. Deceived in old age by his memory, Tuan Yü-ts'ai 段玉裁 wrongly assigned Tai's first visit to Peking to 1755 in *Tai Tung-yüan hsien-sheng nien-p'u* 戴東原先生年譜 (hereafter *TNP*), included in *Tai Chen wen-chi* 戴震文集 (Hong Kong: Chung-hua shu-chü, 1974; hereafter *TWC*), p. 220. For details see Yü Ying-shih 余英時, *Lun Tai Chen yü Chang Hsüeh-ch'eng* 論戴震與章學誠 (Hong Kong: Lung-men shu-tien, 1976), pp. 152-53.

³ *TNP*, p. 221. ⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 236-38. ⁵ *TWC*, p. 144.

⁶ Ch'ien Mu 錢穆, *Chung-kuo chin san-pai nien hsüeh-shu shih* 中國近三百年學術史 (Shanghai: Shang-wu yin-shu kuan, 1937), vol. 1, p. 332.

⁷ See Ch'ien Mu, "Chi ch'ao-pen Tai Tung-yüan Meng-tzu ssu-shu-lu" 記鈔本戴東原孟子私淑錄, included in Yü, *Tai yü Chang*, pp. 283-89. For a different view of the textual evolution of Tai's philosophical writings, see Yamanoi Yü 山井湧, *Min Shin shisshi no kenkyū* 明清思想史の研究 (Tokyo: Tōkyō Daigaku shuppan-kai, 1980), pp. 412-31.

ch'eng gives a vivid description of the situation in 1766 when he was staying with Chu Yün in Peking. In "A Letter in Reply to Shao Erh-yün 邵二雲 (Chin-han 晉涵)," he recalls:

At that time, it may be remembered, both Mr. Chu [Yün] of Ta-hsing 大興 and Mr. Ch'ien [Ta-hsin] of Chia-ting 嘉定 were the two towering figures of highest academic reputation among scholar-officials in the capital. They both admired Tai, but only to the extent of Tai's penetrating and refined studies in textual criticism, philology, etymology, and mathematics. When it came to Tai's [philosophical] treatises, such as *Yüan shan* 原善, they regretted to see [Tai] applying his good self to a field of futility. I argued forcefully in front of Master Chu, contending that [Tai's philosophical] theories were indeed the most rewarding part of his textual investigations. Unfortunately, my position was humble and my words carried little weight. None of the esteemed scholars was listening to me.⁸

We have reason to believe that after this initial setback, Tai kept his philosophical writings to himself and rarely, if ever, permitted them to be circulated among his unsympathetic colleagues. This is clearly shown in his preface to the final version of *Yüan shan*, in which he says that he will hide the manuscript in his family library in the hope that some day an able person will come along to appreciate and promote the truth contained therein. Tuan Yü-ts'ai, Tai's leading disciple, who had copied the first draft of *Yüan shan* in 1763, does not seem to have known about Tai's other two major philosophical works — *Hsü-yen* and *Meng-tzu tzu-i shu-cheng* — during his master's lifetime.⁹

In a letter to Wang Nien-sun 王念孫 (1744–1832), Tuan confessed that he did not study the *Meng-tzu tzu-i shu-cheng* and grasp its central significance until as late as 1810.¹⁰ The obscurity of Tai as philosopher in the late eighteenth century can further be seen from the fact that Chang Hsüeh-ch'eng, who was a great admirer of Tai's philosophy, never had access to Tai's later philosophical writings. For, as late as 1790 when Chang wrote his postscript to the essay "Chu and Lu," he still took *Yüan shan* (most likely the first draft) and two other short pieces on the concept of "nature" to be

⁸ From Chang Hsüeh-ch'eng, *Chang-shih i-shu i-p'ien* 章氏遺書逸篇 (hereafter CSISIP); letter included in Yü, *Tai yü Chang*, p. 309.

⁹ Ch'ien, *Hsüeh-shu shih*, vol. 1, pp. 324–28.

¹⁰ Liu P'an-hsü 劉盼遂, ed., *Ching-yün lou wen-chi pu-pien* 經韻樓文集補編 (Peking: Lai-hsün ko, 1936) *hsia*, p. 20a.

representative of Tai's thought.¹¹ We have evidence that Tai only showed *Hsü-yen* to his old schoolmate Ch'eng Yao-t'ien 程瑤川 (1725–1814) in 1776 and *Meng-tzu tzu-i shu-cheng* to the Buddhist philosopher P'eng Shao-sheng 彭紹升 (1740–1796) in 1777, at their request.¹² Both Ch'eng and P'eng, it may be noted, were genuinely interested in Neo-Confucian philosophy, although they differed from Tai, each in his own way, in philosophical outlook. At this point let us pause for a moment and consider two intriguing questions: First, was Tai's philology related to his philosophy, and, if so, how were they related to each other? Second, were philology and philosophy of equal importance to Tai, or, in terms of Tai's own ultimate concern, was one of them more fundamental than the other?

The answer to our first question is quite clear. On many occasions Tai Chen explicitly stated that his philology and his philosophy were inseparable. In his letter to Tuan Yü-ts'ai, dated February 21, 1777, Tai wrote:

Since I was seventeen years old, I have set the quest of *tao* as my life goal. I was convinced that *tao* can be found only in the Six Classics and the works of Confucius and Mencius. But unless we study the meanings of the words, institutions, and terminologies [in these classical texts] we will not be able to understand the language of the texts.¹³

Earlier in 1765 he also said:

Alas, if the so-called philosophical ideas [of the sages] can be obtained by sheer speculation apart from the classics, then anyone is able to grasp them out of emptiness. If that is the case, what do we need classical learning for? It is precisely because sheer speculation cannot lead one to the philosophical ideas of the sages of antiquity that one has to seek them from the ancient classics. Since messages contained in the surviving records have gradually fallen into oblivion due to the expanse of time between the past and the present, one therefore has to seek them through philological studies [of the classics]. Thus only if philology is

¹¹ Chang Hsüeh-ch'eng, *Wen-shih t'ung-i* 文史通義 (Peking: Ku-chi ch'u-pan she, 1956; hereafter *WSTI*), p. 57.

¹² According to *TNP*, p. 223, Ch'eng Yao-t'ien copied *Hsü-yen* in 1776, and according to P'eng Shao-sheng's letter to Tai Chen (in *Erh-lin chü chi* 二林居集 [1881 edn.; rpt. Taipei: Shih-men t'u-shu kung-ssu, 1976], ch. 3, p. 16b), Tai showed both the *Yüan shan* 原善 and *Meng-tzu tzu-i shu-cheng* 孟子字義疏證 (Peking: Chung-hua, 1961; hereafter cited as *MTTISC*) to P'eng in 1777. (See also *TNP*, p. 240.) From Tai's reply, we know that P'eng at first only asked to see Tai's *Yüan shan*, probably without any knowledge of the *MTTISC*. Tai, however, sent him both manuscripts. See Tai's letter to P'eng included in *MTTISC*, p. 161.

¹³ This letter is included in Yü, *Tai yü Chang*, pp. 291–93.

clear, can the ancient classics be understood; and only if the classics are understood, can the sages' philosophical ideas then be grasped.¹⁴

So for Tai, philology was the foundation and philosophy the superstructure. But Tai's conception of philology was different from that of his contemporaries. While most mid-Ch'ing scholars were doing philology on a piecemeal basis, Tai was promoting what must be called a systematic philology.

As early as 1749 Tai wrote:

[It is necessary that we] bring the *Erh-ya Dictionary* to bear on the interpretation of [such classical texts as] the *Classic of Poetry* and the *Classic of History* and, conversely, also use *Poetry* and *History* to authenticate the *Erh-ya Dictionary*. We should then apply [the philological methods of explication] to all the extant ancient texts of pre-Ch'in times. Only by systematization through synthesis and analysis, always on the basis of the Six Graphic Principles and phonetics, can we then hope to establish philology on a solid ground.¹⁵

Also around this time, in his much-quoted "Letter to Shih Chung-ming 是仲明," he further defined his systematic philology: "The meaning of a single character [in a classical text] can be considered as conclusively established only when it is uniformly applicable to all the classics and firmly based on the Six Graphical Principles."¹⁶

It is true that already in the seventeenth century Wan Ssu-ta 萬斯大 (1633-1683) had expressed the view that Confucian classical scholarship is of such a unified nature that no single text can be fully understood in isolation from the rest. The entire corpus of Confucian classics must therefore be treated as a closely interrelated system.¹⁷ But, obviously, here Wan is only advocating a systematic study of the classics. Ch'ing philology did not come to full maturity until the middle of the eighteenth century. In Wan's time, the kind of systematic philology Tai Chen was to promote a century later could hardly have been conceived.

