

## On "Banning All Other Schools of Thought While Paying Supreme Tribute to Confucianism" from the Perspective of Philology

Hongfeng Zhang<sup>1, a</sup>, Kai Zhang<sup>2, 3, b \*</sup>

<sup>1</sup> College of Arts of Yangzhou University, Yangzhou, Jiangsu, China, 225009;

<sup>2</sup> College of humanities of Qinghai Normal University, Xining, Qinghai, China, 810016;

<sup>3</sup> Northwest Institute of Historical Environment and Socio-Economic Development of Shaanxi Normal University, Shaanxi xian; China, 710119

<sup>a</sup> 18136224151@163.com; <sup>b</sup> akanghao@126.com

\*corresponding author

**Keywords:** Banning all other Schools of Thought; Paying Supreme Tribute to Confucianism; Philosophers; New Confucianism

**Abstract:** During the heyday of the Western Han Dynasty, "Banning all other schools of thought while paying supreme tribute to Confucianism" has its specific historical connotation. It refers to rejecting the study of the schools which were not conducive to the governance of the country at the time, and paying supreme tribute to "New Confucianism" which has absorbed the idea of various schools beneficial to governing the country. The following historical facts, such as "the convening of Shiquge", "Emperor Xuan of Han Dynasty affirming the thought of combining morality with punishment in New Confucianism" and "Emperor Cheng of Han Dynasty opposed reading the books of philosophers", as well as the situation that the number of writings of the various schools took the Emperor Hanwu of Han Dynasty as the watershed, and then it declined sharply, all prove that it is reasonable and credible to reflect the development of academics in Han Dynasty by "banning all other Schools of thought, paying supreme tribute to Confucianism".

### 1. Introduction

During the reign of Emperor Han Wu, Zhongshu Dong proposed to "praise the Confucius clan and suppress all other schools of thought"<sup>[1]2525</sup>. It was summarized by the thinker Yi Baisha at the end of the Qing Dynasty and the beginning of the Republic of China as "banning all other schools of thought while paying supreme tribute to Confucianism"<sup>[2]</sup>, which was widely accepted by other scholars. However, in 1993, Jingtang Sun wrote that the Han Dynasty didn't implement that policy at all, and this was the posterity's misinterpretation of "suppressing Huang Lao and advocating Confucianism"<sup>[3]</sup>, which aroused fierce discussion in academia. Huailun Guan, Jin Zhang, and others have written articles to refute that the Han Dynasty implemented that policy, and it was a historical process<sup>[4-5]</sup>. Scholars have argued whether Han Dynasty practiced "banning all other schools of thought while paying supreme tribute to Confucianism", but ignored a fundamental question: what is the connotation of "banning all other school of thought while paying supreme tribute to Confucianism"? If the meaning is not clear, it is too arbitrary to make a judgment based on a literal understanding and some historical records. Therefore, the article takes the connotation of "banning all other schools of thought while paying supreme tribute to Confucianism" as the starting point, and combines historical perspectives, bibliography and other perspectives to reexamine this historical issue.

### 2. Three Perspectives of "Banning All Other Schools of Thought While Paying Supreme Tribute to Confucianism"

#### 2.1 The Connotation of "Banning All Other Schools of Thought While Paying Supreme

## Tribute to Confucianism"

First, the meaning of the word "banning" needs to be clarified. From the perspective of specific language environment, the "banning" here should be "exclusion", based on three reasons: (1) The Biography of Zhongshu Dong of Han Shu records that "since the beginning of Emperor Wu ... praising the Confucius clan and suppressing all other schools of thought"<sup>[1]2525</sup>, and The Biography of Emperor Wu of Han Shu records that since the beginning of Emperor Wu... banning all other schools of thought, and praising "Six Meridians" <sup>[1]212</sup>. We can see that the meaning of "banning" and "suppressing" is the same. "Suppressing" means "exclusion" <sup>[6]</sup>, which shows "banning" also means "exclusion". (2) The Biography of Zhongshu Dong of Han Shu records that "the doctrines which are not in the list of Six Arts or not Confucian learning, are not allowed to spread and make progress together with Confucianism. Heresy is eliminated, and then the unified discipline can be clear."<sup>[1]2523</sup> "Not allowed to spread", that is, do not let doctrines that contradict Confucianism are spreading, but not abolished them. "Not allowed to make progress together with Confucianism" means not to make these doctrines equal to Confucianism, but not to abolish these doctrines. "Heresy is eliminated" refers to eliminating the doctrines that run counter to mainstream ideology, not all doctrines. It shows that "banning" is not the meaning of abolition. (3) According to Yiwenzhi from Han Shu, Emperor Wu deeply felt that the book was short and simple, and the etiquette was broken. Then the country built a book collection and set the official who wrote the books. All the books of various schools were full of secret palaces. <sup>[1]1701</sup> Emperor Wu collected all the books from the folk into the palace forbidden collection, so that the scholars could not study the books as freely as before, which shows that Emperor Wu did not abolish these schools' doctrines, but impose strict restrictions on the scholars' study. Therefore, "banning" means "exclusion" rather than "abolition".

