

Confucianism

There have been many kings, emperors and great men in history, who enjoyed fame and honor and while they lived and came to nothing at their death, while Confucius, who was but a common scholar clad in a cotton gown, became the acknowledged Master of scholars. . . . All people in China who discuss the six arts, from emperors, kings and princes down, regard the Master as the final authority.

Szema Chtien¹
official Han court historian
(d. circa 85 B.C.)

¹. Lin Yurong The Wisdom of Confucius, p 91.

I. THE LIFE OF CONFUCIUS

CONFUCIUS (the Latinized form of the Chinese phrase K'ung-fu-tzu: "Great Master K'ung") was born about 551 B.C. in the feudal duchy of Lu, now part of Shantung province. It is generally agreed that his father died when he was very young. Confucius was brought up by his impoverished mother in very humble circumstances. For a time he worked as keeper of the government storehouses and later he was in charge of the town's herds of oxen and sheep. Whatever education Confucius obtained came from his work as a young apprentice clerk.

Even though he wanted to be appointed a high court official, in a corrupt society there was no ruler who would provide him an opportunity to straighten out the government by implementing his political ideals. Deprived of the prime minister's post he sought, Confucius turned to teaching. Three thousand young men became his pupils. What may have begun as an informal debating society made up of Confucius and his friends gradually developed into a notable school for diplomats and courtiers. Several of his students rose to positions of considerable influence. One, for example, became steward and chief advisor to the Chi family who controlled the state of Lu.

Traditions of questionable validity claim that Confucius himself became a high official. More likely, he was merely given some sort of minor government pension and was otherwise supported by gifts from a few affluent disciples. However, according to the traditional biography, Confucius was appointed Metropolitan Magistrate of Lu, got promoted to Secretary of Public Works and eventually became Grand Minister of Justice before being forced to resign by jealous aristocrats. Many modern historians, Chinese and Western, doubt the historicity of these stories.'

When he was about fifty years old, friends did get Confucius some sort of official post. Probably he even had a high sounding title like "Member of the Council of State." Although he may have

The oldest biography of Confucius, that by Szema Chien, can be found in Lin Yutang, *The Wisdom of Confitchis*, Random House, N.Y., 1943, pp. 48-91.

expected to become the Duke of Lu's chief advisor, those in power were willing to give him a title and a salary provided he had no authority. After ten years, Confucius realized that the ruler would not follow his advice, so he left the Lu court to look elsewhere for recognition.

At the end of thirteen years of fruitless wanderings, Confucius went back to his native state. The situation had not improved. When the Duke of Lu or his chief advisors asked for Confucius' support on matters of dubious merit he refused and when he gave advice they usually rejected it. As a result, the would-be statesman spent much of his time collecting and editing old books or teaching. At age seventy-three Confucius died, apparently a failure. However, the disciples could not forget what he meant to them; and because of them, Confucius has ever since been considered China's greatest sage.²

Emperor Wu, the second ruler in the Han dynasty (140-87 B.C.), gave state recognition to Confucianism. Although later emperors vacillated at times in their devotion to the teachings of Master K'ung, some embracing Taoism or Buddhism, on the whole the study of the Confucian Classics served as the basis of Chinese education until the appearance of the Republic in 1911. Confucius had been the first person in China to devote his life, almost exclusively, to teaching; and he established the institution of literati who dominated Chinese society until the 20th century.³ For this alone—the ideal of the gentleman-scholar—he put an indelible mark on subsequent history in China, Korea and Japan.⁴

Confucius' preference for conservatism and almost romantic attachment to the past should not blind us to his originality. He initiated four of the characteristic features of subsequent Chinese

²Cf. H.G. Creel, *Confucius and the Chinese Way*, Harper & Bros., N.Y., 1960, pp. 25-56. Creel is especially concerned with separating the historical Master K'ung from the myths which were created about him by admirers.

³Wing-tsit Chan, *Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1963. p. 17.