Central to Tai's conceptions of systematic philology is the basic assumption that the language in which the sages' philosophical ideas are expressed is uniform throughout the pre-Ch'in texts. To what extent this assumption

can be regarded as valid is a question that does not concern us here. The point I wish to stress is that it is precisely this assumption that gives an inner unity to philosophy and philology in Tai's scheme of things. Like Isaiah Berlin's hedgehog, Tai also related "everything to a single central vision, one system less or more coherent or articulate," although in his particular case the "central vision" or the "one system" involved him in two different types of intellectual work — philology and philosophy. True to his hedgehog nature, however, Tai sought not only to make philosophy and philology systematic within their respective domains, but also to relate these two branches of Confucian learning systematically to the "central vision" of the Confucian *tao*. This leads directly to our second question, namely, which of the two fields, philosophy or philology, was more fundamental to his central intellectual concern.

I wish to begin by saying that in spite of his public image as an archphilologist, deep in his heart Tai Chen always aspired to become a Confucian philosopher. The best evidence for this is to be found in the profound gratification he expressed each time he was engaged in a major philosophical work. He once told Tuan Yü-ts'ai, "When I completed chapter one of *Yüan shan* my pleasure was beyond description. I even found food particularly delicious."¹⁸ It is understandable why he was so excited about *Yüan shan*, his first systematic treatment of a philosophical topic. From his early years to the very end of his life, Tai devoted himself to the study of philology and yet, at the same time, he made every effort to go beyond philology in order to reach a genuine philosophical understanding of the Confucian way. Time and time again, he stressed the point that philology was not an end in itself but a means to "hearing the *tao* 聞道."¹⁹ It is probably in the writing of *Yüan shan* that he experienced for the first time the supreme delight of being philosophically enlightened via philology.

There is also an extremely revealing piece of information concerning Tai's state of mind when he was working on *Hsü-yan*, his second major philosophical treatise. In 1772 he reminisced with Ch'eng Yao-t'ien about his start at writing it in Shansi in 1769:

When I was staying with Governor [Chu Kuei 朱珪] in his official residence, for some ten odd days I pretended to be sick. Afterward I came out and confessed to the Governor that I was not really sick. I

¹⁴ *TWC*, p. 168. ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 44. ¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 140.

¹⁷ According to Huang Tsung-hsi's 黃宗羲 summary of Wan's views. See *Huang Li-chou wen-chi* 黃梨洲文集 (Peking: Chung-hua, 1959), p. 199.

¹⁸ *TNP*, p. 226.

¹⁹ For example, see *TWC*, p. 146; "Letter to Someone," in *MTTISC*, p. 173.

was only in a frenzy while trying to smash the Supreme Ultimate Chart of the Sung Confucianists.²⁰

A word of explanation is in order. The last phrase, "smash the Supreme Ultimate Chart of the Sung Confucianists," is a reference to his composition *Hsü-yen*. For although his *Yüan shan* marks a significant departure from the philosophical position of orthodox Sung Confucianism, Tai nevertheless did not push there his differences with Sung Confucianists to a breaking point.²¹ As Ch'ien Mu 錢穆 rightly points out, it was in the *Hsü-yen* that he began to attack his Sung predecessors openly.²² However, what particularly interests us here is the fact that he experienced a frenzied state of mind while writing the *Hsü-yen*. This seems to be a clear indication that he was totally immersed in thought during the period of "some ten odd days" of his pretended illness. The actual writing of *Hsü-yen* may have taken much longer, for evidence shows that three years later, in 1772, Tai was still revising this work.²³ But we can safely assume that it was during these "ten odd days" in 1769 that his central ideas for it crystallized — ideas that would eventually take form in *Meng-tzu tzu-i shu-cheng*. So, as far as the development of Tai's philosophical thought is concerned, the importance of this brief period in 1769 can hardly be exaggerated.

Moreover, Tai's reminiscence also suggests something psychologically significant. The "pretended illness," the "frenzy," and the attempt to "smash the Supreme Ultimate Chart" all point to a powerful psychological experience. When Tai said that he "smashed the Supreme Ultimate Chart," he was actually saying that he had finally declared war on Sung Confucianism. In fact, Tai's change into a critic of the Ch'eng-Chu tradition is traceable to his first meeting with Hui Tung 惠棟 in Yang-chou back in 1757. But his first piece critical of Sung Confucianism was not written until 1765. Even then his criticism was still mild, indirect, and implicit.²⁴ It took

²⁰ Tuan Yü-ts'ai, *Ching-yün lou wen-chi* 經韻樓文集 (Ching-yün lou edn.; rpt. Taipei: Ta-hua shu-chü, 1977) 7, pp. 54a-b.

²¹ In Tai Chung-li's 戴中立 (son of Tai Chen) letter to Tuan Yü-ts'ai dated 1778, he remarked under the title *Yüan shan*, "a refutation of Sung Confucianists" (in *Tai Tung-yüan shou-cha chen-chi* 戴東原手札真蹟 [Taipei: Chung-hua ts'ung-shu, 1956; unpaginated]). I suspect that this remark indicates Tai Chen's self-evaluation of his *Yüan shan*. Chung-li probably only recorded what he heard from his father during the latter's lifetime.

²² Ch'ien, *Hsüeh-shu shih*, vol. 1, p. 339.

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 328-29.

²⁴ See Tai's "T'i Hui Ting-yü hsien-sheng shou-ching t'u" 題憲定字先生授經圖 ("Colophon on the Painting of Master Hui Tung Teaching the Classics") in *TWC*, pp. 167-68. In this short piece of 1765, Tai said: "It has often been said that there is Han Confucian classical learning and there is Sung Confucian classical learning; the former is philosophical in approach, the latter philosophical. I am greatly puzzled by this statement. Alas, if the so-called philosophical ideas [of the sages] can be obtained by sheer speculation apart from the classics, then anyone

him another four years to declare war openly. In view of his early intellectual background, especially his spiritual adherence to the Ch'eng-Chu tradition through the influence of Chiang Yung, Tai's decision to "smash the Supreme Ultimate Chart" at long last must have been an event of the first magnitude in his life.²⁵

Tai's last philosophical work — *Meng-tzu tzu-i shu-cheng* — was completed sometime early in 1777, and, unfortunately, he did not live long enough to leave us a similar statement that would reveal his innermost feelings about this masterpiece. Nevertheless, from his letters to friends we know that he was prouder of it than of any of his other writings. In a letter to Tuan Yü-ts'ai dated May 30, 1777, he spoke of this work thus:

Of all the works I have written I must take *Meng-tzu tzu-i shu-cheng* to be my *magnum opus*. It contains essentials for rectifying the minds of the people. Nowadays everybody, righteous or wicked, mistakenly takes his personal opinion to be what is called *li* 理 (principle, or reason) and has thus brought calamity to the populace. I therefore felt compelled to write my *Shu-cheng*.²⁶

As we know, Tai's latest discovery in his *Meng-tzu tzu-i shu-cheng* was a redefinition of *li* 理 in terms of both *ch'ing* 情 ("feelings") and *yü* 欲 ("desires"); this was diametrically opposed to the Ch'eng-Chu dichotomy between *li* on the one hand and *ch'ing* and *yü* on the other. He was so excited about his new formulation that during the four months prior to his death on July 1, 1777, he wrote no less than five letters to his friends explaining the central significance of his major breakthrough in Confucian philosophy.²⁷ There can be no doubt that the completion of his *magnum opus* gave him an intellectual satisfaction of the highest degree.

is able to grasp them out of emptiness. If that is the case, what do we need classical learning for?" Clearly, this is a subtle way of saying that Sung Confucianism is sheer speculation without textual basis in the classics. This passage contrasts sharply with the text of his 1755 letter to Fang Chü 方矩, in which he wrote: "The *tao* of the sages is contained in the Six Classics. [In understanding the classics,] the Han Confucianists are philologically correct but philosophically unsound, whereas the Sung Confucianists are philosophically sound but philologically incorrect" (*TWC*, p. 144).

²⁵ It may be pointed out that Tai's attitude toward Chiang Yung 江永 also changed significantly around the time he decided to "smash the Supreme Ultimate Chart." Although it is not clear whether he was a "registered" student of Chiang, Tai did treat Chiang as a "teacher" in his early years. During the last decade of his life, however, Tai respected Chiang only as an ordinary senior scholar. This psychological change on the part of Tai may be explained by the fact that he no longer shared Chiang's faith in Ch'eng-Chu Confucianism. For details see Yü, *Tai yü Chang*, pp. 164-78.

²⁶ In Tai, *Chen-chi*. Also quoted in *TNP*, p. 241.

²⁷ Ch'ien, *Hsüeh-shu shih*, vol. 1, pp. 330-31.

