Liu Tsai (1165–1238): 
His Philanthropy and Neo-Confucian Limitations

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1. A case study and broad problems

In spring 1224, before the first harvest, famine became widespread in Chin-t'an[1] county, in Chen-chiang[2] prefecture, southeast of Nanking. What saved thousands of people from starvation was a charitable "rice soup kitchen" (chu-chü[3]). Was this legendary? The factual details are set forth in a commemorative tablet and corroborated by other sources. A single philanthropist named Liu Tsai[24] (1165–1238) started the "kitchen" all by himself as his personal gift. When his sources were nearly exhausted, a friend of his made energetic appeals to obtain additional donations mostly from community members. The relief went on, helping an even larger number of famine victims. At the peak of the crisis, during the ten days before harvest time, the "kitchen" managed to feed as many as 15,000 persons every day! As a private famine relief, its magnitude was probably matchless among all the old societies in world history.

This fact alone would merit a case study. Moreover, its manifold implications, upon analysis, go much further. They throw new light upon general history, especially with reference to Neo-Confucianism.

The case, though extraordinary, was by no means an isolated one at that time. Of varying scope and scale, Neo-Confucian philanthropy made strides in many parts of the country. But some good deeds such as famine relief point an accusing finger at the other side of the coin: the default of government responsibility. This was particularly paradoxical in the Yangtze delta, by far the most wealthy region in China where our case took place.

In the gap between a negligent government and poor peasants, some local gentry (hsiang-shen[25]) helped on occasion. We prefer to call them, in this regard, community elite or leaders. At any rate, the ones who stood out in Southern Sung China and who have been ignored by historical studies, deserve attention. Neither did they emulate the aristocratic magnates in earlier times, nor did they share much similarity with a later type – exploitative, manipulative, land-grabbing, influence-peddling, domineering – so notorious from the Ming period on.

Who, then, were these Southern Sung community elite capable of mobilizing private means for public needs? What was the background of their social concern? And how did their thinking as well as their status help them to do what they did, but significantly no more than that?

What they did in response to the crying needs was to ease the pain; it was not a cure. Inevitably, disasters would recur. Most of the time, no relief would be forthcoming, as there was neither personal leadership nor institutional mechanisms standing by to organize it. What a few had done in the past now appeared to be ephemeral, leaving in history only some vague impression. Why was that?

Private philanthropy cuts both ways. It was an option in which these Neo-Confucians excelled. At the same time, however, does it not imply that they shied away from another possibility: making more efforts to build up community organizations beyond
kinship, religious, and trade groups? Had they done so, China's old social structure might have been different and the evolution of its history likewise. Since they did not, what would be the explanation?

II. Historiography and types

On Liu Tsai, traditional accounts are available in the standard history and similar sources. However, what are they worth? Recent scholars in expecting too much find them disappointing. The question is rather how to make the best use of them. To be inadvertently turned off by this over-critical view would miss much insight. What we can do is to study not only their positive as well as negative aspects but also the messages behind them all.

Ever since the Record of the Historian, all standard and assimilated histories, despite minor variation, follow the same pattern. They use a tradition-bound classification scheme to arrange the biographical section in separate and distinct chapters. Each chapter deals with a group of individual examples that are editorially put together as a category, so classified from the Confucian standpoint. A group or category is similar to what we may nowadays call a type or sub-type.

The Confucian classification of individuals into types manifests itself very clearly when it labels the famous as well as the infamous groups in respective chapter headings. It is not so clear with many other groups. Nonetheless, there is almost always a summary comment (lun), usually at the end of each chapter or its sub-division, but sometimes at the beginning, that deduces or ascribes some common characteristics of this or that type.

The individual biographical accounts, therefore, were essentially written in the light of that classification. This is why a poorly edited piece would almost read like a stereotyped write-up. Even a much better one does not amount to what we would call, strictly speaking, a biography. The difference goes deeper than semantics. What the old-styled historians meant by biographical account (chuan) was a narrative that would transmit the message they intended.

Historians rarely agree. In the bygone centuries, they debated over who should or should not belong to which chapter, that is, which group or type, and why. Some put their critical ideas in the prefacing explanations of what they compiled as an improved version over the standard history. This is precisely how chuan 154 in the SSHP (Sung shih hsin-pien, see note 1) differs from its counterpart chuan 401 in the SS (Sung shih, also see note 1), while Liu Tsai appears in both. What the SSHP puts together there, with several overlapping individuals, Liu Tsai included, does make the group more homogeneous than the corresponding one in the SS. Its summary comment also has greater clarity in pointing out the common denominator of these scholar-officials as a type: the individuals who consistently stood opposed to many government policies.

Six of them in this group had life-long careers in the government. However, in the words of the SSHP comment, "As critic-advisers they often attacked [those in power] and as court lecturers they often contributed [different] ideas." The other two in this group, Ts'ui Yu-chih and Liu Tsai opted in mid-career for early retirement. The comment goes on to say that "even special court favors, giving them successive appointments directly to high and still higher offices, all within one year...failed to get them to serve again." In concluding, the SSHP comments in the same way as the SS does that all of them followed the correct (cheng) principle. But what is it? What does the
Only through an adequate understanding of the traditional accounts do we earn the privilege of criticizing them. Here, two historiographical points may be raised. First, their emphasis is lopsided: too much on the political side and too little on social actions. On Liu Tsai, for example, both accounts merely mention in passing his famine reliefs and other charitable deeds. Neither comment stresses their significance. As we perceive it, from the information gathered elsewhere, Liu Tsai has a distinction not shared by the rest of this group. He may well represent, along with some other philanthropists, a type of community elite who engaged in the private enterprise of public relief. The failure to assess him and others like him in this light suggests a blind spot in the Neo-Confucian intellectual outlook over the centuries.

The next criticism is historiographically rather damaging. It would be too much to expect that the SS and the SSHP editors should have checked the works of Liu Tsai. But what excuses did they have for not making use of a well-known source? This is the CKC (Ch'ng-k'ou ch'i-chiu chuan, see note 1). The title literally means "Chen-chiang's elders: their biographical accounts." Liu Tsai was one of them. With this source, however, a puzzle arises. The editors of the For Treasury Collectanea (Ssu-k'u ch'üan-shu), considered the author anonymous. Incidentally, recent reprint and library cards still say so. But surprisingly, he turns out to be Liu Tsai, the very same, a historian as well! On the other hand, the plot thickens. Since the CKC has a biographical account of him which even describes his funeral, how could he possibly be its author?

The puzzle was neatly solved some years ago by an emendation of the Four Treasury's bibliographical abstracts. It finds that Liu Tsai compiled almost all of the CKC, except its very end, as a part of the local gazetteer. We can re-confirm this finding by citing the exact spot which says so in Liu Tsai's collected works (see note 1; hereafter Works), chüan 8, pp. 3–4 (hereafter in such form as 8: 3–4). The bibliographical emendation points out further that Tsai's authorship has been noted beyond doubt in two later local gazetteers: the Hsien-ch'un chen-chiang chih[34] near the end of the Southern Sung and the Chih-shun chen-chiang chih of the Yüan period (see note 1; hereafter CS-CCC).

Someone else, a minor author, must had added at the end of CKC a few biographical accounts. The same bibliographical work finds the clues tight there. These accounts deferentially refer to Tsai's father as "the retiring scholar" (chü-shih[35]) and to Tsai himself as "the honorable one" (kung[36]), never using their respective names. This deliberate avoidance conclusively indicates the minor author to be a Liu family descendant. The very last account on Wang Sui[37] observes the same avoidance, just as in the case of Tsai. Since one of Tsai's sons married a Wang daughter, he was quite likely the one who added these accounts.

The account on Tsai in CKC, 9:9–14, is the best, giving much more information on his philanthropy. Even so, it does not emphasize the significance of his social actions. How do we explain that? A clue exists in the account itself where it mentions that Wang Sui composed for Tsai "the necrological petition" (hsing-chuang[38]). As was the practice, this petition submitted to the government history bureau for approval became the authoritative source for all. This is precisely where the bias impregnates. Even the CKC account, presumably by his son, would draw upon it. The SS compilation has merely relied on government records and the SSHP largely copies the SS with a few revised wordings and a new arrangement.
Historiography leads to intellectual history. All old-styled biographical accounts, more than tradition-bound, are generically tied to this specific bureaucratic practice that sets an intellectual mold. Beyond the limiting scope of its social concerns, the Neo-Confucian mind through the centuries would perceive little else.

III. Careers and activities

Now we begin our biographical study. Building on the data in CKC 9: 9–14, we will cite it no further except for particular attention. We obtain additional information indispensably from Liu Tsai’s Works, Man-t’ang wen-chi, and besides that, from a few other sources (see note 1), citing essential points as we go along. The Works provide enough data for us to reconstruct Tsai’s life, though the extant edition contains only one half of what his son originally collected (Works, prefaces). Here and there, in order to see his life in a general context, we rely on supplementary references. These titles are given in the notes. Our aim is to go beyond Tsai’s career and political responses. Still we are going to use them as the main threads, in this chronological section, outlining what he did and did not do. The other aspects of his life, more interesting as they are, will first appear briefly here and then come up later on with concrete details in appropriate topical sections.

Tsai was born in 1165 (an inference from CKC, 9: 13). At the age of 16 sui, he ranked first at the prefectural school (Works, 33: 11; cf. 33: 6–7). Declining offers of financial aid, he travelled on his own to the capital and won the doctoral degree in 1190. Immediately thereafter, as was the custom, he married a T’ao [39] girl whose family had a higher status (Works, 26: 10; 26: 13; 28: 20; 30: 16–17). Through a tutor in her family at Chia-hsing [40], mid-way between Hangchow and present-day Shanghai, Tsai learned about and respected the school of thought led by the famous philosopher Chu Hsi (Works, 30: 8–13).

Tsai served in 1191–1196 as the sheriff at Chiang-ning [41], modern Nanking. While there, he stopped those practices in magic that were objectionable according to Neo-Confucian belief. On an official mission, he had his initial experience in famine relief. Despising the usual bureaucratic way of seeking favors from superiors, Tsai and a handful of colleagues promised themselves that they would not accept a promotion that came through recommendations (Works, 29: 11–13). This spirit of self-denial as we shall see characteristically forecasts Tsai’s career future.