Secondly, the true connotation of "all other schools of thought" and "Confucianism" needs to be clarified. "Banning all other schools of thought while paying supreme tribute to Confucianism" is an allegation of academic conditions in a specific historical period, and it must be understood in the historical context of that time. When the Western Han Dynasty was first established, whose doctrine was used to govern the country became the first problem that rulers solved. Various schools started a heated argument, especially Confucianism and Taoism. Because the Taoist thought of "governing by non-interference" adapted to the needs of anti-Qin disadvantages and rest with the people<sup>[1]3623</sup>, it once became the guiding ideology of governing the country. However, Confucianism has not been left out. By the time of Emperor Han Wu, on the one hand, the status of Confucianism had been greatly improved, and the study of Confucian classics had become a social trend. In the process, Confucianism continued to learn from other schools. On the other hand, during the period of Emperor Wu, with the feudal princes, relatives of an emperor, and other forces expanding sharply, the centralization was severely weakened, and social problems became increasingly apparent. Huang Lao's thought of "governing by non-interference" has not been conducive to the rule of the feudal dynasty. Under this historical background, Emperor Wu gradually moved away from Huang Lao's thoughts and leaned towards Confucianism. Zhongshu Dong adapted to the current situation, and on the basis of "The Spring and Autumn Biography Gongyang", absorbed some Taoist, Legalists, Yinyang and other thoughts to complete the transformation and improvement of traditional Confucianism, which became a "New Confucianism" in line with the needs of the times, providing new guiding ideology for further strengthening the centralization of power and promoting social development. Putting "banning all other schools of thought while paying supreme tribute to Confucianism" in this background and examining it, we can see that from the perspective of governing the country, "banning all other schools of thought" refers to the doctrine that is not conducive to governing the country at that time, not all doctrines. "Confucianism" refers to the kingcraft of "New Confucianism" that has absorbed the beneficial ideas of governing the country. However, there is another question here, that is, since "New Confucianism" has integrated the thoughts of various schools, is it still "only respecting Confucianism"? The answer is yes. Because "New Confucianism" only absorbed some thoughts of Taoism, Legalists, Yin-Yang, but not all of them, its essence is still Confucianism. For example, although Emperor Wu made great use of

despicable officials, he did not only take the law, but also carried out many policies of benevolence and virtue. He also resorted to the Spring and Autumn period for some difficult cases, which is the embodiment of the thought of "taking both morality and punishment" in "New Confucianism". Some thoughts of Taoism, Legalists, Yin-Yang, continue to be active on the political stage. In fact, they are the affirmation of the rulers to the "New Confucianism" and also show the vitality and tension of the "New Confucianism".

## **2.2 On "Banning All Other Schools of Thought While Paying Supreme Tribute to Confucianism" from the Perspective of History**

It seems that it is not persuasive to affirm that "banning all other schools of thought while paying supreme tribute to Confucianism" is true only based on the understanding of its connotation. When scholars debated this issue in the past, they mainly focused on the historical documents belonging to the period of Emperor Wu. However, if you want to sort out this issue in a comprehensive way, you should also pay attention to some historical documents after the Emperor Wu.

Documents and historical materials one: In 51 BC, Emperor Xuan personally presided over "Shiquge Conference", and called some famous scholars such as Wangzhi Xiao, Xiang Liu and Xuancheng Wei to discuss "The Five Classics". One of the purposes of this conference is to further consolidate the monopoly position of Confucianism in the official school. If Confucianism had never been in the "exclusive" position, the study of Confucian classics would not have been so prosperous at that time, and the influence of "Shiquge conference", which complied with the rapid development of Confucian classics, would not have been so great.