The above analysis shows clearly that philosophy not only occupied Tai's mind consistently but also engaged his heart. By contrast, philology does not seem to have ever gratified his ego with comparable intensity.²⁸ This is not to say, of course, that philology was not important to him. I have already pointed out that philology was the very foundation on which his philosophical structure was built. I must also add that Tai was a professional philologist in the sense that most of the time he made his livelihood from philological work. However, the fact remains that throughout the last two decades of his life he never allowed his professional interest in philology to distract him from his central philosophical vision, the Confucian *tao*. In an earlier letter to Tuan Yü-ts'ai dated February 21, 1777, he talked about his future plans:

It seems that I shall be able to finish my part of the editing work [in the *Ssu-k'u ch'üan-shu* project] in the coming summer. I have decided to take a leave and return to the south in the seventh or eighth moon so that I may obtain the care of a physician. I wish to find a teaching position in an academy to support myself and will not come out again. I shall devote several years of my life to writing a book elucidating the *tao* of Confucius and Mencius. If I still have some energy left, I will then edit my previous studies in etymology and the classics.²⁹

Obviously, had Tai lived a few years longer, he would have done something more ambitious in the realm of philosophy than the *Meng-tzu tzu-i shu-cheng*, covering not only Mencius but Confucius as well. Philology on the other hand, as the last sentence unmistakably indicates, became only peripheral to his intellectual concern. Here Tai made his final choice between philosophy and philology.³⁰

We have seen that Tai's public image as an archphilologist was directly contradicted by his self-identity as a Confucian philosopher. It was a contradiction between his inner world and an intellectual environment that not only surrounded him, but of which he was also a part. The importance of this contradiction in Tai's life cannot be overstressed. As is shown below,

²⁸ Yang Hsiang-kuei 楊向奎, *Chung-kuo ku-tai she-hui yü ku-tai ssu-hsiang yen-chiu* 中國古代社會與古代思想研究 (Shanghai: Jen-min, 1964), vol. 2, p. 929. It must be pointed out that occasionally Tai also derived some delight from his philological discoveries, but not nearly as overwhelmingly as from his philosophical accomplishments. See, for instance, his letter to Lu Wen-chao 盧文弨 in *TWC*, p. 61, and *TNP*, p. 226.

²⁹ In Yü, *Tai yü Chang*, p. 292.

³⁰ On this point see Chiao Hsün's 焦循 discussion in "Shen Tai 申戴," *Tiao-Ku chi* 雕菰集 (Kuo-hsüeh chi-pen ts'ung-shu edn.), vol. 1, p. 95.

the pressures of this intellectual environment of the mid-eighteenth century had generated in Tai a tension of such an enduring nature that he struggled to accommodate it until his death. It seems to me that much of his intellectual development after his arrival in Peking in 1754, especially the ways in which his philosophic ideas were expressed, needs to be reinterpreted in the light of this tension. For two centuries this dark corner in Tai's inner consciousness has remained obscured from the view of those who studied him. No one has ever suspected that during his lifetime the most profound psychological pressures to which Tai the archphilologist was being subjected came from none other than the group of philologists with which he was most intimately associated. Let us begin by examining the nature of these pressures.

In his "Postscript to Chu and Lu," Chang Hsüeh-ch'eng wrote:

Mr. Tai's scholarship was profound in etymology and excelled in technical terms and institutions [in the classical texts]. Moreover, he also grasped the very significance of these matters and, on the basis of his scholarship, he was to expound the *tao*. But contemporary scholars only valued erudition and philology. Since they saw that Tai's philological achievement fitted in well with the current fad, they therefore considered this to be Tai's greatest strength. When Tai wrote his essays "Human Nature" and "Goodness," in which he truly displayed great originality in the treatment of such philosophical topics as Heaven and Man, *li* (principle, or reason) and *ch'i* (vital force, or matter), these same contemporary scholars then turned to accuse him of talking emptily about philosophy. In their opinion, he could well have saved the trouble of writing such essays. They certainly show no understanding of Tai's scholarship at all.³¹

From Chang's "Letter in Reply to Shao Erh-yün," quoted earlier, we know that "contemporary scholars" is a reference to Chu Yün and Ch'ien Ta-hsin. Elsewhere, Chang specifically singled out Chu Yün as a hostile critic of Tai's adventures in philosophical ideas.³² Since both Chu and Ch'ien were among the most influential leaders in the learned movement of philologism of the day, and since they made this attack emphatically as well as repeatedly, it is inconceivable that Tai could have been insensitive to their criticism, much less ignorant of it. In fact, Tai was not only sensitive, he also responded to it actively. However, his response was conveyed in such a subtle and quiet

³¹ *WSTI*, p. 57.

³² Chang, *Chang-shih i-shu pu-i* 補遺 (Chia-yeh t'ang edn.), p. 29a.

way that it has eluded detection. In what immediately follows, I try to prove my point through a discussion of his *Yüan shan* and *Meng-tzu tzu-i shu-cheng*.

In his preface to the revised and expanded version of *Yüan shan*, Tai wrote:

Originally, I wrote my treatise *Yüan shan* in three sections (*chang* 章). Being afraid that scholars might be biased by a point of view wholly different from mine, I therefore quoted from the Confucian classics to explain and support my argument. In the volume to follow, I place my original three sections, respectively, at the beginning of each of the three chapters (*chüan* 卷) into which this volume is divided; these are followed by my quotations from, and comments on, the classics. Since I have compared and combined the meanings of terms in the classics, it should be very clear where the beginning and the end of my reasoning and my purpose lie: an examination of the Way of Heaven and the Way of Man; they present the most fundamental teachings of the classics. Now that we are separated from the ancient sages by such a long period of time, it is no surprise that students of the classics in our time cannot maintain a systematic view of the teachings or the insights of the ancient sages and that they accept what they usually hear and learn about without discriminating the true from the false. Fearing that my words are not strong enough to retrieve the teachings of the classics from decline, I therefore hide my treatise in my family library in the hope that some able person will discover it and that he will some day promote the truth contained therein.³³

The preface contains several important messages that reveal the delicately strained relations between Tai and other leading philologists. First, it tells the reader what motivated its author to revise and enlarge his original version of *Yüan shan*: he did so in response to scholars "biased by a point of view wholly different" from his. Who were the "scholars" that Tai is talking about in this context? In view of the fact that between 1763 and 1766 the original manuscript of *Yüan shan* circulated only in an extremely limited circle of Tai's scholarly friends,³⁴ and that the earliest known criticism of the

work came from none other than Chu Yün and Ch'ien Ta-hsin, we can safely assume that Tai's "scholars" were, in all probability, not very different from what Chang Hsüeh-ch'eng referred to in the "Postscript to Chu and Lu" as "contemporary scholars." In other words, Tai must also have had both Chu Yün and Ch'ien Ta-hsin in mind when he wrote the preface.

Second, the manner in which he revised and expanded his early draft of *Yüan shan* further shows that the rewriting was prompted by Chu Yün's and Ch'ien Ta-hsin's criticizing it as an "empty talk on philosophy" (*k'ung-shuo i-li* 空說義理). For the rewriting, as Tai himself pointed out, consisted mainly of quoting extensively from the classics to support his original argument. Liang Ch'i-ch'ao, who carefully compared the two versions, fully confirmed this point.³⁵ Thus we see that Tai's revision of *Yüan shan* was not necessitated by philosophical reasons. He did it with the express purpose of establishing his philosophical argument on a firm textual basis. In a quiet but persistent manner, he refuted the philologists' charge that his philosophical treatise was merely "empty talk."

Third, in the latter part of the preface, Tai turned from the defensive to the offensive by pointing out the philologists' inability to maintain a systematic view of the teachings of the sages. This is a typical hedgehog's denunciation of the fox's habit of mind. The term "students of the classics" in the preface leaves little doubt that, here, Tai was speaking of the philologists. Later, in 1769, he made the same point in a positive way by exhorting the philologists to rise above philology in their classical studies in order to learn the Confucian *tao*.³⁶

If Tai's rewriting of *Yüan shan* was done under the pressures of philologism, the same pressures can also be shown to have been at work in his writing of *Meng-tzu tzu-i shu-cheng*. It is all the more revealing that once again Chu Yün was directly involved. The following story was told by the intellectual historian Chiang Fan 江藩 (1761-1831), one of Chu Yün's disciples:

Hung Pang 洪榜 (1745-1779) . . . throughout his life admired Tai's scholarship. At the time when Tai's *Meng-tzu tzu-i shu-cheng* was produced, readers could not comprehend its meaning, and only Pang considered its contribution as great as Yü's (founder of the Hsia

³³ *Tai Chen's Inquiry into Goodness*, trans. Chung-ying Cheng (Honolulu: East-West Center Press, 1971), p. 65; quoted with minor alterations.

³⁴ For instance, when Tuan Yü-ts'ai asked to see his *Yüan shan* in 1766, Tai wrote him saying that it was borrowed by a friend named Wang Ming 王明. (See Tai's letter to Tuan, dated 1766, in *Chen-chi*.) This letter shows that the *Yüan shan* manuscript existed only in a single original copy.

³⁵ Liang Ch'i-ch'ao, "Tai Tung-yüan chu-shu tsuan-chiao shu-mu k'ao" 戴東原著述纂校書目考, in his *Chin-tai Chung-kuo hsüeh-shu lun-t'ung* 近代中國學術論叢 (Hong Kong: Ch'ung-wen shu-tien, 1973), p. 234.