For Confucian influence in Japan, see J.W. Hall, "The Confucian Teacher in Tokugawa Japan" in Nivison and Wright, *Confucianism in Action*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, Calif., 1959, pp. 268-301.

civilization. First, he created the role of the private teacher. Previously officials relied on nothing but on-the-job training. Secondly, he developed the contents, methods and ideals of Chinese education. Insisting upon broad liberal arts learning as a prerequisite for public service, he produced well-rounded and cultured gentlemen rather than technicians or politicians. Thirdly, Confucius accepted students from a variety of social backgrounds. No longer would mere noble birth guarantee entry into public office, Master K'ung permanently destroyed the closed society by disregarding the traditional privileges of the princelings and aristocrats.¹ Superior men, in his opinion, were made and not born, made by their wisdom, education, idealism and social graces. Confucius thus invented a mechanism for encouraging social mobility and justifying the ideal of an open society.^o Fourthly, Confucius stressed the moral nature of education and politics. From beginning to end he was a moralist. For him there was no such thing as pure research, value-free scholarship or learning for its own sake. Above all else, Confucius was a man of integrity who demanded that his disciples become trustworthy advisors of the government. At its best Confucianism therefore gave China a loyal and honest bureaucracy.

II. THE CHINESE CLASSICS

The written cultural heritage of ancient China can be found in the six Classics: the Book of History (*Shu Ching*), the Book of Poetry (*Shih Ching*), the Book of Changes (*I Ching*), the Book of Rites (*Li Chi*), the Book of Music (*Yueh Ching*, nearly all of which has been lost), and the Spring and Autumn Annals (*Ch'un Ch'iu*). Because Confucius called himself "a transmitter and not a creator, a believer in and lover of antiquity,"⁷ his name has been attached to

¹Frederick W. Mote, *Intellectual Foundations of China*, Columbia University Press, N.Y., 1971, pp. 37-41.

^oContrast the view of Hu Shih who condemned Confucius as a political absolutist and reactionary, J. B. Grieder, *Hu Shih and the Chinese Renaissance*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1970. Hu Shih (1891-1963) was a journalist, professor, diplomat and internationally famous philosopher, a disciple of John Dewey and the inventor of the slogan "Down with Confucius and company!"

⁷The Analects (Lun Yu), VII:1; Legge translation, vol. 1, p. 195.

these six collections but the exact nature of his connection with them has long been a matter of debate. Confucius could have merely transmitted the six classics which were generally accepted in his time. However, he could have arranged and compiled a vast amount of ancient materials in six books. Or he could have considerably edited the already existing classics. Or he may have compiled, edited and circulated the core of the classics to which numerous additions were made at a later time. Finally, though this view has few defenders, Confucius could have written the entire set of classics in order to promote his ideal of benevolent government directed by superior men. A noted scholar, K'ang Yu-wei (1858-1927), contended that only when one recognizes that the six classics were actually composed by Confucius to encourage reform in his day can one understand why Confucius should be called the Great Master, the model for all sages and the founder of a doctrine encompassing all enduring truths.⁸

In the *Shu Ching* one finds a collection of political documents from seventeen centuries and four historical periods: the Yu Shun age, Hsia dynasty, Shang dynasty and Chou dynasty (2200-628 B.C.). Many of these documents are considered forgeries and probably none of the authentic ones are earlier than the Western Chou period (11th-6th century B.C.). "The *Shih Ching*, China's oldest anthology of poems, contains 305 folk songs. Tradition says Confucius selected these from three thousand poems and he personally set them to music. However, numerous textual emendations were made as time passed. The *Li Chi* is a book of rules about aristocratic etiquette and a code of rituals. According to the majority of scholars, very little of the present text of the *Li Chi* goes back to Confucius' time. "' *The Spring and Autumn Annals* (Ch'un Ch'iu), a compendium of brief historical records, was compiled by Confucius from materials he found in the archives of the state of

⁸K'ang Yu-wei, *The One World Philosophy* (L.G. Thompson, translator), Allen & Unwin, London, 1958. Also, Ch'u Chai and Winberg Chai, *Confucianism*, Barron's Educational Series, Woodbury, N.Y., 1973, pp. 157-168.