His next post was judicial inspector in Chen-chou [42], also called I-cheng [43], on the north bank of the Yangtze between Nanking and Yangchow. In 1197, already a widower for four years, he remarried a girl named Liang [44] from Chu-chou [45] in southern Chekiang. All her brothers were officials at grades comparable with Tsai’s, one being his colleague. Their father, however, held a much higher rank (Works, 26: 11–12; 28: 5–6; 32: 11–14; 32: 26). Shortly after the marriage, Tsai was told by his father, a humble tutor, to send funds home in order to help the Liu family buy some land (Works, 8: 2 and 32: 11–14).

Bureaucratic evils annoyed Tsai. For example, corrupt overtures of a prefect ran into his stern rejection. But factional politics troubled him even more. Han T’o-chou [46], the dominating chief councillor, persecuted the critics by proscribing their philosophy. Under the ban, in effect during 1197–1202, the Chu Hsi school, which claimed to be the “orthodox learning” (t’ao-hsüeh [47]), was ironically denounced as the “false learning” (wei-hsüeh [48]). Tsai, though not affiliated with it, refused to declare himself, in a for-
mality required by the ban, as having had nothing to do with it. The obstinacy cost him promotion opportunities, though he was rated as "experienced and capable" (lien-t'ou[^8]) (Works, 14: 7).

He wished he could quit officialdom but family financial needs made him go on (CKC, 9: 11). When the factional ban was relaxed, Tsai became in 1202 the magistrate at T'ai-hsing[^51], a medium-sized county along the Yangtze below Yangchow. The tenure was brief for the death of his father put him on leave. When the required mourning period was over in 1205, he split the land his savings had bought among all his brothers who had little means to support themselves, retaining no part for himself (Works, 8: 2; 32: 11–14).

When Tsai reached the capital for reassignment, Han, the chief councillor, was about to provoke a war against the Jurchen in the north. Both SS and SSHP accounts claim that Tsai warned two high officials against it. The CKC, however, wisely chooses not to make any such assertion. A letter from Tsai to one of these officials, though against the war, was not especially outspoken (Works, 16: 2–4). In contrast, a friend of his voiced much stronger opposition (Works, 28: 10). Moreover, Tsai was also friendly with the famous poet-official Hsin Chi-chi[^52], for decades a leading hawk (Works, 15: 1–3).

For a brief time around 1206, Tsai served as a fiscal official in Che-tung circuit east of the capital (Works, 14: 14). All biographical accounts rush on to say that he soon chose to retire for good. What they have missed here is not only a state crisis but also Tsai's disillusionment with its aftermath, something that he himself did not care to write about.

In 1207, Han lost not only the ill-advised war but also, at the demand of the Jurchen, his own head which was taken after his assassination on the palace grounds. Probably to Tsai and others like him, the prospect looked uncertain: would the leadership at court show promise?

Among the ones who took charge for the time being was Ch'ien Hsiang-tsu[^53], whom Tsai befriended. On occasion, Tsai did some ghost-writing for Ch'ien (Works, 13: 15–17). He also suggested to Ch'ien how the examinations, abused by all kinds of cheating, should be abolished in favor of directly taking the best candidates from regional schools (Works, 13: 15–17). Apparently, the suggestion came to nothing. In another letter, Tsai warned Ch'ien that, without having upright officials around to help him, Ch'ien would find his "elbow pulled back" (ch'e-chou[^54]) (Works, 16: 4). This is probably an oblique reference to Shih Mi-yüan who lost little time in dominating the court and went on as the chief chancellor for the next twenty six years, the longest tenure ever attained.

Shih played what may be called "accommodative politics". To throw the opposition off balance, he put scholarly leaders in high but non-sensitive offices. To bargain for a good image, he let what the Chu Hsi school advocated become the state ideology as well as the intellectual orthodoxy, though he never adopted their ideas on how to run the government. Such hypocrisy probably disillusioned Tsai from its very beginning. Besides, an annoying disease interfered with his career. Vitiligo caused white patches all over his skin. So "deformed" was the appearance of his face that Tsai felt it embarrassing to present himself in government quarters (Works, 6: 15–16).

Friends did not realize what his intention was. Their recommendations made him eligible for court evaluation (t'ang-shen[^55]). This was not a regular civil service process, but an accelerating channel that would directly lead to high offices. To their disbelief, Tsai retired in 1208. Orders issued the following year still summoned him to come for
this evaluation and friends urged him to appear at court. Whichever reason comes first, disillusionment or disease, Tsai refused to come out from retirement. Several years later, a nominal "teacher" of his who had graded his paper at the doctoral examination asked him to join the staff of a regional command. In response, Tsai sent a poem, portraying himself as a sick crane (Works, 4: 4). He never wanted active service again; nor had his record been particularly distinguished.

We should explain the retirement system. It normally awarded a former official the sinecure title of honorary temple supervisor. One did not go to the temple at all or for that matter know where its location was. What it meant was a quasi-official status. Moreover, one could still get promoted, though in retirement, when a different temple title put him at a higher grade, as we shall see. In essence, it was a symbolic device to differentiate the rank as well as to determine the pensions. In Tsai’s case, he took such a title. However, unlike most retired officials, he chose not to draw the pensions (Works, 5: 7–8).

With the savings from his last post, Tsai bought a fairly small piece of land to provide the income for his immediate family and himself in frugal living. To nurse his illness, he lived in a three-room cottage on the property, instead of the family residence in town (Cf. CS-CCC, 12: 7). Nearby was a pond; he called it the "Loose Pond" (man-t’ang) and used it not just as his self-styled name but also as his proper name. For poetic purposes, he often added to it two more words, "Sick Eider" (ping-shou[56]).

Nominally a recluse but actually in the prime of his life, Tsai began to engage himself in community activities. The year after he retired, he helped organize for the first time a private "rice soup kitchen" to feed the abandoned children and later hungry adults in famine (Works, 20: 13–15). In 1214, as mentioned in the previous section, he compiled the CKC for the local gazetteer. The same prefect who had asked him to do so wanted him in the following year to join a temporary relief bureau. Tsai gave his usual excuse of unsightly appearance. Instead, he submitted a detailed manuscript of his on famine relief administration (huang-cheng[57]) (Works, 8: 4–5).

The death of his second wife in 1219 (Works, 32: 11–14; 32: 26), probably made him even more disinterested in bureaucratic matters. Two years later, he took the unusual liberty of writing a long note in his "civil service transcript" (k'ao-kung li[58]). It declared that henceforth no friend should again refer to the document (Works, 24: 1; 24: 8). Yet, his second relief "kitchen" in 1224, with which our story begins, was such a resounding accomplishment that the court circles brought up his name again (Works, 22: 6–7; CSCSC, see note 1, 15: 15–20).

A crisis of state had just occurred10. Upon the death of the preceding emperor, the younger prince was arbitrarily put on the throne by the decision of Shih Mi-yüan. This was Emperor Li-tsung. The would-be successor, also a prince by adoption but the elder of the two, was sent away. Innocent of but implicated by an abortive uprising, he was ordered by the court to commit suicide, though the official report tried to cover it up as death by illness. The usurpation, compounded by the tragedy, angered many upright officials. In order to ease their pent-up hostility as well as to repair a badly tarnished image, Shih anxiously sought to have at court some officials of the highest moral standing. Tsai was an obvious choice.

Tsai knew exactly what Shih was after and did not fall for it (Works, 12: 3). As soon as Tsai turned down the appointment of land register intendant (chi-tien ling[69]) at court, Shih offered him a higher post: vice-administrator (t'ung-pan) at nearby Nanking. After
per·tent declination of Works, 14: 16-18), Tsai got off the hook by a minor compromise. He accepted a new temple title at a higher grade but remained in retirement (Works, 7: 3-5).

Tsai went on with his philanthropy. In 1225, he organized his third and last relief "kitchen". His close friend Wang Sui also contributed to it (Works, 27: 13). The court was bound to make repeated calls for Tsai's service. In 1233, the year before the Mongols took North China, Shih died, leaving court politics in an uneasy condition. Shih Sung-chih [60], a nephew of his, surged ahead; on the other hand, a number of upright officials such as Chen The-hsin [61] and Wei Liao-weng [62] also rose to influential positions. Tsai had been in touch with both Chen and Wei. However, it was Wang Sui, now a prominent censor, and several other friends who put Tsai's name forward again in 1234.

First, the court promoted Tsai's rank in retirement once more by giving him a still higher temple title of considerable prestige. This was done by an exceptional order that took into account all his years at home as if he had been in active service (Works, 5: 7-9; 7: 5-6; 14: 20-21). On the basis of his elevated rank, the next step followed, appointing Tsai the executive assistant at the Imperial Court of Sacrifice (T'ai-ch'ang ch'eng [63]). Tsai repeatedly pleaded that his skin disease made his sight most repulsive. Then, he started on the journey to the capital at the insistent court summon relayed to him by the prefect. However, he turned back at Soochow. As he reported, his general health was also so poor that he failed to recognize some old friends there. Obviously he was unfit for active service, let alone the fact that he was nearly seventy years old. Altogether, he declined the appointment five times (Works, 5: 9-12).

The process of one appointment after another, despite strenuous declinations, kept on repeating. Late in the same year, Tsai was summoned to be the vice-director of construction (chiang-tso shao-chien [64]), a still higher office. This took four petitions from Tsai to beg off (Works, 5: 13-15). But the very next year the court noticed Tsai again. The garrison troops at the prefectural seat of Chen-chiang mutinied [65] and Tsai helped the sheriff in his home county organize defense. This merit led to the highest appointment Tsai ever had: an academician-in-waiting commissioned to be the prefect at Ning-kuo [66], in modern Anhwei but close to Hangchow. As always, the "Sick Elder" requested to remain in retirement.

Tsai died at 74 sui in 1238. People in his own community, out of profound gratitude, suspended market trading to go to his burial. People from neighboring areas who came to pay their respects were strung out along the roads for a distance of fifteen miles, according to the CKC account. It should have emphasized that such tributes truly reflected the most significant part of his life; contributions to community welfare.

We have seen Tsai in his career as well as in retirement, always overshadowed by one powerful chief councillor after another till he was too old for active service. This does not have much political importance. Nor is what he chose not to do, bureaucratic involvement under circumstances less than desirable, nearly so meaningful as what he chose to do in private philanthropy. Our study convinces us that he merits a lasting place in history not because he seemingly belongs to a political type, but because he significantly represents a social type of community elite.

