ABSTRACT

Emperor Wu (reigned B.C. 140-87) of the former Han dynasty (B.C. 206—A. D. 25) is known in history as a wise and dynamic ruler. He was a man of great ambitions and his strong leadership ability enabled him to lead the country into continual prosperity thus paved the way for further development by his descendents.

Emperor Wu had achieved much during his reign. For example, he was instrumental in establishing Confucianism as a state doctrine. Such Imperial Confucianism had not only played an important role in shaping intellectual development in the Han period but also on traditional China as a whole. He, moreover, had launched major social and economic reforms with significant impact. In addition, his undaunted efforts in stopping the tribal confederation of the Turkish nomads Xiongnu from invading the Central Plain of China and in expanding the country’s territory has won the applause of many historians. Emperor Wu’s contributions to the people and the state of the Han have certainly earned him the title of a magnificent ruler. Therefore, it is little wonder that his reign marks the “Golden Age” of the Han empire.

Apparently, Emperor Wu is appraised for his contributions to the Han dynasty and duly recognized for his efforts towards building a strong Chinese state. However, there are always two sides of a coin. His lavish pursuits of immortality and his willingness to indulge huge sum of money on military affairs that had led to the depletion of the state’s treasury seems to be less mentioned by scholars. This academic exercise thus aims at revealing the other side of Emperor Wu’s reign and exploring his character, so as to re-assess his contributions. With reference to journals and books, through a close and comparative study of the materials and comments made by past
and contemporary scholars, this thesis hopes to throw new light on the appraisal of Emperor Wu and his contributions to the Han dynasty.