³⁶ See the last sentence of his "Ku ching-chieh kou ch'en hsü" 古經解鈎沉序, in *TWC*, p. 146.

dynasty) achievement [in regulating the waterways]. He wrote a *hsing-chuang* 行狀 (career biography) of Tai which included [Tai's] letter to P'eng Ch'ih-mu 彭尺木.³⁷ When my teacher Ssu-ho 筭河 (Chu Yün) saw this, he said, "This [item] need not be included. This is not the kind of work of Tai that is worthy to be handed down." Pang then wrote [Chu] a letter of protest. The fact that now this letter is not found in the *hsing-chuang* is because Tai's son, Chung-li, finally excluded it. It was not [Pang's] decision.³⁸

To get to the heart of the matter, it is necessary to take a close look at Hung's letter to Chu, which reads, in part:

In our last conversation, you instructed me, "[Tai's] reply to P'eng Ch'ih-mu in the *hsing-chuang* need not be included. [Philosophical topics such as] Human Nature and the Way of Heaven cannot be heard [from Confucius].³⁹ Why should there be further discussions in addition to those of the Ch'eng brothers and Chu Hsi? This is not the kind of work of Tai that is worthy to be handed down." During the conversation I only listened to your instruction. Out of respect, I didn't dare to say a word. Now as I look back, since you are a well-respected leader of the scholarly world, you wouldn't possibly say anything without good reasons. I can think of three possible reasons for your objection [to the inclusion of Tai's letter]. First, the Ch'eng brothers and Chu Hsi are all eminent worthies with moral perfection. It is therefore undesirable to contradict their established doctrines. . . . Second, it is important for a student of the classics to follow the methodology of his own field. Han Learning has its own methodology, and so does Sung Learning. Now since Tai specialized in textual technicalities and excelled in etymology, it would be better for him to stay away from [philosophical discussions of] the meanings of [Human] Nature and [Heavenly] Decree (*ming* 命) so that his weakness may not be exposed and strength obscured. Third, it may be argued that one can only exert oneself to become a Confucian

scholar, but one cannot attain sagehood through learning. One can hardly avoid exaggeration when one tries to characterize an anti-quarian scholar in terms of the moral qualities of a sage. As far as I can see, your objection probably arises from these three contradictions.

It must be pointed out that when Chu Yün raised his objection to Hung Pang, he did not give any specific reasons. The above three reasons, therefore, were all conjectures on the part of Hung. In my judgment, the most likely explanation is that Chu's objection was based on something very close to the second reason listed in Hung's letter, namely, a Han Learning philologist should never meddle with philosophical speculation typical of Sung Learning.

Tai's letter to P'eng Shao-sheng, written in 1777, is actually a summary of his major philosophical arguments in both *Yüan shan* and *Meng-tzu tzu-i shu-cheng*. We already know, thanks to Chang Hsüeh-ch'eng, that Chu had from the very beginning disapproved of Tai's adventures in philosophy and had contemptuously called Tai's *Yüan shan* and his other philosophical pieces "empty talk." Obviously, Chu didn't change his view after Tai's death and he honestly believed that by asking Hung Pang to exclude the letter from the *hsing-chuang* he was rendering his beloved friend a last important service. From his strictly philological point of view, he just couldn't bear to see the image of Tai as a great classical scholar marred by a proclivity for philosophical nonsense. To allow Tai's "empty talks on philosophy" to be handed down to posterity was only to subject him to ridicule in history. For his admiration for Tai's classical scholarship had reached such an emotional height that he seized every opportunity to quarrel heatedly with Ch'ien Tsiai 錢載 (1708-1793) when the latter denounced Tai's philology.⁴⁰

There can be no doubt that Hung Pang was fully aware of Chu's radical philologism. So, toward the end of his letter, he defended Tai's *Meng-tzu tzu-i shu-cheng* in the following way:

Among Tai's writings on Human Nature and Heavenly Decree, none is more comprehensive than his study of the *Book of Mencius*. Nevertheless, he titled this study *Meng-tzu tzu-i shu-cheng* (*Evidential Explications of the Meanings of Terms in the Book of Mencius*). Then it is not a

⁴⁰ See Li Tz'u-ming 李慈銘, *Yüeh-man t'ang jih-chi pu* 越縕堂日記補 (Taipei: Wen-hai ch'u-pan she, 1963), vol. 13 (*jen chi* 壬集), p. 59a. For more details, see Weng Fang-kang 翁方綱, *Fu-ch'u chai wen-chi* 復初齋文集 (Taipei: Wen-hai, 1966), vol. 1, pp. 323-24.

³⁷ This is P'eng Shao-sheng's *hao*. For this letter see *MTTISC*, pp. 161-70.
³⁸ Chiang Fan 江藩, *Han-hsüeh shih-ch'eng chi* 漢學師承記 (Wan-yu wen-k'u edn.), vol. 2, p. 24. Citing this instance from memory, Liang Ch'i-ch'ao mistook Chu Kuei 朱珪 for his brother Chu Yün in *Ch'ing-tai hsüeh-shu kai-lun* 清代學術概論 (Taiwan: Chung-hua, 1970), p. 31. This error is also carried over in Emmanuel C. Y. Hsu's translation, *Liang Ch'i-ch'ao: Intellectual Trends in the Ch'ing Period* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard U.P., 1959), p. 62.

³⁹ This is a reference to a passage in the *Analects* (Bk. V, sect. 12). The implication is that Confucius never engaged in "empty talks."

work talking about Human Nature and Heavenly Decree. It is rather a work dealing exclusively with etymology and textual technicalities.

By arguing that the title of the *Meng-tzu tzu-i shu-cheng* suggests philology rather than philosophy, Hung unwittingly revealed, at the same time, an important psychological secret of Tai's — an inner tension created by psychological pressures of philologism. Actually, Tai's final adoption of a philological title as well as philological form of presentation for his major philosophical work makes sense only when it is understood as an indirect reply to the philologists' charge that in doing philosophy he was engaged in "empty talk."⁴¹ He was merely trying to say that his philosophy was an inevitable outgrowth of his philology. This is typical of Tai's response to the challenge of the philologists, which we have already observed in his revisions of the *Yüan shan*.

But, unfortunately, Hung's letter has given rise to a serious modern misunderstanding of the destiny of Tai's philosophy vis-à-vis the intellectual climate of mid-Ch'ing China. Commenting on Tai's adoption of a philological title, Hu Shih indicated that Tai did this because he had to yield to the authority of the Ch'eng-Chu school. "It turned out, however," Hu deplored, "that in the end opposition of the followers of the Ch'eng-Chu school just proved to be unavoidable."⁴² Here, Hu misread the situation completely. As has been shown above, if Tai ever yielded to an authority, it could only have been the authority of Han Learning. Furthermore, speaking of the opposition of the Ch'eng-Chu school in this context, Hu has practically identified Chu Yün as a Ch'eng-Chu follower, which is an impossible thing to do.

Chu Yün, a leader of the philological movement, contributed greatly to the rise of the so-called Han Learning in eighteenth-century China.⁴³ According to Sun Hsing-yen 孫星衍 (1753-1818), he was extremely critical of classical studies since the Southern Sung, when, in his opinion, they were marked by emptiness and Buddhist influence. To him, true classical scholar-

⁴¹ There is a brief discussion of why Tai changed the title of his philosophical work from *Hsü-yen* to *Meng-tzu tzu-i shu-cheng* in Hu Shih's *Tai Tung-yüan ti che-hsüeh* 戴東原的哲學 (Shanghai: Shang-wu, 1927), pp. 86-87. As is shown below, Hu Shih's interpretation is based on a serious misunderstanding of Hung Pang's letter. (See Yü, *Tai yü Chang*, pp. 100-102.) The Japanese scholar Aoki Kaizō 青木晦藏 suspected that Tai's philological title may have been inspired by Itō Jinsai's 伊藤仁齋 (1627-1705) *Yü Meng tzu-i* 語孟字義. (See Aoki Kaizō, "Itō Jinsai to Dai Tōgen" 伊藤仁齋と戴東原, in *Shibun* 斯文 8.1 [1926], pp. 27-28.) However, thus far there has been no evidence that Tai ever had access to Itō's works.

⁴² Hu, *Tai Tung-yüan*, p. 86.

⁴³ Yao Ming-ta 姚名達, *Chu Yün nien-p'u* 朱筠年譜 (Shanghai: Shang-wu, 1932), pref., pp. 2-4.

ship could only be founded on sound philology.⁴⁴ Chang Hsüeh-ch'eng, a disciple of Chu, characterized his mentor as a scholar who followed strictly the interpretations of Han exegetes in everything from etymology, mathematics, and textual technicalities, to the meanings of the classics.⁴⁵ The imperial compilation project (*Ssu-ku ch'üan-shu*) was initiated in 1773 largely on his suggestion.⁴⁶ It is true that, unlike Chi Yün 紀昀 (1724-1805), he did not attack the Ch'eng-Chu school openly. It seems, nevertheless, too far-fetched to suggest that a scholar with his kind of philological orientation would have been opposed to Tai's philosophy in defense of the Ch'eng-Chu school. Hu Shih was apparently misled by Chu's remark, "Why should there be further discussions in addition to those of the Ch'eng brothers and Chu Hsi?" By this remark, as far as I can judge, Chu meant to say that even Ch'eng-Chu philosophy was "empty talk." Why should Tai want to add still more? As a radical philologist, Chu was equally contemptuous of Tai and the Ch'eng-Chu school on this score. In a word, he was, like many other leading philologists of the day, an antiphilosopher.