IV. Family status and property
Charity begins at home; so did Liu Tsai's philanthropy. Before he helped the community people, he had greatly helped his brothers in awkward matters of both status and
property. We would go into these matters in detail for it helps to understand the man in the full context of his life situation, as a biographical study in depth should. Besides, these matters themselves are highly interesting in social history.

The background of family lineage, seemingly remote, is quite relevant. Liu Tsai's ancestors moved up in status to join the elite and then fell back to a base line of literati without degree nor government post, though still above the common people. The big rise came with an ancestor four generations before Tsai, the first one in the lineage to become an official, a medium-rank one at court. After him, however, the downward turn began. Although his descendants were literati, none of them before Tsai got into officialdom. His son, Tsai's great grandfather, was merely a honor student in the prefectoral school (CKC, 9: 8-9).

From Tsai's grandfather on, the family fortune went down further. This old man, never successful at examinations, sold much of his land for 500 strings or 500,000 coins so that his two sons could share an expensive tutor whom a relative's family retained. The sacrifice did not pay. While neither of them won any honor, both had to, with little property left, earn their living by tutoring ( Works, 26: 14; 32: 4). During Tsai's boyhood, the family had the status of literati, rather than that of elite, except as a pale memory. In fact, in his teens, he rendered to people some literary service for income (Works, 8: 2).

The declining family fell apart. No tradition-bound account would mention that, but we are interested. Tsai's father had five sons: three by his wife and two younger ones by a concubine whom he took after his wife had died. The first son left home to be a soldier: a social disgrace. The second was Tsai. The third son was a cripple who could not support himself. The fourth, Tsai's half-brother, died while a young man. The youngest, his other half-brother, was given away as a foster baby: another social disgrace of the family ( Works, 26: 15-16). Tsai was not only the sole son who pulled himself up but also a most brotherly one who put the family together again.

To see how charitable Tsai was in erasing the disgraceful situations, let us first tell the story of the foster son. At his birth, the father tutoring in Nanking sent the word home that the family with its means already strained by four sons could hardly afford another. The concubine mother found in the neighborhood a wealthy couple without offspring to take the baby as their foster child. Upon hearing it, the father said it was fortunate for the baby's future.

By the time Tsai was a sheriff, the concubine who had taken care of him in boyhood and her other son who had grown up with him both died. In sad memory, Tsai decided to retrieve the only one left in her line but with the foster parents named Ch'en[68]. Considering that the Ch'en couple were old and feeble, the arrangement was made for their foster son to go back and forth between the two households. After father Ch'en died, Tsai took both mother Ch'en and his half-brother into his house, quartering them in a separate compound. To make up an appropriate status, the half-brother still named Ch'en was called the "brother-in-law" (wai-fii[67]). He married, raised a family, and saw his eldest son marry and have children. Tsai dutifully helped with everything they needed (Works, 26: 15-17).

Upon the death of the half-brother, Tsai changed the legal status of the surviving family by reverting their name back to Liu, with the sole exception of the eldest son and his offspring to remain as the Ch'en heirs. In reporting the restored status to the ancestral temple in due ceremony, Tsai pointed out that this was the only way by which official
privileges could extend to them—an exemption from tax and labor service required of
the common people (Works, 26: 17). In all these successive steps gradually taken to re-
medy the situation, Tsai was thoroughly considerate in taking care of every angle.

The story of the prodigal soldier has other interesting aspects. The social status of a
soldier, even lower than that of a commoner, was an intolerable disgrace to a literati
family. The eldest son upon becoming one was promptly disowned by the enraged
father. He then raised a family by marrying a woman of equally low status. Tsai who did
not give up the elder brother gradually took over all his children. In Tsai's household,
his wife graciously treated these children like her own. Meanwhile, at a distance, Tsai's
father with lingering resentment kept an injured silence.

Only after the death of his father did Tsai dare welcome home the prodigal soldier
and his wife. Other people thought it would be most difficult to have a rapport between
the sisters-in-law, considering the social barrier. After all, Tsai's wife came from a fami-
ly whose status was higher than what Tsai had. In fact, her father was once a high
civilian official in charge of army supplies when Tsai's brother was still there, a humble
soldier. However, in terms of family order, the brother as the eldest son would rank first
and so would his wife. Apparently, Tsai's wife was a true lady with a decisive mind. She
saw no awkward dilemma, for she remarked that, social status aside, the proper way in
the family should follow the order by age. As soon as the sister-in-law came, she greeted
her as an elder. Their rapport was cordial from the moment they met (Works, 32:
11-14).

Our attention now moves on to property, an aspect always connected with one's so-
cial standing. The grandfather having sold much of the property, the father probably
tired of tutoring in his old age wanted to buy some land and demanded funds from Tsai.
This was in 1197. Tsai newly remarried found his cash reserve to be short of what was
expected from him. His bride, noticing how he worried, sold household items in order to
make up the difference. What the father bought was 300 mou, about 45 acres.

After his father's death, at the end of the mourning period and before his departure
for a new post in 1205, Tsai reassessed the situation at home. All three brothers needed
support: the former soldier, the cripple, and the restored foster son. To have them reuni-
ited was fine, but to go on living with them was something else. Considering their social
disparities, it would be best for each of them to have a piece of property and to go his
own way. Tsai's wife fully understood. She said while Tsai would have income from gov-
ernment service, how could the brothers make ends meet without some support. The
decision was made. Tsai split the 45 acres among his brothers, keeping no land for him-
self (Works, 32: 11-14). Thus, all his savings since his degree in 1190, he said, went to
them (Works, 8: 2).

When Tsai retired in 1208, to the chagrin of his relatives, he also chose to be self-re-
liant in not taking government pensions. All he had was what he recently saved since re-
suming office less than three years ago. This he invested for income in a separate piece
of land, only 100 mou, about 15 acres. He and his immediate family depended on it for
such a frugal life (Works, 8: 2) that his wife felt it necessary to economize on daily ex-
penses (Works, 32: 11-13). By the elite standards of retired officials, Tsai could not be
regarded as a landlord, though in the eyes of the common people he was a landowner of
fair size, in addition to his elite status.

In the community but beyond the family was the paternal lineage or clan. Many a
scholar-official strengthened the lineage organization to promote kinship cohesion as
well as to aid the poor ones in the group. As is well known, the famous Fan Chung-yen\[^68\] in the eleventh century went as far as donating land to establish a lasting clan estate for welfare and charity. Tsai praised the admirable spirit of this famous example in urging his fellow clan members not to be selfish, particularly not to trample upon the less fortunate one (*Works*, 2: 4-5). One source claims, which may be exaggerated, that Tsai provided monthly meals to meet with clan members and explained how over a cup of wine they could smooth hurt feelings and reassert cordial sentiments (*SYHAPI*, see note 1, 71: 44).

It seems, however, that on the whole Tsai did not do much exclusively for clan charity. This is understandable. Most of Tsai’s clan relatives were in the neighboring county of Tan-yang\[^69\]. It was his grandfather who, in order to get away from a quarrelsome cousin, started a separate branch in Chin-t’an. This branch would not have too many members nor needs. Besides, the disgraces of his brother and his half-brother would probably make it rather awkward for Tsai to assert active leadership in clan welfare. It was to the community at large that his charitable spirit turned.

**V. Relations with other officials**

In a society dominated by the bureaucracy, what determined the general standing of an elite? It is a complex, the sum total of rank, wealth, and prestige that intricately overlap with one another. To make it crystal-clear, one’s rank, official or quasi-official, was the determining factor of elite status. It alone put him in the eyes of the law above the common people. It remained constant, changeable only by court order and nothing else. To this political and legal status, wealth and prestige were supplementary factors—one being an economic variable, the other a social one.

An official rank was what one achieved in active career. It yielded spin-off privileges. An earned privilege was the quasi-official honorary rank for retirement. Similarly, a granted privilege was the quasi-official title one got for his father, son, or another relative. The achieved status came before the privileged status. As to the latter, the personally earned privilege counted more than the granted one. The same operating principle of personal achievement or merits applied to wealth and prestige. What one pulled himself up to in these respects would receive a higher social regard than what one inherited, assuming the two to be of equal amount.

Wealth, mainly sizeable land property in an agricultural society, was indeed basic in life. It would add much weight to one’s general standing, as it supported his life-style, enabling him to influence others, built further prestige otherwise, and particularly put his offspring at a great advantage, including the potentiality of bureaucratic career. Nevertheless, it could not change his official rank or status. For that matter neither would the lack of it. In this sense, wealth was a supplementary variable.

Prestige already came with both official status and wealth. Apart from that, however, it depended on how one was regarded by his peer group. As the elite upheld Confucian values, one’s moral character and outstanding conduct would help his reputation. As the scholar-officials were learned elite, intellectual pursuits would also upgrade prestige. They ranged from Confucian learning through literature to various arts, roughly in that order of Neo-Confucian priorities. All of these were variables that add to one’s general standing.

This explanation, hopefully not a diversion, provides us with a checklist to assess the various components that made up the general standing of Liu Tsai. His official status, as
we have seen, was respectable but not very high. Though his quasi-official title, upon successive promotions, gave him an increasingly higher prestige, this came rather late in his life, after he had already won great fame through famine relief. As to property, what he acquired was small by elite standards, while his family background lent him little inherited property, if any. Did he achieve much prestige by way of intellectual pursuits? Or did it mostly come from his philanthropy? We will leave these questions to the following sections. What engages our interest for the moment is how was his relationship with other scholar officials, his peer group.

In general, his critical attitude kept this relationship distant. Not only was he, as mentioned earlier, adverse to Han T'o-chou and his following for the ill-advised war of 1206-7 (see also Works, 28: 16; cf. 30: 11), but his reactions were even more so to the border officials for their faulty intelligence reports (Works, 28: 10). After the war, he still complained that border officials, caring little about defense, only knew how to enrich themselves (Works, 4: 5).

Tsai's general view on the officialdom was also quite negative. Many candidates, he gathered, got their degrees by playing tricks at the examinations. Others with no better conduct either got into the National University or simply stayed in the capital looking for future openings. They spread political gossip, attacking or praising some officials, merely in their own selfish interest. Yet such gossip became a factor in court politics. Many a high official, reacting to it, openly aided those for him and appeased those against him. The so-called consensus, Tsai concluded, often had little truth in it (Works, 13: 8-9).