⁹Chai and Chai, *ibid.*, p. 10.

¹⁰*Mid*, pp. 15-17.

Lu. More important are three commentaries on these *Annals* from the Han dynasty, especially the *Tso Chuan*, which purportedly give the philosophical significance of the historical items.'¹

The *I Ching* was originally a book of divination, based on eight simple trigrams consisting of all possible combinations of three straight lines and three broken ones. Out of the Supreme Ultimate (*Tai Chi*) are produced the *Yang* and *Yin* from which arise four symbols which combine in various ways to create eight trigrams. These were rearranged in sixty-four hexagrams. Together the hexagrams symbolize all that has happened or will take place in the universe; each also represents one or more natural phenomena. Ten appendices were added to the original fortune teller's manual, transforming it into a masterpiece of profound speculative philosophy." As for Confucius' connection with the book, that presents a regular briar patch of problems through which no generally accepted path has yet been discovered. Traditionally it was believed that Confucius arranged the book, added the commentary and wrote the appendices. Few now find it possible to accept that ancient view. Some contemporary scholars feel that the bare divination texts go back to 12th century B.C. Chou traditions, but that additions were made to them from time to time. If so, the *I Ching* has become "a bottomless well" from which Chinese thought has continued to draw provocative insights."

In regard to the six Classics as a whole, most modern scholars assert that Confucius used them to create a model for an ideal society based on ancient practices and precedents. As he stated, "If a man preserves and cherishes old knowledge so as to acquire

¹See James Legge, *The Chinese Classics*, University of Hong Kong Press, Hong Kong 1960, vol. V. For a critical evaluation of the *Annals* as literature and history, cf. pp. 1-16, 38-53. Legge's translation includes the *Tso* commentary in footnotes.

²See R. Wilhelm, trans., *The I Ching*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, N.J., 1967.

³On Chinese cosmology, cf. Joseph Needham, "Human Laws and Laws of Nature in China and the West," *Journal of History of Ideas*, XII, pp. 3-30, 194-230 and Frederick W. Mote, *Intellectual Foundations of China*, pp. 15-28. A similar opinion is found in Joseph Needham and Wang Ling, *Science and Civilization in China*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1954-69, six volumes.

new, he can be a teacher of others." Believing in the wisdom of the past and loving the ancients, he nevertheless brought Chinese civilization to full flower as a result of his original writing and creative editing. Because of his labors the six scriptures became priceless intellectual treasures of the Chinese world. In the *I Ching* he expounded a profound metaphysical view of the universe which united the way of Heaven and the way of man. Through teachings in the Classics of *Rites*, *Music* and *Poetry*, he laid the base for political education: government by propriety and rule by virtue. Then, he formulated a philosophy of history in the *Shu Ching* and *Spring and Autumn Annals*. By means of these Classics Confucius established the normative pattern for imperial China in political philosophy, ethics and education.

III. THE CONFUCIAN ETHIC

What Confucius taught is to be found in three books: *The Analects* (Lun Yu), *The Great Learning* (Ta Hsiieh), and *The Doctrine of the Mean* (Chung Yung). These are generally accepted as "the orthodox doctrine of the Chinese people," the *Analects* having been compiled by the immediate followers of Confucius, *The Great Learning* by Tseng Ts'an, one of his chief disciples,² and the *Mean* by the Sage's own grandson, Tzu-ssu.

Confucius transformed the customary feudal code of rites and etiquette into a universal system of ethics. After 2500 years the fundamental concepts are still up-to-date. Because of what Confucius taught so persuasively and exemplified in his own life so forcibly, the Chinese have possessed an ethical creed far transcending the limits of any one age or social order.³ Confucius held up the

²*Analects*, Bk. 11:11. Ezra Pound interprets this epigram to mean that if men keep alive the old and recognize novelty they can eventually teach (*ConJi4cius*, New Directions Book. N.Y., 1951, p. 199). Other modern scholars claim it means all new learning is already found in the old (Legge, *Ibid*, vol. I, p. 149).