In this connection, we must also say something about the Ch'eng-Chu school as we find it during the lifetime of Tai Chen. The Ch'eng-Chu teachings, of course, remained orthodox in the sense that they continued to be tested in the examinations, but we obviously cannot identify everybody who studied the Ch'eng-Chu texts for examination purposes as a follower of the Ch'eng-Chu school. There must also have been many moralists who still lived, thought, and talked quite comfortably within the confines of the Ch'eng-Chu *Weltanschauung*, but these people were no more Ch'eng-Chu Confucians than all churchgoers are Christians. What was conspicuously lacking in the Ch'eng-Chu school during the reign of Ch'ien-lung (1736-1795) was, therefore, an intellectual spokesman who could defend the Ch'eng-Chu philosophical position ably and intelligently. Both Chu Tse-yün 朱澤澐 (1666-1732) and Wang Mou-hung 王懋竑 (1668-1741), the two fine Chu Hsi scholars of the Ch'ing period, were long dead when Tai began to write philosophically in the early sixties. Even if we take the Ch'eng-Chu school as state ideology, the Ch'ien-lung period did not pro-

⁴⁴ Sun Hsing-yen, "Ssu-ho hsien-sheng hsing-chuang" 荀河先生行狀 ("Career Biography of Chu Yün"), in *Ssu-ho wen-chi* 荀河文集 (Chi-fu ts'ung-shu edn.; rpt. Taipei: I-wen yin-shu kuan, 1966), *chüan-shou* 卷首, pp. 21b-22a.

⁴⁵ Chang Hsüeh-ch'eng, "Chu hsien-sheng mu-chih ming" 朱先生墓誌銘, in *Chang-shih i-shu* 章氏遺書 (Shanghai: Shang-wu, 1936), vol. 3, p. 29.

⁴⁶ Kuo Po-kung 郭伯恭, *Ssu-ku ch'üan-shu tsuan-hsiu k'ao* 四庫全書纂修考 (Shanghai: Commercial Press, 1937), pp. 7-13. For an excellent account of Chu Yün's role in the *Ssu-ku* project, see R. Kent Guy, *The Emperor's Four Treasuries: Scholars and the State in the Late Ch'ien-lung Era* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard U., Council on E. Asian Studies, 1987), chap. 3.

duce a political spokesman comparable to Lu Lung-ch'i 陸隴其 (1630-1693), Hsiung Tz'u-li 熊賜履 (1635-1709), Li Kuang-ti 李光地 (1642-1718), or Chang Po-hsing 張伯行 (1652-1725).⁴⁷ So, by Tai's time, the Ch'eng-Chu school had become philosophically impoverished.⁴⁸

On the other hand, the tide of Han Learning, in which Tai participated, was very much on the rise. According to the contemporary account of Yüan Mei 袁枚 (1716-1797), scholars of the day all competed with each other in promoting Han Learning and attacking Sung Learning. This intellectual fashion almost carried the whole empire, the south as well as the north.⁴⁹ Hu Ch'ien 胡虔 (*chü-jen*, 1796), a friend of Chang Hsüeh-ch'eng, also made a similar observation. In praising Hsü Shen 許慎, the Han lexicographer, and denouncing Chu Hsi, Hu wrote that "ten thousand mouths almost utter with one voice."⁵⁰ With the so-called Sung Learning weakened beyond repair, it could not possibly have threatened Tai Chen so much as to require him to present his philosophical ideas under the veil of philology. Moreover, as we have seen, Tai's criticism of Sung Learning, from *Yüan shan* to *Hsü-yen*, and finally in *Meng-tzu tzu-i shu-cheng*, clearly reveals a process of escalation that defies all disguises, no matter how clever and skillful. In fact, it is doubtful that he ever had any intention of concealing his philosophical differences with Sung Confucianists. In his "Reply to P'eng Shao-sheng" he said:

The central ideas in my *Yüan shan*, together with the various arguments I set forth in my *Meng-tzu tzu-i shu-cheng*, are all sharply dissimilar with the *tao* you espouse. It was in deference to your wishes that I showed them to you. Now in your letter, you say that we have differences as well as similarities. On my part, however, I think we are totally different and there is not even the slightest similarity between us.⁵¹

This is a perfect example showing that he had no scruples about driving his philosophical differences with the so-called School of Sung Learning beyond the breaking point.

Tai's debate with P'eng Shao-sheng took place in 1777, only a month before his death. P'eng, according to the evidence, was the only scholar who

⁴⁷ On this point consult Chang Ping-lin 章炳麟, *Chien lun* 檢論 (Chang-shih ts'ung-shu edn.) 4, pp. 24b-25a.

⁴⁸ One only needs to read Chiang Fan's *Kuo-ch'ao Sung-hsüeh yüan-yüan chi* 國朝宋學淵源記 (Yüeh-ya t'ang ts'ung-shu edn.; rpt. Taipei: [I-wen, 1965] to confirm this observation.

⁴⁹ See Yüan Mei 袁枚, *Sui-yüan shih-hua* 隨園詩話 (Peking: Jen-min wen-hsüeh ch'u-pan she, 1960), vol. 1, p. 49.

⁵⁰ Hu Ch'ien, "Kuang hsüeh p'ien" 廣學篇, quoted in Ch'ien, *Hsüeh-shu shih*, vol. 2, p. 517.

⁵¹ *MTTISC*, p. 161.

had the privilege of reading the *Meng-tzu tzu-i shu-cheng* while Tai was still alive. If it is at all justifiable to say that during Tai's lifetime his philosophy had been seriously challenged by the Ch'eng-Chu school, then this probably was it, although P'eng's credentials for membership in that school are not entirely unproblematic.⁵² Other contemporary scholars who had criticized Tai's philosophical ideas from the Ch'eng-Chu point of view included Yao Nai 姚鼐 (1732-1815), Weng Fang-kang 翁方綱 (1733-1818), and Ch'eng Chin-fang 程晉芳 (1718-1784). But a close scrutiny reveals that all their serious critical pieces were written only after Tai's death, largely because neither *Meng-tzu tzu-i shu-cheng* nor *Yüan shan* was published until 1777-1779.⁵³ Of the three probably only Yao had actually exchanged views with Tai on problems concerning Sung philosophy when both were in Peking.⁵⁴ However, since Yao had been a great admirer of Tai and even asked to become his disciple in 1755, it is rather unlikely that their philosophical discussions could have been very heated.⁵⁵

In the above I have briefly reviewed the general state of affairs in which the adherents of Sung Learning found themselves in the second half of the eighteenth century. The aggregate evidence shows rather conclusively that this school, in sharp contrast to that of Han Learning, lacked not only leadership but also vitality. It was in no position to put up any effective or organized resistance to the dynamic intellectualism of Tai Chen. The revitalization of the Ch'eng-Chu orthodoxy and its counterattack against Han Learning in general and Tai Chen in particular did not take place until about half a century after Tai's death. Under the influence of Yao Nai, Fang Tung-shu 方東樹 (1772-1851) wrote a powerful systematic critique of Han Learning, the *Han-hsüeh shang-tui* 漢學商兌, in 1824 — a year that may be taken as the beginning of the decline of Ch'ing philologism. Writing on January 25, 1861, Li Tz'u-ming, with the exaggeration and sentimentality typical of a Chinese diarist, held Yao Nai responsible for having transformed China, within a short span of less than forty years, from a world of profound learning to one of complete illiteracy.⁵⁶ So, if the Ch'eng-Chu school as a formidable philosophical enemy of Tai Chen during the latter's lifetime

⁵² *TNP*, p. 240. It must be pointed out, however, that at the time P'eng was debating with Tai, instead of taking the Buddhist point of view, he was defending the philosophical position of the orthodox Ch'eng-Chu school. See P'eng's letter in his collected writings, *Erh-tin chü chi* 3, pp. 16b-19a.

⁵³ Yü, *Tai yü Chang*, pp. 109-10, and p. 130, n. 70.

⁵⁴ See Yao Nai, "A Letter in Reply to Chiang Sung-ju" 復蔣松如書, in *Hsi-pao hsüan ch'üan-chi* 惜抱軒全集 (SPY edn.), *wen-chi* 6, p. 10b.

⁵⁵ See Tai's letter to Yao in *TWC*, p. 142.

⁵⁶ Li, *Yüeh-man T'ang*, vol. 10 (*keng chi mo* 庚集末), p. 53a.

was imaginary, existing only in the mind of modern historians, it was, however, a real one in the middle of the nineteenth century.