The evil, as Tsai clearly saw, had its roots in "accommodative politics". The leaders would soften an adverse opinion or smooth over a potential crisis. Once done, they stopped doing anything else. This was how most scholar-officials became tied up by positions and income (Works, 7: 2). Such a critical view led Tsai into alienation.

Politics occupied no great part in Tsai's career; nor were his views prominent enough to make his reputation. His main concern remained with local government. When he was a young official, he had aspirations to make practical contributions, but circumstances prevented their realization (Works, 7: 1; 30: 12). Yet his realistic insight while not well known during his life time, nor in tradition-bound histories, interests us greatly.

In spite of the centralization in the Sung government, Tsai pointed out, a subordinate office was a compartment that had its share of built-in power, fragmentary though it was. He took as an example the office of judicial inspector, a post he himself once held. Such a low-rank official would often seize a civil case and press criminal charges, with a power equal to that of the police inspector. When the police inspector objected to the charges as being excessive, the judicial inspector would insist on them by a stern and strict interpretation of the law. Neither the administrator nor the vice-administrator of the prefect, though inclined to be reasonable, could reduce the charges (Works, 22: 17-18). This example shows how a small amount of power, lodged in a given office without adequate check, would give rise to its abuse.

Contrary to the usual impression that the Sung local government unit was a centralized and coordinated machinery, it was in fact so compartmentalized that a medium-level county official would find himself in a tight spot, completely boxed in, with his superiors turning a deaf ear and his subordinates not listening to him. Tsai illustrated this by vividly describing the situation of county registrar (chu-pu[79]). We shall paraphrase his account.
Tsai in retirement saw every year many people under arrest pass by his door, escorted by government runners. When he asked why, some of these people said, "My property was gone, but my tax burden was not." Others complained, "I had paid my tax, but they came after me for sur-charges." Or yet another variation of the same theme: "My tax quota was the same as before, but the amount just went up."

Distressed, Tsai posed a theoretical question: was the magistrate to blame? No, a magistrate would retort that he merely ordered the registrar to go by the tax registration books. Troubled in his own mind, Tsai purposely asked a highly praised registrar for his explanation. The man with knit eyebrows frankly said that he could not deny the blame for the hardship on the people, except that the job was an impossible one.

A registrar, the man said, had his orders to oversee tax collections. The village scribes, his nominal underlings responsible for collection records, were mostly self-seeking and dishonest. They would rarely listen to his orders, for they had backing in the magistrate's office. If reprimanded, they would take it up with some one there. Moreover, the power to press for tax payments and to arrest those in arrears came under the assistant magistrate. If a registrar should raise some questions, he would be accused of undue interference.

A registrar would also find the book-keeping clerks working behind his back. What they did or did not do went largely unchecked. When offended, they would sabotage by throwing the tax books all over the office. When some one walked in with a bribe, they would promptly have the tax record changed. When caught cheating, they would simply point a finger at the side of the questioning official, alleging that his attendants standing there had taken their share of the bribe. No questions would ever follow.

By way of concluding, this good registrar whom Tsai asked turned his answer into a most penetrating question: under these circumstances, how could any registrar do his job properly? Speechless, Tsai felt sorrowful (Works, 20: 20–21).

To characterize the local government system in our words, the fragmentary powers of its various compartments mesh into an invisible net that overwhelms everyone. Caught in this entangled web, the only way would be to opt out, if one wished to save his integrity. This was probably why Tsai did so, after nearly two decades of struggling service.

Most disastrous of all, however, were some of the administrative decisions a prefect made. For instance, along the Grand Canal were irrigation pipes used by the peasants. Made of wood, these were called sealed pipes (han-kuan[74]), for they were protected by stone sealings. A big pipe line, when built, cost the peasants nearly the equivalent of 100,000 coins. Yet, as Tsai angrily narrated in a poem, a most unreasonable prefect ordered the pipes dismantled and the wood as well as the stones shipped to the city, all by thousands of conscripted laborers. Once deprived of these irrigation facilities, the countryside would get no water when and where it was needed. Moreover, the fields would suffer flooding when the weather brought excessive rainfall (Works, 4: 6–7).

During his career and by personal observation Tsai saw a great deal of suffering among the peasants. He confessed that both at the prefectural and the county level, there was "nothing one could do" (Works, 6: 9). Consequently, few honest and fair-minded officials would care to stay there (Works, 6: 7).

Alienated from court politics, if not more so from the conditions in local government, Tsai in retirement did not care to be in touch with most bureaucrats, not even by correspondence. Replying to those who sent messages first, he wrote large-sized characters in loose-style calligraphy. Scratching out mistakes as he wrote, he did not bother to make a
clean copy (Works, 8: 8). Then he signed his self-styled name, "Sick Elder of the Loose Pond" (CKC, 9: 11). He realized that his personality, aloof yet straightforward, usually offended his bureaucratic peers (Works, 6: 15; 7: 9).

Tsai also did something exceptional to cut off many acquaintances whose rank was behind his. This is the story of his civil service transcript, well worth repeating. A stationery store clerk (p'u-li[72]) who sold this form to him at the beginning of his career told him to keep it carefully, saying that how far and how soon he would get promoted depended entirely on what was recorded in it. After Tsai retired, he no longer cared. But others valued it.

Those in the lower ranks or those applying to court for reassignment would by regulations need several sponsors with higher ranks. This would be recorded in the transcript of each sponsor. Many a bureaucrat was reluctant to do so as it might eventually affect his own career. Since Tsai no longer cared, his transcript was often borrowed for that purpose. At times, to Tsai's disgust, it passed from one hand to another in the mail and Tsai did not know where it was. Reminded by a friend in 1221 that some of these aspiring bureaucrats, taking advantage of his sponsorship, might do something wrong for which he would still be liable, Tsai finally got it back and wrote in it a long postscript. The note declared that no one should ever refer to this transcript again, for Tsai would no longer sponsor any one just as he himself was no longer interested in active service (Works, 24: 1; 28: 18).

For some one to make such a declaration of renunciation himself in an official document was unheard of. Many bureaucrats resented it as arrogance with a sarcastic undertone. Only a few close friends admired it as self-denial, a Confucian virtue, though carried to an extreme. This was precisely why their recommendations to promote Tsai's rank in 1234, as mentioned in Section III, went so far as to include the point, an equally unusual step in reverse, that all his years at home should be counted as merit as if he had been in active service.

With a few chosen friends, Tsai kept in touch by occasional correspondence. Among them were, for example, Li Hsin-ch'uan[73] (Works, 6: 2; 8: 14–15), a prominent historian; Yüan Hsieh[74] (Works, 36: 8), an eminent philosopher; Yeh Shih[75] (Works, 36: 7–8), well known in history especially for his statecraft theories; Ni Ssu[76] (Works, 8: 8; 36: 7), a leading official respected by many; and Tu Fan[77] (Works, 2: 18; 5: 2) whom Tsai had known and recommended as a minor official and who eventually rose to be a great statesman.

There were some other friends. For two reasons, however, we are particularly interested in the cases of Chen Te-hsiu and Wei Liao-weng. Both men, as mentioned in Section III, rose to high posts at court in 1234. And both cases demonstrate characterizedly the kind of friendship Tsai kept through the decades.

Besides exchanging poems, much of the correspondence with Chen concerned literary matters (Works, 1: 14). For instance, Chen asked for a postscript to a famine relief calendar he had compiled (Works, 24: 14–15). He also asked Tsai to compose commemorative essays for a couple of Confucian-type temples. Tsai in turn requested Chen to compose an inscription for his father's tomb (Works, 10: 10).

At times, the correspondence discussed politics. In 1225, shortly after the crisis of imperial succession, Tsai tried to dissuade Chen from abruptly leaving the court (Works, 10: 8–10). But Chen had already made up his mind, wishing to demonstrate that some scholar-officials would not accept hypocritical accommodation[13]. When
Chen returned to court in 1230, Tsai urged him to follow historical models (Works, 10: 8–10). When Chen became a councillor, Tsai added his congratulations. Unfortunately, Chen soon died, much to Tsai’s sorrow (Works, 1: 24; 25: 10–11). However, whenever Chen rose, Tsai never wanted to ride on his coattail.

Through Chen, Tsai got to know Wei as early as 1206, though the two did not correspond much. When Tsai’s greatest famine relief effort in 1224 became famous, Wei was among those who recommended his resuming active service, to no avail. In the following year, Tsai had heard from Chen that Wei on his way to court was passing through. He tried to meet Wei but missed him (Works, 10: 9). In a letter that followed, Tsai urged Wei to exercise his philosophical leadership in advancing the teachings of the Chu Hsi school. As Tsai saw it, Yeh Shih in advocating statecraft theories overstretched the utilitarian substance, whereas Yang Chien[78] in following Lu Chiu-yüan’s[79] philosophy overdrew speculative abstractions; and neither was correct (Works, 10: 11–12). In other words, his relationship was anchored with chosen friends on an intellectual basis, regardless of their political fortune.

The life of a retired official could not have been completely segregated from the peer group. The bureaucrats at local posts were bound to follow the custom of making courtesy calls on community dignitaries. Tsai was one among a dozen of doctoral degree-holders in his native area (CSCSC, 15: 19). In addition, he had his quasi-official title in retirement which was successively upgraded. While he could not avoid such contact, he kept it at a minimum with insistence, even arrogance.

To paraphrase the CKC account, Tsai would neither receive a local bureaucrat until he had repeatedly called in vain, nor return the courtesy until Tsai had received him at the cottage several times. On making a return call, always on foot, never riding, Tsai had a servant hold a calling card and announce at the official gate that he, a subject in the county, would like to pay his respects (CKC, 9: 11). A vivid description, it has taken some literary license. However, the fact remains that for exchange of greetings on such occasions as an official’s arrival, departure, and invitation Tsai nearly always fell back on the formality of writing a message, without making personal contact. Only in a few cases, Tsai liked the local officials well enough to do some ghost-writing and to discuss irrigation or some other matter of community welfare (Works, 9: 2–13; 13: 1–15; 15: 1–9).

