THE ACADEMIC AND SOCIAL LIFE OF THE TAI HSUEH (NATIONAL ACADEMY) STUDENTS OF THE SUNG DYNASTY.

Though the establishment of the Sung University (Tai Hsueh) had not been a breakthrough in Chinese history, it was, nonetheless, remarkable for its innovations in the academic system, rules and course contents. It had not only directly affected the spirit of the students at that time, but also produced a tremendous impact on Sung politics through the awakened students.

Given the limitation of time and resources, it is not very possible to embark on a comprehensive examination of the Sung students' life and, furthermore, the scope of such a study must necessarily be extensive. Hence, this critical study focuses on the various aspects of Tai Hsueh students' life on one hand, and on the other, it probes analytically into their overt characteristics and unique features. The merits and demerits of the students' involvement in Sung political, social, intellectual life and life in general will then be assessed.

This study does not attempt to examine the authenticity and accuracy of the historical documents and records. Instead, it attempts to investigate and analyse objectively Tai Hsueh students' life from the available historical facts and records. With this perspective in mind, the thesis is structurally divided into three sections.

This first section deals with the significant impacts the prevailing social environment and political background had had on the students' life. It lucidly explicates the university system, its course contents and its direct influence on the students' hearts and minds. And, against the backdrop of the centralized government,
treacherous and corrupted ruling class, the ever-widening social gulfs between the classes and the increasingly sharp social conflicts, this study takes a further step in analysing the students' causes for social criticism and political intervention.

The second section which is the principal focus of this study deals critically with the students' life. It is sub-divided into three progressively related parts. The first sub-division delves into the political intervention by students, its central theme being the 'Eight Critiques of the Government' (八大平政). It brings out the noble unselfish spirit of the Tai Hsueh students in their sacrificial act to save their country. The second sub-division critically portrays the students' life proper; it analyses their attempts to revitalize and improve the shortcomings and failures, and their social activities which went hand in hand with their political intervention. The third sub-division depicts their academic life, reflected by their daily routine and rituals. The main emphasis is to point out the negative decadent aspect of their life.

The third section is a wholesome critical evaluation of the students' life. Against their various activities during the Sung Dynasty, it not only encompasses an all-embracing view of the students' life but also attempts to evaluate impartially the students with their strengths and their weakness.

In short, the objective of this study aims to examine critically the spirit of the Tai Hsueh students and their special characteristics. And, significantly, by tracing their life, their hearts and minds during the turbulent times of Sung Dynasty, an appraisal of the Tai Hsueh students' status is thus arrived.