Documents and historical materials two: The Biography of Emperor Yuan of Han Shu records that emperor Xuan said that The Han family has its own system, which is mixed hegemonic with kingly. How can we only use moral education? Could it be said that we would adopt the policy of Zhou Dynasty? <sup>[1]27</sup> Scholars often use the material as a powerful argument against that Emperor Han Wu practiced "banning all other schools of thought while paying supreme tribute to Confucianism". However, in fact, in the process of constructing "New Confucianism", Confucian scholars in the Han Dynasty absorbed the thought of legalist, advocating both moral and punishment. For example, Bushu Lu governed the prison in Huainan area with criminal law, and used "Spring and Autumn" to arbitrarily rule outside <sup>[1]1333</sup>. It is the best portrayal of the confluence of Confucianism and Legalists. Because "New Confucianism" absorbed some of the ideas of the Legalists, emperor Xuan said that it was mixed hegemonic with kingly. It shows that the Emperor Xuan adopted "New Confucianism" which absorbed various schools of thought beneficial to the governance of the country, rather than the common use of Confucianism and Legalists. In addition, some scholars believe that Emperor Wu did not select talents to advocate Confucianism, but more of them were talents other than Confucianism. This kind of talent view can not "ban all other schools of thought"<sup>[7]</sup>. But it is just because the "New Confucianism" integrates the ideological elements of various schools that are conducive to the governance of the country and it is no longer traditional Confucianism, Emperor Wu did not stick to one standard in selecting talents, and did not take Confucianism as his specialty. It can't be asserted that there has never been "banning all other schools of thought while paying supreme tribute to Confucianism" in the history just based on the fact that Emperor Wu didn't have an independent Confucian as the minister.

Documents and historical materials three: Yu Liu, the feudal lord king, once asked emperor Cheng of Han Dynasty to read the books of philosophers and "Records of the Grand Historian of China". Emperor Cheng asked Feng Wang, who was the general of the army, and he replied that the books of philosophers are against the study of Confucian classics and not saints, or praise and believe ghosts, gods and bogeys. "Records of the Grand Historian of China" has the plot of the treacherous power of the Warring States, and at the beginning of the rise of Han Dynasty, officials made some strategies which led to some disasters from heaven and earth. Both of them are not suitable for the feudal lord king. Emperor Cheng replied to Liu Yu that "The Five Classics" was made by sages, and included everything. The books of philosophers and "Records of the Grand Historian of China" undermined justice, and they are blocked. They won't work for a great cause,

and it is unnecessary to pay attention to them.<sup>[1]3324-3325</sup> Until the period of emperor Cheng, it was still necessary to ask for instructions from the emperor to read the books of philosophers, which shows that the rulers at that time restricted the academic study of the philosophers. If Emperor Wu never practiced "paying supreme tribute to Confucianism", but only "respecting Confucianism", it's hard to imagine that emperor Cheng would suddenly ban reading the books of philosophers. Feng Wang thought that except Confucianism, all the other theories were heresy, which were against the way of saints. Emperor Cheng also thought that Confucian classics were all inclusive, and the other theories were little skills and none of them was enough to pay attention to. This may be a strong evidence of "banning all other schools of thought while paying supreme tribute to Confucianism".

### 2.3 On "Banning All Other Schools of Thought While Paying Supreme Tribute to Confucianism " From the Perspective of Philology

When scholars discuss the question of "banning all other schools of thought while paying supreme tribute to Confucianism", they often start from the perspective of history. But because the authenticity of some historical materials is controversial, their conclusions are also questioned. From the perspective of bibliography, not only can we avoid this defect, but we can further clarify this problem. Here is a two-way thinking. From the perspective of the bibliography, if Emperor Wu practiced "banning all other schools of thought while paying supreme tribute to Confucianism", the number of works on Confucianism will increase significantly, and the number of works on the rest will be sharp decrease. If Emperor Wu had never practiced "banning all other schools of thought while paying supreme tribute to Confucianism", then there would not have been a significant increase or decrease in the number of academic works studied by various scholars. Even if Emperor Wu only "respected Confucianism" and did not have "solitary respect" the result was that the number of works on Confucian scholarship was relatively increased, and the number of works on other Confucian scholars was relatively reduced without a sharp increase or decrease.

Based on such a two-way thinking, according to Yiwenzhi from Hanshu, the statistics of the writings of each family in the Western Han Dynasty and the writings of each family after the Emperor Hanwu can be counted and compared<sup>[8]</sup>. The list is as follows:

**Table 1.** A comparison of the books of philosophers between the Western Han Dynasty and Emperor Wu

The schools	The total amount of works in the Western Han Dynasty	The percentage of total works	The total amount of works after Emperor Wu	The percentage of total works
Confucianism	818	18.42%	173	49.01%
Taoism	991	22.31%	5	1.42%
Legalist	215	4.84%	0	0%
Strategists	107	2.41%	0	0%
Yin-Yang	331	7.45%	21	5.95%
Ecletics	402	9.05%	122	34.56%
Logicians	36	0.81%	0	0%
Mohism	86	1.94%	0	0%
Agriculturists	114	2.57%	25	7.08%
Novelists	1341	30.2%	7	1.98%
Total	4441	-	353	-

To begin with, as the Taoist school that had been favored and had the greatest influence in the Han Dynasty, there was only five works after Emperor Wu, and the works of Legalists, Strategists, Logicians, and Mohism was zero. If "banning all other schools of thought while paying supreme

tribute to Confucianism" has never been practiced, it seems difficult to explain this phenomenon.