How Tsai was inclined or disinclined to befriend an official can best be seen in the varying ways he dealt with several members of the prestigious Shih family[14]. Tsai dislikes Shih Mi-yüan, the long-tenured chief councillor, probably a major cause of his decision to retire. However, by virtue of their getting doctoral degrees at the same examination, Tsai had been an acquaintance of Shih’s son (Works 12: 3; Sung-jen yi-shih hui-pien[80], 18: 905). This lingering social relationship was probably how a brother of the chief councillor knew Tsai. Upon becoming the local prefect, he politely greeted Tsai with a personal note. Then he requested Tsai’s participation in the local gazetteer project to which Tsai agreed. Even so, Tsai kept himself at a distance. When he asked Tsai again to help with official famine relief, Tsai did not comply. When he invited Tsai to a banquet for all the doctoral degree-holders, Tsai also declined to attend (Works, 15: 4; cf. 8: 3–4). Never once did Tsai pay him an informal social call (Works, 12: 3).

Another brother of the chief councillor, however, cared for philosophy far more than prestige. Through mutual friends, he asked to correspond with Tsai and was gladly accepted as a friend (Works, 12: 7–8). In contrast, when a young nephew of the councillor
upon becoming the prefectural vice-administrator wrote to Tsai, he got a rebuke. Tsai sternly pointed out that the message had been in small-sized square-shaped characters, much like an official document and obviously written by an aide, whereas the other Shih family members had always sent notes written by themselves. When the young man wrote himself to apologize, he got from Tsai yet another lesson that precisely because of his background he should carefully conduct himself according to the best examples in his family, the ones Tsai had happened to know. Only after making these stern remarks did Tsai in this second response promise to see him at their mutual convenience in the future (*Works*, 6: 11–13).

In short, with most people in his peer group, Tsai felt alienated. The feeling must have been mutual, not entirely their fault. Whatever helped the general standing of Tsai, it did not come from them. Mainly it came through what Tsai achieved himself in philanthropy.

**VI. Confucian learning and faith**

Besides philanthropy, did Tsai have other Confucian merits that helped his prestige or general standing? The answer is: only modestly so. The traditional sources in exaggerating Tsai's scholarship make conflicting claims. A Ming period preface to Tsai's *Works* remarks that he always regretted not having studied with Chu Hsi. Yet a Ch'ing period preface honored Tsai as a second-generation disciple of Chu Hsi. Both assertions probably stem from the Yüan period local gazetteer. There Tsai is said to have been, together with Wang Sui, in the company of Huang Kan* Chu Hsi's disciple and son-in-law (CS-CCC, 18: 15). What is the source of that? Nothing else has been said, nor is it mentioned by Tsai himself.

We suspect a case of mistaken identity. Huang Tu was the one whom Tsai called a nominal "teacher" for having read his paper at the doctoral examination (*Works*, 4: 10; 27: 1). Besides, in his *Works*, Tsai did say who his real teacher was. For that, we will let Tsai tell his own story.

Before the doctoral degree, Tsai said, he rendered literary service, particularly tutoring, in order to make a living (*Works*, 12: 3). He had no means to go elsewhere to study with any well known master (*Works*, 32: 6–7). A local wealthy family often invited those successful at examinations to come as guests. Tsai occasionally visited there, listening to their discussions, though he had no time to study under them (*Works*, 33: 6–7).

Only when Tsai married his first wife did he find his real teacher. A tutor in her family named Lin Fu-chih* taught him to study Chu Hsi's teachings. But how was Lin related to the Chu Hsi school? While a prefectural teaching assistant in the Hunan area, Lin paid a visit to the Yüeh-lu* Academy which had been founded originally by Chu Hsi and his friend Chang Shih* (Works, 30: 8–13). That is about all what Tsai said.

The sequel to the standard intellectual history lists Tsai among the followers of the Yüeh-lu school (SYHAPI, 71: 43). The fault of this source is its insistence on classifying everyone under a particular school even, as in this case, by arbitrarily overstretched a most tangential linkage, an indirect one at that. If Tsai did have some sort of linkage with this school, he would have mentioned it. When he wrote a tomb inscription for some one who had actually attended some discussions at this academy, Tsai said nothing at all about his own intellectual affinity (*Works*, 28: 8).

It was rather by his voluntary and independent choice that Tsai came to respect the Chu Hsi school. In the earlier years, when the government banned it, Tsai refused to de-
nounce it, as a matter of principle, not because he had any formal affiliation with it. Nor did he in the intervening years join its followers in claiming it to be the orthodoxy. While he urged Wei Liao-weng in 1225 to assume the intellectual leadership, since Chu Hsi and other masters of this school had died, he did not discuss what the orthodoxy was or should be (Works, 10: 12). Only in his old age when the government honored this school as the orthodoxy^{15}, did Tsai refer to it as such (Works, 23: 5–6; cf. 7: 7).

He also respected the rival school led by Lu Chiu-yüan and later by Yuan Hsieh, Lu's follower and Tsai's friend. Only, he regarded Chu Hsi as having surpassed them (Works, 19: 17). Moreover, he looked up to Chu Hsi not as the greatest master above all others but as the best one who synthesized various other teachings (Works, 23: 5–6).

As a gift, he sometimes sent his friends Chu Hsi's "Recorded Sayings" (Yu-lu[^85]) (Works, 6: 7). In his old age, he gave them instead Reflections on Things at Hand (Chin-su lu), a work co-authored by Chu Hsi that he considered to be most practical. He had another reason. Many a high official by this time claimed to have received personal instructions from the master, but this book, Tsai took the care to point out, would show where their conduct often went astray (Works, 6: 18–19).

Tsai could not care less for intellectual pretensions or justifiable prestige, but he was concerned with community education. Often he helped his relatives and friends who gathered monthly to study how to prepare for state examinations (CKC, 9: 11), though he did not like to be the lecturer at such meetings (Works, 16: 14). Besides that, he revived a defunct academy which had been occupied by a Taoist temple (CS-CCC, 11: 34).

Tsai engaged in the usual fields of learning and literature, though in none of them was he among the best. Studying by himself in retirement the commentaries of the classics, he did not rank high as a classicist (SYHAPI, 71: 43). A productive essayist, he considered rhetoric to be far less important than either self-cultivation or actual conduct (CS-CCC, 3: 2). Critics in later periods agreed that Tsai was not a great master in literature. While an anthology of Sung poetry has some of his works, its editor remarks that, other than his five-character verses in archaic style, Tsai's poetry was generally commonplace (SSC, see note 1, 3: 1). As to an anthology of Sung narrative poems, it does not include Tsai at all, though he wrote many of them (CSCSC, 15: 38–41).

Confucianism, to a true believer like Tsai, was the faith for good living. All established and folk religions were less desirable or objectionable. The way to practise the Confucian faith should limit praying to the proper spirit only. Take praying for rain as an example. A drought in Tsai's county was over after an official mission had been sent to pray at a Confucian-type temple known for its connection with rainfall. To show proper gratitude to the spirit, the local official repaired the temple and allotted land to provide for its upkeep. This was as it should be, according to Tsai in a commemorative essay (Works, 21: 4–5; CS-CCC, 8: 24). In a separate but similar essay, Tsai criticized praying to dragon deities for rain. While he admitted that there are dragons do bring rainfall, he argued that it is the spirit that makes it possible, whereas dragons are merely living beings (Works, 23: 1).

How did true Neo-Confucians select proper objects of worship? In their faith, a worthy spirit is the kind so recorded in the classics and formal histories, whereas folk religions had what they called "loosely excessive sacrifices" (Yin-su [^86]) which should be discouraged. Tsai was a good example of those who carried this faith into action. As a sheriff in his early career, he stopped certain magic practices. While in retirement, he
and a few friends visited the temple of a native prince whose virtue had been much honored in history. They found both the pavilion and the tablet in it crumbling. On the other hand, the two verandas next to the main hall had as many as eighty-four objectionable idols. Thereupon, Tsai together with his friends donated funds to make the necessary repairs. At the same time, the local government by their request ordered the idols taken away. This, Tsai remarked, followed what Ou-yang Hsiu had advocated in his famous essay "On Fundamentals" (Pen-lun [87]). One should cultivate the fundamental faith in Confucianism in order to overcome other beliefs (Works, 21: 16; cf. 21: 7-8; CS-CCC, 8: 21).

Like most other Neo-Confucians, Tsai’s objection to Buddhism and Taoism, the two established religions, was not strenuous but tempered with rationalized excuses. He did succeed, he said, in persuading his second wife to abandon her belief in Buddhism (Works, 32: 13). His major objection was that the Buddhist as well as the Taoist clergy intruded into the Confucian ancestral rites. People who did not realize it mistakenly believed the service of these clergymen to be indispensable.

On the other hand, again like practically all other Neo-Confucians, Tsai could not escape from the influence of Ch’an or Zen Buddhism (Works, 3: 6-8). More pertinent here, however, were the commemorative essays he wrote for Buddhist monasteries. As these were in the community, their contacts happened to be socially unavoidable. In each case, Tsai denied that he knew anything about Buddhist teaching and yet he found the excuse to write for these monks that they practiced Confucian-like virtues such as respect for ethical values and rendering useful service without being social parasites, quite unlike many other Buddhists (Works, 21: 5-7; 21: 24; cf. CS-CCC, 9: 13-14; 9: 22).

Tsai, who was less than frank in not stressing the fact, entrusted much of the daily management of his famine relief "kitchens" to his monk friends. Another family in the community rebuilt a monastery and found a self-reliant monk to run it. As it was located between the grave of Tsai’s grandfather and that of his father, he got to know the monk as well as the disciple who eventually took over (Works, 21: 10-11). When Tsai first engaged in private famine relief in 1209, he had the help of three laymen, one Taoist and this monk. It turned out that the last was the best person and played the leading role (Works, 20: 15). When Tsai undertook his greatest philanthropy in 1224, he appointed the disciple of this monk as the supervisor of the "kitchen" (CSCSC, 15: 20). The appointment, not mentioned by Tsai in his commemorative essay, appears only on the last line of the tablet. Elsewhere, Tsai inadvertently left another clue. He composed a poem on behalf of this disciple for presentation to the prefect (Works, 2: 24). Their relationship was that close.

Tsai’s attitude toward the Taoists was about the same. He wrote poems to bid them farewell when they went back to nearby Mao-shan, a Taoist center of national fame (Works, 1: 19). In fact, the county name Chin-t’an literally meaning golden altar, owed its origin to this Taoist stronghold (Works, 23: 9). When writing an essay requested by a leading Taoist temple in the county seat, through the intermediary of his nephew, Tsai said that he found the Taoist religion, though not what he would believe, did make a contribution in advocating its simple, abstemious, and hygienic life-style (Works, 23: 18; CS-CCC, 10: 6). Besides, Tsai could not help liking the philosophy of Chuang-tzu. At one time, he parted with a collection of essays by four Northern Sung masters in ex-
change for the work of this un-Confucian philosopher which went by the title of Nanhua ching (Works 3: 5).