¹Liu Wu-Chi, *A Short History of Confucian Philosophy*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1955, p.34.

²*Ta Hsiieh* is sometimes said to have been written by Tzu-ssu.

³Liu Wu-Chi, *Ibid*, p. 25.

ideal of moral perfection as the ultimate goal of the superior man and that has managed to survive momentous political, economic and cultural changes.

As a statesman, he insisted upon the need for benevolent government. A ruler should govern his people like a father cares for his children. Ruler and ruled must be bound together by unbreakable ties of paternal love and filial respect if the nation is to remain strong and healthy. Of course, military strength is needed to safeguard the nation's sovereignty and sufficient food is required to sustain the inhabitants of a state, yet most crucial in Confucius' view is the people's confidence in their government. When the people lose respect for their ruler, thinking him an enemy rather than a kindly parent, the mandate of Heaven will be withdrawn from him and the government forfeits its right to expect obedience. Paternalism may have serious defects in the eyes of modern democrats, but for Confucius the alternative to patriarchal government was ruthless tyranny by unprincipled autocrats. With illustrations drawn from stories of mythical sage-kings of the distant past, Confucianists taught dukes and emperors to treat their subjects like fathers caring for their children.

In *The Great Learning*, Confucian political philosophy is expounded in terms of three guiding principles and eight general rules. The Heavenly Way means that proper government should 1) manifest illustrious virtue, 2) show love for the people, and 3) rest in the highest good. To fulfill his duties, an official must 1) investigate many things, 2) extend his knowledge, 3) be guided by sincere thoughts, 4) "rectify" his heart, 5) cultivate his personality, 6) regulate his own family, 7) govern his state well, and 8) bring peace to the world. As a famous text says, "To know what comes first and what comes last is to be near the Tao. The ancients who wished clearly to manifest illustrious virtue throughout the world would first govern their own states well. Wishing to govern their states well they would first regulate their families. Wishing to regulate their families, they would first cultivate their own persons. Wishing to cultivate their own persons, they would first rectify their hearts. Wishing to rectify their hearts, they would first

seek sincerity in their thoughts. Wishing for sincerity in their thoughts, they would first extend their knowledge. The extension of knowledge lay in the investigation of things." ⁴

For Confucius, the art of politics was based on the importance of rule by virtue yet he also stressed the value of a social hierarchy. As he put it, the ruler should be a ruler, a father should be a father, a son should be a son. ⁵ With the maintenance of a carefully defined social order, the prince is able to do his duty well, paternal rights are guaranteed, family relationships are secure and individuals act responsibly. However, rule by virtue is realized through rites and music rather than reliance upon military force.

Because government cannot be effectively exercised by the king alone, he should seek out wise and virtuous men to serve as his counselors. When someone asked how to rule benevolently, Confucius said to love men because loving them will make them peaceful. A wise ruler should be generous with his subjects and not simply take from them, he declared.

Beyond the obvious unity of politics and ethics, it is important to recognize the principle of polarity which characterizes Confucian social thought. The political and the personal, outer and inner, ideal and action, public office and individual self-culture all exist in a relationship of polarity. ⁶ These are not contrasted but connected. What happens at one level of human experience affects all other levels. The Confucian ethic starts with a practical social problem and digs down ever and ever deeper until it reaches the very bottom—an investigation of the structure of all things. What begins as a political matter is gradually seen to be a family problem, a personal concern, a question of attitude and finally ontological awareness—an understanding of the nature of being itself. Confucianism is not merely an ethical system but rather a moral

⁴*Ta Hsiieh*, 2:3b-4. Chai and Chai, ed., *The Humanist Way in Ancient China*, Bantam Press, N.Y., 1965, pp. 294-295.

