Abstract

Li Shih-min (李世民, 598 - 649 A.D.), Emperor Taizong (太宗) of the Tang dynasty (唐, 618 - 907 A.D.), was one of the most eminent emperors in Chinese history. He ascended the throne through military means and the assassination of his brother, then the Heir Apparent. His "Zhen Guan Era of Peace and Prosperity" (贞观之治, 627 - 649 A.D.) was comparable to the "Peace and Prosperity Era of Emperors Wen and Jing" (文景之治, 179 - 141 B.C.). "Xuan Wu Gate Incident" (玄武门之变), the extraordinary political stability and the outstanding institutional disciplines during the reign of Emperor Taizong have been the main themes of previous research. However, none of the studies has concentrated on his psychological cravings for the security of power. To bridge the gap, this Academic Exercise aims to analyze Emperor Taizong's views on the Learning of the Emperors (帝王之学), with particular reference to the Difan (《帝范》), the eye-opener of his political thoughts.

Emperor Taizong understood that his throne would not be sustained for a long time unless he could train competent future successors. He was fully aware of the fact that wealth, prestige, knowledge, competence and sacredness constituted the basic qualities of an Emperor. As such, socialization of the Heir Apparent to undertake these roles was essential. To achieve this ultimate goal in his total concept of an ideal emperor, he attempted to seek political consolidation through the Confucian ethocratic ideology. He
believed that the Confucian ideology was effective in legitimizing his power and authority. He felt strongly that this belief should be inculcated in his successors.

In sum, the Learning of the Emperors is the search for "Inner Sageliness and Outer Kingliness" (内圣外王). Nevertheless, Emperor Taizong, being a pragmatic politician, was more interested in consolidating his political power, which he wished to pass on from generation to generation. The rationale of Emperor Taizong's Learning of the Emperors was, therefore, practical in nature.