Between the two, Buddhism was more influential than Taoism. This was true, Tsai said, especially in the areas near Soochow as his native place is (Works, 23: 22). But Tsai had an additional explanation. The Buddhists became strong, he observed, for they would never forget charity (Works, 21: 11). In other words, their belief runs parallel to Tsai's Neo-Confucian philanthropy, the most salient aspect of his faith, a much greater concern in his heart than whatever reason he might have on his mind.

VII. Community Welfare

To a variety of community welfare efforts, Tsai gave both donations and promotions. Buddhist influence and Neo-Confucian interest often converged. For example, their common concern with building bridges for public convenience. Where the local government did not care enough to build, Tsai often asserted his initiative to do so. The procedure was typical of him. He gave first; then with some others cooperating, he followed through. One local gazetteer credits Tsai with building five bridges, two of them large-sized (CS-CCC, 2: 26-29).

Health was another area in which Buddhist and Neo-Confucian concern went hand in hand. Probably owing to Tsai's skin disease, he knew a number of medical doctors, usually men of literati background. One of them interestingly abandoned scholarship, practised medicine, shifted to trade, made his fortune, and finally won the doctoral degree at the state examination (Works, 30: 7-8). Poverty turned others of literati origin into Buddhist clergy. They chose to learn medicine from senior monks; then they practised. Tsai was fond of all such doctor friends always for the same reason. They treated the rich and the poor alike. Different from most doctors, they were not interested in making money (Works, 31: 23-24; 36: 1).

On health, Tsai's ideas had a surprisingly modern ring. In an address outlining Neo-Confucian faith, he pointed out that cold or overheating, indulgent living, and emotional upset all lead to weakened conditions. People easily get infections, Tsai said, when their resistance is so lowered. In illness, he advised, they should first clear up their mind, select a good doctor, choose medication with care, remove things that upset them, wash and clean up everything around them. Following such advice, most patients are bound to get well (CS-CCC, 3: 3-4).

Tsai went on in the same address to attack the malpractice of folk religions. People worshipped deities of epidemics and the like. Such temples were in every town. A child or a witch, said to be possessed by spirit, was supposed to cure illness. It did not. Yet sacrificial ceremonies were expensive. Additional tricks cost some more. People paid out of ignorance and fear. By pawning and borrowing, they went bankrupt.

The very title of this address, "Revering heaven and respecting the spirit" (Tsun-t'ien ching-shen wen[89]), succinctly underscores Tsai's Neo-Confucian faith. For the community, the major place of worship should be the soil-and-grains altar (she chi t'um[89]). During the drought, Tsai usually led the community people to pray there. Rainfall often followed. Tsai also asked the county sheriff to repair and expand the place. To supplement some community funds, Tsai donated cash, bamboo, and wood. Along its new walls and gateway, several hundred pine and cypress trees were planted. A nearby farm house was bought and converted into a hall for abstinence and sacrifice (CS-CCC, 13: 8-9).
A Neo-Confucian institution much celebrated since its pioneer Fan Chung-yen was the charitable estate (*i-chuang*) for his clan members or paternal common descendants. While Tsai’s small-sized clan did not have one, he greatly admired a Ch‘en clan in the community for having it, with about twenty-five acres of land and the income of one hundred twenty piculs, half for the relief of poor kin and the other half for the upkeep of ancestral graves (*Works*, 23:8–9). It took a great deal of efforts, Tsai observed, not only in getting such a task started but also in keeping it running well (*Works*, 21:23–26).

Another renowned institution, especially since the successful model of Chu Hsi, was the charitable estate (*i-chuang*). However, it differed from place to place. The capital might originate with a government grant, a family donation, or various contributions from community members. The policy also varied. Some granaries merely undertook to sell their grain during a crisis in order to counteract the high market prices, much like what the government did with its ever-normal granaries (*ch‘ang-p‘ing ts‘ang*). Others did not, merely loaning their grain to those in hardship (*Works*, 22:9–10).

Tsai in retirement set up a community granary by persuading the circuit commissioner of ever-normal granaries to supply its capital (*Works*, 6:4). Its policy combined the two functions just mentioned by loaning grains to the rural poor but selling them at the market town (*Works*, 22:10). To give the task his guiding hand, Tsai often met with other community leaders at the granary (*Works*, 32:21). With success, however, came criticism and pressure. Some jealous bureaucrats said that the several thousand piculs the granary had accumulated was in excess of what its function would call for. Tsai was afraid that, come flood or drought, some local government officials would use it as an excuse to dip their hands into it (*Works*, 6:17).

How to keep the institution lasting worried Tsai. He had a long discussion with a friend from a neighboring prefecture who had studied under Chu Hsi. The friend explained the principle of confederated responsibility. He and his brothers had started their community granary twenty years ago as a joint family charity. They realized that in the meantime their families had been growing apart in varying circumstances. What they did was to keep the granary as a confederated body, split its holdings into shares like inheritance, and entrust each descent family to run their own unit with the injunction that all the income must go to charity and none to themselves.

The experience in this case, entirely on a family basis, would not apply to Tsai’s community granary. Moreover, the so-called confederation, in Tsai’s view, maintained no real unity among its separate units. Reflecting further on the institution, Tsai foresaw many problems. "The crafty ones would cheat, the bigoted ones would default, the powerful ones would seize control, and some local officials would encroach upon it." In short, Tsai asked, "Could community granaries really last?" (*Works*, 22:9–10). There seems to be no institutional solution that Tsai could find.

Another problem a village had was the state system of requisitioned labor service. Those who had this government assignment suffered great hardship. Others evaded it by every conceivable excuse; some of them would not even report the location of their ancestral graves, as it might entail the much feared service burden. To reduce the inequity so resulted, many a village had what was called mutual service-aid estate or endowment (*i-chuang*)18. It was an institution to recompense the village officers and servicemen who where given the assigned labor service and sometimes also to meet welfare needs. In Tsai’s village, such an estate had been getting the funding by two ways: donors gave it either a piece of their land or a share of their rental income. Yet disputes
often arose when some land donors later denied that they had ever given up the property right.

In order to eliminate such disputes, Tsai introduced a reasonable compromise as another option. A donor unwilling to part with his property right could choose to deed over a piece of his land as a permanent mortgage to the estate. The estate would collect the rent but pay according to the land value an annual interest to him as the owner, as if a loan were involved. This option, which at first seemed to be too complicated, worked out to mutual satisfaction (Works, 21: 20-23).

Nevertheless, it was best for mutual service-aid estate to acquire properties of their own. This was how Tsai helped with the one in the village where the grave of his grandfather was. Someone living in a distant prefecture owned a piece of land there. He found it neither easy to collect the rent nor enough to pay the taxes. Nor could he find a buyer willing to take over the tax as well as the labor service burdens. When Tsai heard the story in 1213, he sighed. Then he had a bright idea: why not raise some money for the mutual service-aid estate to buy it?

The responses to the idea exceeded expectation. One man in the market town gave first, his nephews next, others followed, and the donations over-subscribed. The estate not only bought this land at 260 strings of coins but made it into a block by acquiring the adjoining pieces with 800 odd strings.

The next year had a drought. Tsai, after a property at nearly 400 strings, again had the estate buy it. After the contract was signed, the original owner, losing a litigation, had all his properties confiscated. The magistrate who appreciated the expansion of the estate, suggested that it could take over that land through government grant at no cost at all. Disagreeing, Tsai insisted on going through with the deal already made. Other estate leaders did not see the point. However, in deference to Tsai’s leadership, they grudgingly went along. A year later, with the litigation reversed, all the confiscated properties returned to the original owner. This piece alone did not, for it had been paid for. Only then did others acknowledge Tsai’s foresight.

On a commemorative tablet, Tsai noted all the boundary markings of the estate properties. In addition, he listed the name of every tenant family. This, he stressed, would help the future generations remember how their forefathers had tilled the land and helped the estate provide mutual service-aid (Works, 21: 20-22).

Tsai fully realized that such an estate would run into many difficulties. He had no other idea on how to strengthen the institution and make it last. In ancestral worship, he placed his only hope.

In 1234, Tsai with his prestige at its peak did something else to help more than his village and the nearby communities but all the taxpayers throughout the prefecture. The government always collected a surcharge in addition to the tax grain on the ground it would diminish in the collection process through shrinkage, wastage, and other shortages. Around the 1160’s, the law fixed the surcharge at 38% of the tax grain due. In reality, the local government units using containers larger than the legal or standard sizes always took in more than that. Now Tsai and a few other elite members in the community appealed to a new prefect and he ordered that henceforth only legal sized containers were to be used. The injustice, long an extra-legal and accepted abuse, came to an end (Works, 23: 16).

Tsai in retirement did much for community welfare, far more than what he as a bureaucrat could have done. Significant is, in our view, the assertive role of a community leader.
VIII. Famine relief

The most meaningful part of Tsai's life was the saving of other lives through famine relief. Apart from an official relief mission in his early career, he initiated private undertakings three times in 1209, 1224, and 1228.

When a famine occurred the year after he had retired, Tsai joined an official who was about to leave home and two private scholars in the community to discuss how they could help. It was recalled that in late Northern Sung days under the reign of Hui-tsung — the misrule of that artist-emperor notwithstanding — private relief had been among the eight conduct (pa-hsing[^97]) officially honored by the government[^20]. Moreover, the Ch'en family, the same family with a charitable clan estate, had done it. This precedent inspired Tsai and his friends to set up a place in order to feed some hungry persons with congee or rice soup.

Their appeal to others in the community got no response. Limited to their own donations, the "kitchen" they ran at first could only take care of abandoned children, much like an orphanage. Fortunately, the word got to the circuit commissioner of ever-normal granaries. Upon his order, the local county granary allotted 200 piculs of rice. This marked the turning point. It not only enabled the private "kitchen" to feed the hungry adults as well, but also prompted other officials nearby to add their gifts. The prefect gave 300 piculs and the prefectural professor the surplus foodstuff from his school. Not all aid came in time. By the time the highest official, the regional commandant, got around to order a shipment of 200 piculs, as Tsai noted in his commemorative essay, it was too late, for the crisis was already over.