Secondly, in the Western Han Dynasty, Novelists, Taoists and Confucianism respectively accounted for 30.2%, 22.31% and 18.42% of the total works. Confucianism did not have the most works in the Western Han Dynasty. However, after Emperor Wu, the number of Confucian works alone accounted for 49.01%, which is half of the total number of works, while the former novelists and Taoists with high weight accounted for only 3.4% now. It shows that Confucianism was highly valued after Emperor Wu.

In addition, there are only 173 Confucian works, which are quite different from the previous ones. If Emperor Wu practiced "paying supreme tribute to Confucianism", the number of Confucian works should increase rapidly, but why not? In fact, this problem needs to clarify the difference between "Confucianism" works and "Confucian" works. "Confucianism" works refer to those containing the way of governing the country and "sublime words with profound meaning", which belongs to the works in Yiwenlue of Yiwenzhi. "Confucian" works refer to the works in the sub department, which belongs to the works in Zhuzillue of Yiwenzhi. Their status is essentially different. According to the statistics of Yiwenzhi from Hanshu, there were 3123 "Confucianism" works in the Western Han Dynasty, and there were 1370 "Confucianism" works after Emperor Wu, accounting for about half of the total. It can be seen that after Emperor Wu, "Confucianism" works had a substantial increase. This shows that scholars at that time devoted most of their energy to the study of "Six Meridians", so the "Confucianism" works in the sub department will be correspondingly reduced. Their devotion to the study of Confucian classics further proves that the Han Dynasty was likely to practice "paying supreme tribute to Confucianism".

Although Yiwenzhi from Hanshu can not completely summarize the works in the Western Han Dynasty, it generally reflects the overall trend of the works in the Western Han Dynasty. During the Western Han Dynasty, the works of various scholars took Emperor Wu as a watershed, which formed a huge contrast between before and after. After Emperor Wu, there was a sharp decline, indicating that Emperor Wu was very likely to "ban all other schools of thought while paying supreme tribute to Confucianism".

## Conclusion

Based on the above research, we can draw the following two conclusions:

(1) "Banning all other schools of thought while paying supreme tribute to Confucianism" has its specific historical connotation. "Banning" means "exclusion". "All other schools of thought" means various doctrines that are not conducive to the governance of the country at that time. "Confucianism" means the kingcraft of "New Confucianism" which absorbs the beneficial thoughts of each school. Therefore, its full meaning refers to rejecting those doctrines that were not conducive to the governance of the country at that time, while paying supreme tribute to Confucianism which absorbs the beneficial thoughts of governing the country from each school.

(2) The fact that Emperor Xuan personally presided over the "Shiquge Conference", and praised the thought of "developing both morality and punishment" of "New Confucianism". Emperor Cheng opposed to study the books of philosophers and the situation that after Emperor Wu, except for Confucianism, the number of other schools works declined sharply, together prove that since the beginning of Emperor Wu, Confucianism has gradually been established as one. In other words, it is reasonable and credible to reflect the academic development of Han Dynasty by "banning all other schools of thought while paying supreme tribute to Confucianism".

## References

- [1] Ban, G. (1965) The Han Book. Zhonghua Book Company, 8.
- [2] Zheng, J. Zh. (2016) "Statute Monarchy" or "Supporting Autocracy" —— Re-evaluation of Dong Zhongshu "Inference of the Kong Family, Restraining the Hundred Schools". Journal of Hengshui University, 2, 1.

- [3] Sun, J.T. (1993) Emperor Wu of the Han Dynasty of "Banning All Other Schools of Thought While Paying Supreme Tribute to Confucianism" ——A Fundamental Error in the Reflection of Modern Chinese Confucianism. Nanjing Social Science, 6,102-112.
- [4] Guan, H.L. (1995) Emperor Wu of the Han Dynasty of "Banning All Other Schools of Thought While Paying Supreme Tribute to Confucianism" Did Have Something to Do with Him—Discussion with Comrade Sun Jingtian. Nanjing Social Science, 6,13-19.
- [5] Guan, H.L. (2009) A Textual Tesearch on the Historical Process of "Banning All Other Schools of Thought While Paying Supreme Tribute to Confucianism". Jiangsu Social Sciences,1, 192-195.
- [6] Wang, Sh.R.,Sun, L.Q.,Zhang, X.D. (1995) Chinese Dictionary. Shanghai Dictionary Publishing House, 995.
- [7] Zhu, Z.Yan. (2005)Query on "Deposing Hundreds of Schools and Respecting Confucianism Alone" by Emperor Hanwu [J]. Journal of Shanghai University,6, 92.
- [8] Chen, G.Qing. (2012) Annotated Compilation of Hanshu Yiwenzhi. Zhonghua Book Company,164.