⁵*Analects*, Bk XII, chap. 11: "There is government, when the prince is prince, and the minister is minister; when the father is father, and the son is son." (Legge translation)

⁶Cf. Benjamin Schwartz, "Some Polarities in Confucian Thought," D.S. Nivison and A.F. Wright, *Confucianism in Action*, pp. 50-62.

code rooted in metaphysics.'

Until China encountered the West during the 19th century, Confucianists agreed unanimously that the family provides the ridge pole of civilization. For good or ill, since that time, some beleaguered defenders of Confucius have dropped the centrality of the family in favor of the allegedly superior authority of the individual or the State. Nevertheless, it is beyond question that Master K'ung himself believed in the pivotal role of the family. Since the *Analects* contain no lengthy commentary on this subject, one should turn to *The Classic of Filial Piety* (Hsiao Ching), long considered a work of Confucius' disciple Tseng Tzu, for a definitive exposition of the Confucian family-centered philosophy. ⁸

According to the *Hsiao Ching*, Confucius taught that filial piety is the basis of virtue and source of all culture. To prove this he pointed out that our physical bodies are gifts from our parents. Because we owe our existence to parents, respect for them grows naturally out of biological existence. When we love our parents and serve them gratefully, our moral sense is born. "The body and the limbs, the hair and the skin, are given to one by one's parents, and to them no injury should come; this is where filial piety begins. To establish oneself and practice the Tao is to immortalize one's name and thereby to glorify one's parents; this is where filial piety ends. Thus, filial piety commences with service to parents; it proceeds with service to the sovereign; it is completed by the establishment of one's own personality."

From this single virtue of filial piety all others can be derived by extension, say the Confucianists. Because we respect our parents, we hold in high esteem the ruler who is the father of the entire country. As the emperor is the surrogate father of the whole nation, his officials are like our elder brothers to whom we owe obedience and respect. Also, since the nation has one father, all citizens

⁸As we shall see, Confucianism was never just humanist in the sense of being a pragmatic exercise in moral judgments. From Confucius' teachings themselves was born interest in the objective "investigation of things" and intuitive "rectification of the mind."

*Many doubt the traditional authorship but even if the *Hsiao Ching* is a later compilation, it became a standard elementary textbook from the Han period onward.

⁸*Hsiao Ching*, I (Chai and Chai, *The Humanist Way in Ancient China*, pp. 326-327).

become members of a single family and should be treated fraternally. Man's earliest social groups, primitive clans, were made up of people united by blood ties; but Confucianism goes far beyond loyalty to one's actual relatives. Purely physical kinship is transcended by the concept of a wider relationship. However, Confucius does not appeal to a supernatural sanction. His filial piety ideal is grounded on the natural bond between man and man rather than the affection of the Father God for His human children.

It should be noted that the Chinese word for religion, *chiao*, literally means "support for filial piety." This then is the most elemental religious as well as social concept of Chinese civilization. As taught in Confucianism, filial piety starts as a domestic virtue but diffuses its beneficial influence throughout society. Not only was it the chief cornerstone of the social structure which embraced everything from the home to the imperial court, it also provided the ideology for ancestor worship which was the main feature of Chinese religion throughout the imperial period.

Starting with filial piety, Confucian ethics analyzed all human behavior in terms of five key relationships: that of father and son, husband and wife, elder brother and younger brother, friend and friend, ruler and subject. To quote the *Hsiao Ching*, "The Tao of father and son is rooted in the Heaven-endowed nature, and develops into the equity between sovereign and ministers."¹⁰ And again, "Filial piety is the basic principle of Heaven, the ultimate standard of earth, and the norm of conduct for the people. Men ought to abide by the guiding principle of Heaven and earth as the pattern of their lives, so that by the brightness of Heaven and the benefits of earth they would be able to keep all in the world in harmony and in unison."¹¹

In modern China, as elsewhere, harmonious relationships of society have been broken. Is paternalism the answer to all our problems? Confucius was not unaware of the disruptive influences which create family breakups, the generation gap, marital discord, group rivalries and national disorder. Are the father, husband,

¹⁰*Hsiao Ching*, IX.