The relief operation began early in the tenth lunar month. At first, it fed no more than 10 children. By next month, the number jumped to 300. Toward the end of the lunar year, it went over 2,000, many of whom were old people, sick people, and women with children. Early in the new year came the young and the middle-aged. Soon the daily head-count went up to 4,000, breaking the Northern Sung historical record by about one-fifth.

How were such large number of people accommodated? Space was one difficulty. From its original site in an abandoned alley, the "kitchen" moved into a celestial temple (yüeh-tz'u[^99]) of the Confucian-type and finally into a Buddhist temple. Crowding, another problem, was solved by feeding in orderly shifts: first the children, next the females, and last the males. The abandoned children who stayed there got a morning and an evening helping. Other children who came daily received only one, as there wa not enough supply to give more.

In drawing up the regulations, Tsai characteristically paid careful attention to hygiene. Among those who stayed, the sick ones were put in separate quarters. Those from distant villages and next counties, if they did not choose to make frequent trips, were allowed to stay in different cottages temporarily set up for them. All these measures with a modern ring served one purpose: to prevent contagious diseases from spreading. What Tsai did in this operation set the pattern for his repeated performances later on.

This first famine relief, privately managed, ran for six months, ending late in the third lunar month. All told, it used 962 piculs of rice; 2,000 strings of coins, with half of which additional rice was bought; 3,900 big bundles and 14,200 small bundles of firewood; and 3,640 mats for bedding, shelter, and burial of those who died. The people who came
used in turn 300 utensils. Counting all the missing ones that had to be replaced, the total was 1,390.

The commemorative essay has all this information and some more. The elite sponsors directed but some one else did the daily management. They were three lay persons, one Taoist, and one Buddhist clergy. While the Taoist had to go home mid-way, the Buddhist, as previously mentioned, assumed the leading part throughout. However, Tsai chose to attribute the greatest credit to the few helpful bureaucrats. In his words, "if not for the commissioner of ever-normal granaries, the relief could not have gone beyond its beginning, and if not for the prefect and the prefectural professor, it could not have gone on to its end." (Works, 20: 13–15).

Knowing Tsai's experience, the prefect Shih whom we have mentioned wanted him in 1215 to join a temporary office for famine relief. Tsai declined and submitted instead his manuscript on relief administration which, he said, had all the details (Works, 8: 4–5). Judging from the lack of further reference to it, probably the bureaucrats did not care much for Tsai's recommendations.

Tsai's greatest philanthropy occurred in 1224. Much of this second famine relief was similar to the first. However, its records provide additional information of interest, especially those available only on the commemorative tablet.

The previous winter was so bitterly cold that it killed the crops, even the vegetables. In spring of 1224, many famine victims wandered along the roads. So informed by his doctor friends, Tsai decided to help all by himself. Claiming that he remembered the charitable sentiments often expressed by his father, he used what had come from the small land around the grave of the old man. Slightly over one-half of the rice raised there had annually gone to the caretaker, but the rest in the last ten years, nearly 500 piculs altogether, had been kept in storage. Now Tsai shipped it to the same celestial temple to set up a "kitchen" for the second time.

At first, a few hundred hungry people came. In about forty days, by the end of the third lunar month, more than 10,000 people did! Having no more means to go on, Tsai considered halting the operation. Upon hearing this, his friend Chao Jo-kuei[100], also a retired official, rushed over. In addition to a generous gift from himself, Chao who unlike Tsai was apparently on cordial terms with other wealthy families sent written appeals to all of them.

The gifts in response came swiftly in the early part of the fourth lunar month. The "kitchen" acquired new vigor. It had high-grade rice that even a medium-income family could hardly afford. The dozens of helpers who were kept on hurriedly set up additional stoves. From then on, 15,000 persons took turns to eat there every day. They were so grateful that they would look up to the sky and click their teeth three times before taking the food. On the fifteenth day of the month, the harvest began and the relief operation lasting fifty-six days was finally over (Works, 22: 6–7; CSCSC, 15: 15–16).

Who were these donors? And how much did each of them give? All the specific information is in the list appended to Tsai's essay recording this great undertaking. Though the list does not appear with the essay in the Works, it was originally on the commemorative tablet and fortunately survives in a rubbing (CSCSC, 15: 16–20).

Besides the magistrate and two other officials serving in neighboring counties who headed the list, all the rest of the donors were natives of the community. To group them by categories, they were four officials in active service elsewhere; ten individuals with quasi-official titles or, in the name of such an individual deceased, his surviving son or
grandson; four doctoral degree-holders and one doctoral degree-holder of the National University; nine students of the National University; two remote members of the imperial clan; then significantly, fifteen townsmen (i-jen [101]), apparently commoners; and finally, one Buddhist and one Taoist clergy.

The amount of donations, large and small, may be illustrated by taking the opposite ends of the range in some of these categories. Among the officials, 15 piculs of rice and 50 strings in paper currency from the magistrate; only 2.7 piculs from a sheriff in the next county. Among those with quasi-official titles, 43 piculs from the most helpful Chao, and the same amount from another individual; only 20 strings in paper currency from yet another, which by our rough estimate based on other data in the list would be about the equivalent of 4 piculs of rice. Among the doctoral degree-holder, 28 piculs each from three of them; 2000 bundles of firewood besides a set of pots from another individual; and only 1000 bundles of firewood from yet another. The Buddhist monk gave 11.7 piculs, while the Taoist only 6.9 piculs.

Prior to these denations, Tsai himself contributed nearly 500 piculs. Now Chao gave as much as 43 piculs. They proved the decisive importance of private initiative and individual leadership in philanthropy. What a contrast that was to the lack of concern on the part of the prefect who sent nothing at all.

The paper currency was not worth much in a period of inflation. We add up the amounts of paper currencies donated, counting by thousands, the unit that was supposedly equivalent to a string of coins or a thousand of them. The total is 646 units. According to the list, the paper currencies received, besides paying for miscellaneous expenses, bought only 83 piculs of rice. Our rough estimate would hypothetically place the price of rice then and there at about 5 units.

We add up the rice donated. It totals 491 piculs and, with the 83 piculs purchased, 514 piculs. How many days could this quantity last in a relief operation of this size? We have no data on its daily quota. However, a later local gazetteer cites the figure from a famine in 1329. Each hungry person would need every day a half pint (sheng [102]) of rice or 0.5 % of a picul (CS-CCC 20:11-12). If we multiply this figure by the round number of 10,000 persons, let alone the peak number of 15,000, we get 50 piculs as roughly the daily amount Tsai's "kitchen" would need. The quantity Chao and others placed at its disposal would last about 12 days at most. The harvest happily arrived in time. Otherwise, the charity could hardly have coped with the crisis much longer.

In 1228, as a result of too much rainfall during the previous year, it was the neighboring county that suffered from famine. As neither large enough space was available in the temples over there, nore outstanding and experienced leadership like his, Tsai out of sympathy undertook his third and last private relief. Starting in the middle of the second lunar month, his personal gift was nearly exhausted in about a month's time. As yet, the wheat harvest was not at hand. Again, his friends helped out, including Wang Sui also a native like Tsai and an acting magistrate not far away. This time it was a different prefect and he sent 100 piculs of rice. With these gifts, the relief pulled through the crisis in the early part of the fourth lunar month (Works, 27: 13).

Tsai's philanthropic activities for his own county and beyond, produced widespread gratitude. How the people in several communities came to his burial has already been described. More posthumous honors were bound to come after that. The temple of historical worthies (hsien-hsien tz'u [103]) in the prefecture chose to add Tsai's name. Not in its main hall which honored the orthodox philosophers and their equals, Liu Tsai was
along with Wang Sui admitted to its side hall reserved for native celebrities, though the others, all from earlier eras, had little to do with philanthropy (CS-CCC, 11: 5). The county temple of historical worthies, however, had only one hall. There, Liu Tsai and Wang Sui both appeared along with such great Neo-Confucian philosophers as Chu Hsi and Chang Shih (CS-CCC, 11: 26). Apparently as in the case of tradition-bound accounts, the Neo-Confucian value scheme did not regard philanthropy as significant enough to merit a separate category of distinction. At the end of this biographical study, we do.

IX. A hypothesis: Neo-Confucians limitations on community organizations

We have come a long way, not so much to praise Liu Tsai as to appraise him. He stands out in history mainly for his assertive role in philanthropy. More importantly, he stands for a type of private elite in community welfare. Even more meaningfully, however, is the other side of the coin.

To recall what we have said at the very beginning, why did this type shining here and there at this stage of history fail to blaze a new trail? Why did Neo-Confucians not go one step beyond philanthropy? What were the factors that prevented them from strengthening community organizations outside the kinship, the religious, and the trade groups? How did the personal, intellectual, and institutional factors mesh?

However, is that a big jump to generalized propositions? Should we not confine ourselves to gathering more data by studying similar cases? We respectfully disagree. Such studies would probably give us more of the same story, unless there is a hypothesis for them to test, verifying it, modifying it, or nullifying it.

A case study, though not illustrative, is more than illustrative. Linked up with general information already available in broad historical context, it becomes illuminative enough to arrive at a generalized level of working hypothesis.

Our explorations from various angles begin with Tsai’s personality. There is neither enough data nor the need to speculate in psychological terms. Still, common sense observation helps. Tsai strikes us as hard-headed or strong-minded. Why, for example, should he be so self-righteous from his early career on as to make a categorical self-denial of all recommendations that his superior officials might make? After all, some recommendations may well be honestly made, hard-earned, deserving, and completely justified.

He seems to be exceedingly self-conscious. Understandable is his unsightly appearance due to skin disease. But is that enough reason for him to stay away almost totally from government quarters? He did see, meet, and go about with other elite elsewhere.

While he chose to have a few friends, none of them appears to be very close, not even Wang Sui. He portrayed himself in the aloof imagery of a sick crane (Works, 4: 4). Such solitary feelings are frequently found in his poetry as well as in the poems by many other Neo-Confucians. Is this mood significantly related to a fairly common mode of their thinking?

