Abstract

Private education had a long history in China. Indeed, it went as far back as the time of Confucius (孔子). However, Confucius did not employ any teaching method which we consider "formal" and there was little organization among his students. More significantly, in the thousand years after Confucius, scholars did not give much thought to how the "gathering-type" of private education should be organized into an institution.

It was not until the Sung dynasty, specifically after Chu Hsi (朱熹, 1130 – 1200) had revived the White Deer Hollow Academy (白鹿洞书院) that the academy system, or more accurately "Shuyuan" (书院), became an unique educational institution for higher learning in China.

The main purposes of this Academic Exercise are to examine the salient features of the academy system in a particular period, that is, the Southern Sung dynasty, and to study how education was conducted in those academies. It is also hoped that the present study will stimulate critical evaluation of the trend of educational Philosophies and practices in the midst of our education reform.

The Academic Exercise is divided into seven chapters. Chapter one briefly introduces the nature of "Academy" and the reasons for focussing on the academy system in the Southern Sung dynasty. Factors that
contributed to the blossoming and prosperity of the academy system in this period are discussed in chapter two. Chapter three recounts the flourishing state of the academy system. The following two chapters present the major activities undertaken by the academies, their organizational structure and the style of study of these academies. Chapter six analyses the tremendous influence of the academy system on education, academic world and the society as a whole. The final chapter provides concluding remarks on the academy system of the Southern Sung dynasty and suggests how certain features of such a system may be of value to the present day.