

## Rationale for ceremonies honoring venerable sages of the past during the Song period

by *UMEMURA Naoki*

When looking back on the history of pre-modern local school education in China, one finds that the Northern Song period marked an important turning point, in that the central government adopted a policy to facilitate establishing local schools and planned to establish the school system as a major route to entering the bureaucracy. As to the purpose of such a plan, one possibility is an attempt to standardize the cultivation and training of scholar-officials, an explanation that has already been pointed out in the research to date focusing on the history of education, in general, and the Imperial Examination System, in particular. However, there is another side to the issue, in that the school education system was primarily an ideal institution, meaning that it should be considered from the view of new ideological currents developing during the Song period which aimed at restoring ancient political ideas.

The present article takes up this alternative view, focusing on ceremonies conducted in local schools in honor of venerable sages of the past, in order to discover their rationale utilizing mainly traditional interpretations of the Confucian classics and clarifying the receptivity of the scholar officials of the period to local school education. The analysis produces the following conclusions.

To begin with, the concept of *shidian* 稷奠, a ceremony worshipping Confucius and his followers initially held at the shrine to Confucius during the latter part of the Tang period, gradually changed its venue to the schools during the mid-Northern Song period, at a time when the shrine to Confucius and the school were consciously differentiated ritual spaces conceptually.

Secondly, the concept of *xianshi* 先師 (eminent scholars of the past) changed from specialists in one classic of the Tang period to signifying those who had acquired the true way and virtue through their interpretations of the *Zhou-li*

周礼.

Next, a new interpretation that “all *shidian* possess *he* 合” as stated in the *Liji* 礼記 also appeared, despite the fact that some scholars justified enshrining local venerable sages by using older interpretations. In particular, Wei Liaoweng 魏了翁 criticized the universal enshrinement of Zhou Dunyi 周敦頤, insisting on a principle of ritual for the spirits of one's ancestors.

Finally, the concept of *xiang-xiansheng* 鄉先生 (eminent local scholars) found in the *Yili* 儀礼 evolved during the late Southern Song period into a justification for the enshrinement of local venerable sages of the past at local schools.