Typical of his life-style, he took a walk alone after a meal along the Loose Pond (Works, 20: 20). This invokes a picture similar to many common scenes in literati painting: a solitary figure in the surrounding landscape or at most with one or two companions, not particularly close, as if they were there to reduce some loneliness but never capable of removing it altogether. Does such a mood also have something to do with their mode of thinking?
A selfmade man, Tsai always preferred self-reliance; for example, in not taking the retirement pensions he was entitled to. The same was true of his work-style. He liked to go at it alone; for example, providing the famine relief much on his own. Significantly, when Tsai's own donation ran out, it was Chao who came over to see Tsai, offered to help, and took on himself the task of appealing to others for donations. Why didn't Tsai take such initiatives? 21

Tsai was by no means unique in having a rigid personality. Our general knowledge tells us that a number of Neo-Confucians were like that. Rarely did several of them get together as a leadership group or to form a joint management. In government service, they did not get along with most bureaucrats. Once out of it, their own work-style prevailed. Many a Neo-Confucian did much better in running his own show singlehanded. In short, while they detested "organization men," they were not themselves good at organizing.

These Neo-Confucians were upright, but also uptight. To be sure, most societies have such individuals. Our particular interest here is to explore further from the intellectual angle, as there is a definite connection between such rigid personality and a strong stress on self-cultivation. Intellectually, many Neo-Confucians believed, one should proceed from self-awareness toward self-perfection. In the process, one's actions become self-willed, voluntary, and ideally spontaneous. This high ideal goes hand in hand with a deep distaste for organizations.

However, the Neo-Confucian mode of thinking did not stress self only. In following the old heritage, it also emphasized personal relationships. How best to characterize the twin emphases, one on self-awareness, the other on social concern? We offer the term: person-directed mode. By this is meant the basic two-fold attention on one's self as a person and on human relationships as that of person-with-person specifically according to their respective personal status.

Let us illustrate the person-directed mode with just a few linguistic examples. To behave one's self is "to be a person" wei-jen[104] in classical Chinese and tso-jen[105] in present-day colloquial. The idea of person-with-person relationships comes directly from the original and exact etymological meaning of jen[106], a fundamental virtue in Confucian ethics. The person-directed mode of thinking thus perceives people primarily as persons, groups no so much as groups but as growing out to their natural and ethical person-with-person affiliations, and organizations as to a certain extent arbitrary and impersonal, the fewer, the better.

Tsai and others like him over-emphasize self to a fault. The traditional Neo-Confucian accounts, in overlooking this fault, tend to err in the same way: too much emphasis on self-awareness, not enough on social concern, and little on social organization.

Did the emphasis on person, particularly self, eventually lead, during the Ming period, to some kind of individualism? Recent scholars have noted that a few Ming thinkers, in developing awareness of self, brought forth a kind of individualism with strikingly modern features. With a passionate concern for common welfare, they sought to establish the place of the individual in relation to others in some organizational or institutional framework; apparently, though, such endeavors had severe limitations, particularly on the institutional side. 22

We have reservations. In relating Chinese thought to Western thought, through what seems to be parallel but not nonetheless distinct perceptions, we would prefer the use of differentiated terms so as to keep their separate identities apart. In our hypothesis, we
see such Ming thought merely as self-directed persuasion which is still limited by the person-directed mode of thinking. This limitation may help to explain why it was neither individualism, nor could it find a way to activate individuals as such and then to organize them in some institutional framework.

Let us now go back to the Neo-Confucians in the Southern Sung. They perceived organizations as having many imperfections even at best, imposed and arbitrary actions most of the time, and most probably abuses all the time. Their appraisal severely criticized the reformer Wang An-shih, though a good man personally, for having misled the country with mistaken notions.

In their perception, the reality did seem to prove their conviction to be correct. Many a Neo-Confucian like Tsai succeeded in fact in leading the way in voluntary philanthropy. The ideal was that as more inspiring examples persuaded more persons to be voluntarily responsive and responsible, the community would move that much closer to a perfect order. Why then should there be much concern with organizational implementation of welfare activities? After all, no institution is self-perpetuating. Only an open-ended series of good persons over time would insure either the endurance or, failing that, a resurgence of community interest.

Continuing our exploration from the intellectual angle, we find yet another limitation in their perception of institutions. The Confucian heritage envisaged the continuum of self-family-state essentially as a conscious projection of personal relationships, rather than as organizational linkages. By Sung times, the society was becoming more complex than before with the intermediate layers evolving mobility, multiplicity, and vitality. Yet, the Neo-Confucians did not respond to such pluralistic growth. Should the continuum have become self-family-large social groups-state? None of them explicitly called for new, pluralistic linkages.

As this case study has shown, besides the clan, Tsai helped the community granary and the mutual service-aid estate. However, he continued to rely on personal leadership and such old Confucian stand-bys as personal devotion to the faith of ancestral worship. He searched for but did not find a more lasting way of organizing these community institutions.

Even more revealing was Tsai's famine relief. He did it three times; each time, a one-shot operation. Neither he nor other Neo-Confucians perceived that it might be institutionalized, like a modern community chest for example. Since the family units could not cope with such major disasters as famines and on the other hand the state would not often come through with the needed relief, why was it not obvious that in the self-family-state continuum there should now become some broadly based institution to fill a hungry and crying gap? The Neo-Confucian neglect of this apparent need probably stemmed from an intellectual failure to visualize the grouping of diverse pluralistic interests to look after the community welfare as a whole.

This provides a convenient transition to take up the limiting factors on the institutional side itself. Long in existence had been various social groups such as kinship, religious societies, guild and trading organizations, to mention but the major categories. They all had one strong trait in common: each group functioned separately as a specific interest group by itself as well as a particularistic set exclusively for its members. No organizational linkages existed between them. In this intricate social web formed by parallel yet fragmentary pieces, it would be hard to knit together a new pattern of community-wide institution that cut across all these groups. In fact, a community sentiment
seemed to be lacking, let alone organization. Moreover, there was no town organization, other than community granary, if such existed, to help destitute villagers. As to community granary, one would worry about, as Liu Tsai did, the availability of trustworthy management.

More importantly, the powerful state imposed severe limitations on organizations. It is generally agreed that the court and its high officials looked with suspicion upon intermediate social groups as potential power bases for would-be dissidents and rebels. It should be emphasized furthermore that local officials on account of their vested interests wished to see neither the strong organization of a social group, nor its sponsorship by any one else, particularly not by the local elite who were their peers. They would welcome the help of elite leadership in the community only on a temporary basis when an emergency left them with little choice. In Tsai’s case, for example, we see no evidence that the local officials were thankful to him for his famine relief. Yet they relied on his leadership for the exigency of organizing defense.

In essence, no one in the ruling class from top to bottom would care to have any social group cut into their monolithic power. The elite leaders in the community, in the final analysis, were members of the same class. Though in retirement and no longer active in the establishment, they were still a part of it on the fringe. Never being anti-establishment, their criticism were neither frequent nor effective enough to make significant changes. In Tsai’s case, for example, only in his old age did he join other community elite in making an effective appeal to have the extra-legal portion of the grain collection abolished. Even so, it took a good prefect to do it.

When some one like Tsai engaged in philanthropy, he did have in mind the welfare of the common people. However, what he did was what a good official should have done. In other words, it was the same ideal of paternalistic benevolence for the people. No such philanthropist would ever go out of his way to strengthen those community organizations that could become of the people, let alone by the people.

The class limitation is crystal-clear. Tsai wrote that the donors to his greatest relief kitchen were listed on the commemorative tablet by the time sequence of their giving. This is not quite true. What he meant was he did so within each status group. Otherwise, the list goes exactly in the hierarchical order of the highest ranking official, the other officials, the quasi-officials in strict accordance with their respective ranks, then the townsman, and behind them, one Buddhist and one Taoist donor. At the very end of the list appears the name of the managing monk (CSCSC, 15: 16–20).

One does not get from this hierarchical list a sense of community participation. The townsman who donated — and a few of them donated more than some of the elite did — are in a sense allowed to join the charitable undertaking by following the elite leadership. The elite typically had neither a stable organization nor the wish to lead one that would have non-elite participation, unless it was officially sanctioned.

The practising Neo-Confucians like Tsai are caught in a web of interlocking personality, intellectual, as well as institutional limitations. The personality limitations are characteristic of some alienated members within the ruling class. The limitations of the Neo-Confucian mode of thinking and their perception of institutions stem from their class background. The related institutional limitations are the built-in features of the class structure. There is no possibility for community organizations to be strengthened, nor the social structure to be so changed. The pluralistic growths of Sung China thus stagnated at a fragmentary stage and the society up to the present century failed to make an evolutionary break-through.
NOTES

1 The primary sources and a few key references are listed here by the alphabetic order of the acronyms used in the text.

SSHP Ko Wei-ch'i[12], Sung shih[13] (1962 reprint).

8 HTCTC 158: 4281-2.
9 See my article in note 7 and another one in Encyclopaedia Britannica (15th ed.; Chicago, 1974), IV: 337-40.
10 HTCTC 162: 4424-8.
11 HTCTC 167: 4550-1.
12 HTCTC 168: 4579.
13 HTCTC 167: 4424.
15 See my article in note 7.
16 For a recent theory which re-emphasizes, quite pointedly in my opinion, the importance of family structure in the Chinese culture, see Francis L. K. Hsu, "The effect of dominant kinship relationships on kin and non-kin behavior: a hypothesis," American Anthropologist, 67 (1965), 638-81; and his "Rejoinder," Ibid., 68 (1966), 999-1004.
17 The welfare granaries during the Sung period, mostly government established or government related, went by different arrangements under a variety of names; see a standard work: Wang Te-yi[27], Sung-tai t'ai-huang t'ieh-ch'i cheng-te[28] (1970), 38-64: 170-1.
18 For a generally excellent discussion of this institution, also known as the charitable service estate, see Brian E. McKnight, Village and Bureaucracy in Southern Sung China (U. of Chicago Press, 1971), 158 ff. and especially with regard to Liu Tsai, 162-9. However, the expression "charitable service" may appear to be unclear or even misleading.
19 Ibid., 165-167, a lengthy translation which however does not include the last episode of the story.
20 The work by Wang (see note 17) gives the exaggerated impression that from the late Northern Sung to the Southern Sung the government generally undertook many relief measures. What he has cited however were outstanding cases of government action, rather than routine measures. In fact, he has another work in which one can see how such government actions were often inefficient, ineffective, corrupt, and abusive; see Wang Te-yi, Sung-shih yen-chiu lun-chi[29] II (1972), the notes on pp. 396-9.