With the development of his philosophical ideas, Tai's attitude toward Ch'eng-Chu orthodoxy grew increasingly antagonistic and uncompromising. But his relationship with philology was an entirely different story. Throughout his life, but especially in his later years, he displayed a deep-rooted ambivalence toward philology. On the one hand, his faith in the fruitfulness of various new methods and techniques as they were firmly developed in the broad realm of classical philology was almost unlimited. He believed, with other leading scholars of the day, that philology was the only key to open the arsenal of classical texts in which the sages' *tao* was hidden. On the other hand, however, he refused to stress the importance of philology beyond its methodological significance. In his view, there was a natural connection leading classical philology to Confucian philosophy. To rest content with philological probing itself was to mistake the means as the end. Interestingly enough we find him, at times when he was not fully on guard, even speaking in contempt of philology. To penetrate the depth of his ambivalence toward philology, it is necessary to examine some of his oral remarks, which, in my judgment, are psychologically much more revealing than his formal writings.

Tai once told Tuan Yü-ts'ai,

Matters pertaining to such fields as etymology and mathematics may be compared to sedan-chair bearers, whose function is to carry the sedan-chair rider. To identify me as a person good only at such matters as etymology and mathematics is to mistake a sedan-chair rider for a sedan-chair bearer.⁵⁷

A slightly different version of this remark is also given by Chang Hsüeh-ch'eng as follows:

I take etymology, phonetics, astronomy, and geography to be my four sedan-chair bearers; the *tao* I am trying to make clear is the mandarin who rides in the sedan-chair. What a pity the so-called outstanding scholars of our time are qualified only to communicate with my sedan-chair bearers.⁵⁸

The analogy in both versions is the same, but the emphasis is somewhat different. In Tuan's version, Tai was mainly concerned with his own in-

tellectual identity; he did not want to be taken as a philologist, even an archphilologist. In Chang's version, he used the same sedan-chair analogy to achieve a different purpose, namely, to express his disdain for those philologists who, because of inability or lack of interest, or both, refused "to rise from the grasp of the minute and disconnected to the grasp of the whole."⁵⁹ The difference between these two versions is no cause for suspicion. The sedan-chair analogy was probably a favorite of Tai's, which he must have used on many occasions. In both cases, however, it is unmistakable that the common theme was to disparage philology and promote philosophy. Psychologically, there is still something deeper than just that. I strongly suspect that by making remarks like these he was consciously responding to the challenge of both Chu Yün and Ch'ien Ta-hsin. The reference to "the so-called outstanding scholars of our time" in Chang's version makes this identification almost inevitable. Conceivably, Tai may have been greatly annoyed by the repeated criticism of these two esteemed friends that he simply wasted time in "applying his good self to a field of futility," that is, to "empty talk on philosophy." The philologists of the day just could not bring themselves to recognize, as he did, the existence of a natural connection between classical philology and Confucian philosophy. In frustration and anger, he therefore issued his stinging retort that they were qualified only to make friends with his sedan-chair bearers.

That Tai's above remarks were aimed at philologists like Chu Yün and Ch'ien Ta-hsin can be confirmed by another oral remark of his preserved in Chiang Fan's *Kuo-ch'ao Han-hsüeh shih-ch'eng chi*. Chiang related, "Tai Chen once told people, 'Among contemporary scholars I consider Ch'ien Ta-hsin to be number two.' For Tai implied that he himself was by far the number-one scholar."⁶⁰ Here, we must pause and ask, Precisely on what ground could Tai claim his superiority over Ch'ien in learning? Needless to say, the claim could not possibly have been made on the ground of erudition, which was, by and large, a commonly accepted standard among Ch'ing philologists. As Paul Demiéville has rightly pointed out, "As far as erudition goes, Ch'ien Ta-hsin (1728-1804) seems to have been the greatest scholar of his time, greater than both Chang Hsüeh-ch'eng and Tai Chen."⁶¹ We must, therefore, look elsewhere for a sensible answer. Fortunately, a valuable clue to the problem is furnished by the following autobiographical statement Tai once made to Tuan Yü-ts'ai: "Learning consists primarily in mastery of

⁵⁷As E. Harris Harbison speaks of John Colet, in *The Christian Scholar in the Age of the Reformation* (New York: Charles Scribner's, 1956), p. 60.

⁵⁸Chiang, *Han-hsüeh shih-ch'eng chi*, vol. 1, p. 49.

⁶¹P. Demiéville, "Chang Hsüeh-ch'eng and His Historiography," in W. G. Beasley and E. G. Pulleyblank, eds., *Historians of China and Japan* (Oxford: Oxford U.P., 1961), p. 170, n. 7.

essence (*ching* 精), not pursuit of erudition. In my own case, I have never pursued erudition (*po* 博).⁶²

What Tai called "mastery of essence" (*ching*) is very close in meaning to what Chang Hsüeh-ch'eng called "essentialism" (*yüeh* 約) or "specialization" (*chuan-chia* 專家), which, in the context of their discussions, must be understood as characteristic more of philosophy than of philology. I believe it was by resorting to a criterion more philosophical than philological that Tai, in this mid-Ch'ing context of Confucian learning, pronounced Ch'ien Ta-hsin to be the first runner-up, and reserved the number-one place for himself. Revealingly enough, it was also on the very same ground that Chang Hsüeh-ch'eng, quite independently of Tai, came to the conclusion that Tai "was actually the number-one scholar of the Ch'ien-lung period."⁶³ Even a late Ch'ing critic of Han Learning like Chu I-hsin 朱一新 (1846-1894) said, when making a comparison between Tai and Ch'ien, "Among the scholars of the Ch'ien-lung and Chia-ch'ing periods, [Tai] Tung-yüan and [Ch'ien] Chu-ting 竹汀 were two giants, one excelling in the classics (Tai) and the other in history (Ch'ien). Chu-ting surpassed Tung-yüan in terms of erudition, but was inferior to the latter in profundity."⁶⁴ It is interesting that in his first judgment Chu followed precisely Ch'ien's own criterion of erudition, which, as we have seen above, is also the one adopted by Demiéville.⁶⁵ In the second judgment, however, Chu apparently shifted to Tai's emphasis on "mastery of essence," which he characterized as "profundity." Tai's message contained in this remark, therefore, can be fully understood only in the light of his sedan-chair analogy. In Tai's eyes, since Ch'ien, with all his erudition, never rose "from the grasp of the minute and disconnected to the grasp of the whole," he was a sedan-chair bearer. On the other hand, Tai did not hesitate to assign to himself the number-one place in the scholarly world of the day because, in his self-definition, he was always a Confucian philosopher, riding comfortably in the sedan chair. In a still deeper sense, however, this remark of his may not have been intended

⁶² *TNP*, p. 248. Tai often expressed the view that the most difficult things to acquire in learning are erudition, insight, and precision. (See *TWC*, p. 141, and his *Ching-k'ao* 經考 [An-hui ts'ung-shu edn.] 3, p. 21a.) Obviously, he took erudition to be the least difficult to acquire of the three.

⁶³ *CSISIP*, cited in Yü, *Tai yü Chang*, p. 309.

⁶⁴ Chu I-hsin, *Wu-hsieh t'ang ta-wen* 無邪堂答問 (Kuang-ya shu-chü edn.; rpt. Taipei: Shih-chieh shu-chü, 1963) 1, p. 3b.

⁶⁵ For Ch'ien Ta-hsin's view of erudition as the most important thing in learning, see his "Pao-ching lou chi" 抱經樓記, in *Ch'ien-yen t'ang wen-chi* 潛研堂文集 (SPTK so-pen edn.) 21, pp. 195-96. See also Ch'ien Mu, "Ch'ien Chu-ting hsüeh shu" 錢竹汀學述, in *Ku-kung wen-hsien chi-k'an* 故宮文獻季刊 2.2 (March 1971), pp. 1-11.

simply as a personal criticism of Ch'ien Ta-hsin. What he really meant to say was that philology can never claim to be Confucian learning of the highest order. By virtue of its being immediate to *tao*, only philosophy can make such a claim in Tai's scheme of things. Once again, Tai responded to the challenge of the philologists in his typically subtle and indirect way.

There is another aspect of Tai's oral remarks that illustrates his strained relationship with the philologists. By this I refer particularly to his open attacks on the Ch'eng-Chu school. Let me first quote a systematic classification of Tai's oral remarks by Chang Hsüeh-ch'eng:

Generally speaking, Tai's oral remarks may be classified into three types. Speaking to prominent court officials of high scholastic standing, he tended to be more or less agreeable. Only occasionally did he express his own ideas, but only to the extent to which he considered that such ideas were acceptable to them. He never wanted to elaborate on his ideas. In conversations with his disciples, however, he was truly helpful by always giving them enlightening instructions. Talking with his admirers who were not learned enough to follow his teachings, his style was extremely elusive. He was often enigmatically abstruse and therefore beyond grasp.⁶⁶

All three categories of people can be identified. The "prominent court officials of high scholastic standing" referred to, among others, Chu Yün, Ch'ien Ta-hsin, Lu Wen-ch'ao 盧文弨 (1717-1796), Ch'in Hui-t'ien, and Wang Ming-sheng 王鳴盛 (1722-1798). The "disciples" were Tuan Yü-ts'ai and Wang Nien-sun. Tai's "admirers" were numerous, but here Chang must have had Feng T'ing-ch'eng 馮廷丞 and Wu Ying-fang 吳穎芳 specifically in mind.⁶⁷ People in the first category were all leading philologists of the day, whose support and sympathy could mean a great deal to the cause of the reconstruction of Confucian philosophy that Tai was championing. I strongly suspect that some of Tai's anti-Ch'eng-Chu remarks were intended to arouse feelings of comradeship among his fellow philologists. Take the following two remarks, recorded by Chang Hsüeh-ch'eng, for example: "Now, with my appearance on the scene, the time probably has arrived for Chu Hsi to run out of his luck. Anyway, he has been fortunate enough to dominate the intellectual world for over five hundred years."⁶⁸ "I have

⁶⁶ *WSTI*, p. 59.

⁶⁷ See Wu Hsiao-lin 吳孝琳, *Chang Shih-chai nien-p'u pu-cheng* 章實齋年譜補正, in *Chang Shih-chai hsien-sheng nien-p'u hui-pien* 先生年譜彙編 (Hong Kong: Ch'ung-wen shu-tien, 1975), pp. 263-64, and Yü, *Tai yü Chang*, p. 105.

⁶⁸ *WSTI*, p. 57.

written my *Yüan shan* in the hope that I shall eventually find my niche in the Confucian temple."⁶⁹ It is quite understandable that Chang found such remarks repugnant. But the question is, What sort of psychological force had driven him to say things like this? To say that Tai had a "devious" or "impure" mind (*hsin-shu wei-ch'ün* 心術未醇 or *hsin-shu pu-cheng* 心術不正), as Chang persistently did, is probably right, but does not explain much.⁷⁰ It only gives us a different question: Why did Tai happen to have a "devious" or "impure" mind? I suggest that in making such remarks, Tai was also responding to the psychological pressures of philologists, but from a different direction. If, by way of his sedan-chair analogy, he was to show the nonfinality of philology in Confucian learning, his avowed candidacy for a place in the Confucian pantheon occupied by Chu Hsi was to tie his new philosophy to the philological movement. He was trying to make his fellow philologists see that his dedication to philosophical work, on the solid foundation of Ch'ing philology, was by no means an expression of personal idiosyncrasy. On the contrary, he would like to think that in doing philosophy he was serving the common cause of the Ch'ing philological movement. For, after all, his philosophy was the synthesis of Ch'ing philological findings, and, moreover, the school of Han Learning could not expect to prevail over that of Sung Learning in its bid for Confucian orthodoxy without a final, decisive victory on the philosophical battleground. Tai's remarks, as quoted above, seem to suggest that his aspiration to replace Chu Hsi in the Confucian temple, if it ever came true, would symbolize the establishment of a new Confucian orthodoxy rather than just a personal triumph for Tai. His special reference to his *Yüan shan* is also significant. Isn't it clear that he was taking this opportunity to answer the charge of Chu Yün and Ch'ien Ta-hsin that *Yüan shan* "was an empty talk on philosophy and should not have been written"?

It is obvious that these oral remarks by Tai appealed to emotion rather than to reason. But, probably, this is precisely why Chang Hsüeh-ch'eng had found Tai agreeable to leading scholars of the day. It may be noted that the mid-Ch'ing philological movement was from the beginning a highly emotionally charged one, with several of its leaders harboring, to varying degrees, strong anti-Sung (or, more precisely, anti-Ch'eng-Chu) feelings. Before Tai came into contact with this movement in 1754, he had no quarrel with Sung Confucianism. On the contrary, under the influence of Chiang Yung, he sometimes even defended the Ch'eng-Chu philosophical tradi-

tion.⁷¹ However, his attitude toward Sung Confucianism took a drastic iconoclastic change after his meeting with Hui Tung in Yang-Chou in 1757. More than anybody else Hui was responsible for giving the Ch'ing philological movement the name of Han Learning. From a strictly philological point of view, he accused Sung Confucianists of philological illiteracy.⁷² His iconoclasm reached its emotional peak when he said, "Sung Confucianism was even more disastrous than the burning of books by the Ch'in."⁷³ Chi Yün, a chief editor of the *Ssu-k'u ch'üan-shu*, was another scholar who had apparently pushed Tai deeper into the anti-Sung campaign. Chi's tactics against the Ch'eng-Chu school were unique in that he launched, at the same time, a frontal attack and a flanking attack. As a chief editor of *Ssu-k'u ch'üan-shu*, he made biting criticisms of Sung Confucianism in a systematic and organized way throughout the massive *Imperial Catalogue* (*Ssu-k'u ch'üan-shu tsung-mu t'i-yao* 四庫全書總目提要).⁷⁴ As a popular writer, he composed numerous fables and anecdotes to expose the hypocrisy of Ch'eng-Chu moralists.⁷⁵ He was indeed the only scholar in traditional China who ever attempted to undermine the influence of Sung Confucianism not only in high culture but in popular culture as well. It is conceivable that some of Tai's anti-Ch'eng-Chu remarks may have been but echoes of Chi's utterances.

I must hasten to add, however, that I am not suggesting that Tai's philosophical writings are all products of a deliberate need to satisfy the anti-Sung feelings of his fellow philologists.⁷⁶ His philosophical differences with Chu Hsi are genuine differences, which even the critical Chang Hsüeh-ch'eng found little room to doubt. What disturbed Chang was rather the inconsistency between the pen and the tongue. Chang was particularly worried about the disintegrating influence of Tai's oral remarks. For, not long after Tai's death, he already heard many prominent scholars saying, "When the day comes that Tai's learning reigns supreme, it will be as easy to demolish Chu Hsi as to break down a decayed stump."⁷⁷ This last quote is extremely revealing. It tells us that Tai's strategy of appealing to the

⁶⁹ Yü, *Tai yü Chang*, pp. 155-57.

⁷⁰ Hui Tung, *Sung-yai pi-chi* 松崖筆記 (Taipei: Hsüeh-sheng shu-chü, 1971), p. 37.

⁷¹ Li Chi 李集, *Ho-cheng lu* 鶴徵錄 (Yang-hsia Lao-wu edn.), 3, p. 12b.

⁷² Yü Chia-hsi 余嘉錫, *Ssu-k'u t'i-yao pien-cheng* 四庫提要辨證 (Hong Kong: Chung-hua, 1974), vol. 1 (*hsü-lu* 序錄), p. 54.

⁷³ Hummel, ed., *Eminent Chinese* 1, p. 123.

⁷⁴ Ch'ien Mu, however, is inclined to think that Tai's anti-Ch'eng-Chu works, especially *MTTISC*, were intended to please Chi Yün; see Ch'ien, *Hsüeh-shu shih*, vol. 1, p. 322. This seems too harsh a judgment of Tai.

⁷⁵ *CSISIP* in Yü, *Tai yü Chang*, p. 310.

⁶⁸ *CSISIP*, cited in Yü, *Tai yü Chang*, p. 309.

⁷⁰ *WSTI*, p. 57; *CSISIP*, cited in Yü, *Tai yü Chang*, p. 307.

philologists' longing for Confucian orthodoxy was, after all, not without effect. Chang Hsüeh-ch'eng was very observant in detecting the inconsistencies between Tai as a writer and Tai as a conversationalist. But with all his profundity in psychological observation, he failed to fathom the depth of Tai's inner tension arising from the latter's self-identity as a Confucian philosopher vis-à-vis the antiphilosophical temper inherent in Ch'ing philologism. It is in terms of this inner tension that Tai's inconsistencies must be understood.

Finally, I conclude this study with a brief review of Tai's intellectual development, focusing on his changing views of Confucian learning. Heretofore, historians have generally discerned in Tai's life two stages of development, with his visit to Yang-chou in 1757 as the dividing line.⁷⁸ In what follows, however, I try to establish that Tai's thought underwent altogether three stages of development, reaching full maturity only in the last decade of his life. This development is nowhere more clearly shown than in his discussions of the structure of Confucian learning, to which I now turn.

In a letter to Fang Chü 方矩, dated 1755, Tai wrote, "From antiquity to the present, there have been altogether three different approaches to learning: some take the philosophical approach, others take the philological approach, and still others take the literary approach. Of the three, however, the literary approach must be regarded as the last in importance."⁷⁹ As far as I know, this is the earliest clear formulation of the well-known triptych of Confucian learning — philosophy, philology, and literary art — although scholars had long pursued the three types of intellectual activity before Tai Chen. What is particularly noteworthy in this statement is the fact that Tai did not treat the three branches of Confucian learning as of equal value. This point becomes more readily recognizable when we turn to his letter to Cheng Yung-mu 鄭用牧, written probably in 1750, in which he further stated, "Today there are many learned men who excel in literary art and philology, but none of them seems interested in seeking to know the *tao*."⁸⁰ Here his partiality for philosophy is too obvious to be ignored. Taking these two letters together, it is clear that during this early stage philosophy was placed far above philology and literary art in his intellectual system. Philology fared better than literary art, but paled noticeably beside philosophy. This explains why, in the same letter to Fang Chü, he did not hesitate to

praise Sung Confucianists as philosophically sound in spite of all their philological imperfections.

His second stage, in which philology figured centrally in his conceptions of learning, lasted roughly from 1757 to 1766. It was during this period that he told Tuan Yü-t'sai, "Philosophy, philology, and literary art each has its own fountainhead. I should like to think that I have found all three fountainheads."⁸¹ Two points may be observed in this connection. First, to say that philosophy, philology, and literary art come from separate "fountainheads" implies, logically, that they are not interrelated. This is decidedly different from his earlier view, as his letter to Fang Chü makes clear: literary art was first linked to what he called "root," which is largely identifiable with philosophy, and then eventually to the "ultimate root," which was none other than *tao* itself. Second, his whole conception of Confucian learning took on a fundamental structural change. The earlier hierarchical structure was replaced by a more or less egalitarian one, in which philosophy could no longer claim its priority over either philology or literary art. But Tai's egalitarianism is much more apparent than real. In fact, through this structured readjustment, he elevated philology to a place that was almost immediate to the *tao*. Thus we find him saying, in 1765, that "only if philology is clear, can the ancient classics be understood; and only if the classics are understood, can the sages' philosophical ideas then be grasped." Between philology and "the sages' philosophical ideas" (*tao*), there is little room left for philosophy as a legitimate branch of inquiry in Confucian learning.

Tai's radical philological point of view in the second stage should probably occasion little surprise, since it was during this period that the impact of the philological movement on him was the strongest. In fact, the view to which he subscribed was widely shared by many other philologists of the time. Chang Hsüeh-ch'eng has told us

The so-called learning as conceived by scholars of our time consists only of [studies of] terminology in the classical dictionary *Erh-ya* and etymology [based on] the *liu-shu*, or Six Graphic Principles,⁸² which are, in their opinion, all that matters to our world. As for the philosophical works of Chou [Tun-i] and the Ch'engs (Ch'eng Hao and Ch'eng I),

⁷⁸ Hu Shih, *Tai Tung-yüan*, pp. 24-26; Ch'ien, *Hsüeh-shu shih*, vol. 1, pp. 316-24; and Yang, *She-hui yü ssu-hsiang*, vol. 2, p. 923.

⁷⁹ *TWC*, p. 143. ⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ *TNP*, p. 246.

⁸² I have followed James J. Y. Liu in rendering the *liu-shu* as "Six Graphic Principles." See Liu's *The Art of Chinese Poetry* (Chicago: U. of Chicago P., 1962), p. 4.

or the literary writings of Han [Yü] and Ou-yang [Hsiu], they simply cast them aside with a sniff. Even the open-minded ones among them do no more than divide learning into three branches of philosophy, philology, and literary art, and take each on its own merit.⁸³

In this passage, it may be noted, Chang presented two current views of Confucian learning. The first view was apparently too narrow to be embraced by Tai, but the second one was almost surely Tai's. It not only fit well with Tai's "fountainhead" theory just quoted, but also echoes Chang's formulation as given in his letter to Chang Ju-nan 章汝楠 right after his first encounter with Tai in 1766.⁸⁴ It may be recalled that although Tai's philosophical career was well underway toward the end of this stage, his declaration of philosophical independence from the Ch'eng-Chu school was not officially proclaimed until he "smashed the Supreme Ultimate Chart of the Sung Confucianists" in his traumatic experience of 1769. So, throughout this stage his criticism of Sung Confucianism was mainly confined to the realm of classical philology. In this stage — unlike the first one — he could no longer accept Ch'eng-Chu philosophy as basically sound, but — unlike the final stage — his own systematic philosophy was not yet fully established. It was probably because of this interregnum that philosophy became temporarily out of focus in his view of Confucian learning.

In the last decade of his life Tai concluded his long intellectual development with a final, definitive view of Confucian learning. According to Tuan Yü-ts'ai, Tai had retracted the "fountainhead" theory and had told Tuan, "Philosophy is the fountainhead of philology and literary art. How could there be a fountainhead of philosophy? What I said before is an overstatement."⁸⁵ In another context Tuan further quoted his master's words as follows: "Only after one becomes thoroughly familiar with philosophy can he then engage in philology and literary art."⁸⁶ This last statement explains what Tai meant by "philosophy is the fountainhead of philology and literary art." Clearly, he now returned to his early position by stressing the immediacy of philosophy to the Confucian *tao*. He seems to say that to engage in philology and literary art without the "central vision" provided by philosophy can lead only to blindness. At any rate he appears to have fully regained his confidence in philosophy.

But why should he now deny philosophy its "fountainhead"? Tuan Yü-ts'ai explained that this is because the first "philosophy" as preserved in the Six Classics is the creation of the sages, and is itself the "fountainhead" of our political, social, and moral order.⁸⁷ This explanation is in basic agreement with Tai's own theory of *tzu-jan* 自然 ("natural") and *pi-jan* 必然 ("necessary"), according to which sagehood consists primarily in creatively transforming the natural to the necessary, which is synonymous with *li* or "principle."⁸⁸ It was, in the final analysis, Tai's emphasis on the creativity of the human mind that eventually led to his realization of the absurdity of speaking of "fountainhead" in the case of philosophy.

Tai's final view of Confucian learning is further expressed in his "Letter to Someone," written in 1777, which reads, in part,

In the study of the classics, elucidation of the meaning of words comes first. The next step is to understand the grammar of the text. However, if one's final goal is to search for the Confucian *tao*, then he must purge himself completely of all his dependence. Although the etymology of the Han scholars was based on an orthodox line of transmission, at times it suffered from forced interpretations. The Chin exegetes had even more far-fetched interpretations and groundless speculations. Those of the Sung judged by introspection; thus they often accepted many errors, renouncing precisely what was not wrong. . . . Scholars since the Sung have wrenched their own ideas into identity with what the ancient sages and wise men intended to say, without really understanding their spoken and written language.⁸⁹

Basically, the structure of Tai's final view bears a remarkable resemblance to that of his early one. Nevertheless, it also shows marks of his struggles with both Sung philosophy and Ch'ing philology during the middle stage. The structure is again hierarchical, with philosophy as the lord and philology and literary art, in that order, as maids. But no longer would he be so compromising as to maintain that Han Confucianists were philologically correct but philosophically unsound, while Sung Confucian-

⁸³Tuan, "Preface," p. 1.

⁸⁴See *MTTISC*, pp. 12-13 and 64. For English translations, see Wing-tsit Chan, *A Source Book of Chinese Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1963), pp. 716-17; Cheng, trans., *Inquiry into Goodness*, p. 77. For further clarifications, see Yü Ying-shih, "Tai Chen and the Chu Hsi Tradition," in Chan Ping-leung et al., eds., *Essays in Commemoration of the Golden Jubilee of the Fung Ping Shan Library (1923-1982)* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong U.P., 1982), pp. 377-92.

⁸⁵*MTTISC*, p. 173; English translation adapted from Hsü, *Intellectual Trends*, p. 56.

⁸³ *WSTI*, p. 311. ⁸⁴ See *Chang-Shih i-shu*, vol. 3, p. 314. ⁸⁵ *TNP*, p. 246.

⁸⁶ Tuan Yü-ts'ai's pref. to *Tai Tung-yuan chi*, p. 1. For further discussions of this statement see Yü, *Tai yü Chang*, pp. 114-17.

ists were just the opposite. On the contrary, he was now as much critical of the Han philologically as he was of the Sung philosophically. Freedom from all dependence in the search for truth was thus both the starting point and the terminal point of Tai's intellectual life. Quite symbolically, his was a life that began with a minor philological question at the age of ten,⁹⁰ but that ended with a major philosophical answer five years past the age at which Confucius knew the Decree of Heaven.⁹¹

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CSISIP	<i>Chang-shih i-shu i-p'ien</i> 章氏遺書逸篇
MTTISC	<i>Meng-tzu tzu-i shu-cheng</i> 孟子字義疏證
TNP	<i>Tai Tung-yüan hsien-sheng nien-p'u</i> 戴東原先生年譜
TWC	<i>Tai Chen wen-chi</i> 戴震文集
WSTI	<i>Wen-shih t'ung-i</i> 文史通義

⁹⁰When Tai was studying *The Great Learning* with a teacher at the age of ten, he asked the question, "How do we know that this is what Confucius said, as transmitted by Tseng-tzu, and how do we know that the commentary represents the views of Tseng-tzu as recorded by his disciples?" See *TNP*, p. 216; Liang [trans. Hsü], *Intellectual Trends*, p. 55.

⁹¹According to Chiao Hsün, shortly before death Tai was concerned only with his philosophy, not his philology. See Chiao's *Tiao-ku chi*, vol. 1, p. 95. For a detailed analysis of this complicated problem, see Yü, *Tai yü Chang*, pp. 118-23.