¹¹*Ibid.* VII.

elder brother and ruler to be obeyed without question? Most of the time Confucius advocated obedience to one's superiors, regardless of circumstances. When asked by a disciple what filial piety meant, the Master replied, "Never disobey."¹² But occasionally his position was less rigid. He once admitted that "in serving his parents, a son may gently remonstrate with them. If they refuse to listen to his argument he should remain reverent and obedient. Even if he is belabored, he should not complain."¹³ In the *Classic of Filial Piety*, the author recognizes the danger in unquestioning obedience and quotes Confucius to prove that a son has a duty to admonish his father. If a father has a son to admonish him, he will not commit gross wrongs. In the case of gross evils, the son should never fail to warn his father against them. How otherwise can a son be called truly filial?" Nevertheless, on the whole Confucius underscored the importance of strict loyalty to the father—and the ruler.

Confucius defined the truly good man as *chun-tzu*, the superior man, a noble among commoners, a genuine aristocrat. Likewise, he described those who failed to attain this ideal as nothing but peasants, barbarians, *hsiao-jen*. In so doing, the Sage transformed conventional feudal classifications into ethical ones. When those around him divided mankind into distinct social castes based on birth—the upper class and everybody else—Confucius insisted on a moral standard of excellence.

Many sayings in the *Analects* explain the qualifications to be found in *Chun-tzu*. He is broad-minded and not small-minded, conciliating but not flattering, dignified but not arrogant. According to Confucius, nine things occupy the thought of *chun-tzu*. When looking, he sees clearly; when hearing he hears distinctly. He has a kind expression, a respectful manner and is sincere in what he says. Because the superior man is serious about his work, he asks questions when in doubt rather than pretending to know everything. If he is tempted to get angry, he pauses to think of the

¹²*Analects*, 11:5.

¹³*ibid*, 1V:18.

¹⁴*Hsiao Ching*, XV.

consequences of his display of temper. Most importantly *chun-tzu* prefers righteousness to personal profit." If this advice seems rather trite and platitudinous, we must remember that Confucius spoke on the basis of firsthand experience with the Chinese governing class. Instead of being lifeless moral commonplaces his remarks were blunt criticisms of this duke, that prince, a specific minister of public works or court functionary. Therefore, his seemingly bland maxims represent an ever-valid attack on the sins of the bureaucrats in every age.

Confucius listed the special evils which corrupt the privileged bureaucratic class. When men are young, they have to guard against lust. Once they have grown up, when their blood and vital powers are strong, they must be careful not to get involved in strife. In old age, men are in danger of succumbing to greed.¹ For the young official the gravest danger was to use his government position to satisfy his desire for sensual pleasure. For the man who had achieved a respected post in the court, the fatal temptation was to endanger his status by meddling in palace politics. Worse, in Confucius' opinion, was the elderly courtier's desire to amass a fortune before the time came for retirement. As the philosopher must have learned from his own unfortunate career as a government official, the money-hungry bureaucrat was the major threat to the establishment of national well-being.

Although Confucius' code for the responsible civil servant was a major contribution to human thought, far greater was his concept of *jen*. *Jen* is one of those little words which are so rich in meaning for Chinese culture that it is difficult to find an adequate English equivalent. *Jen* is the central thesis of the whole Confucian system. Translators have interpreted it to mean "true virtue," "benevolence," "mutual respect," "reciprocal love," "goodwill"—and perhaps best of all, "human-heartedness." *Jen* combines filial piety and fraternal love. As the bond of social solidarity for all men and the connection between the generations, *jen* provides a rational basis for all the lesser, derivative virtues like

¹ Analects, XV1:10

"Ibid. X V1:7.

courage, propriety, altruism and righteousness.

According to Confucius, the ancients were not satisfied with material comforts. For them, the way for a man to be truly human must be found in ethics. The Chinese ideogram *jen* is composed of the character "man" and the character • "two." Since men are social beings, *jen* means love for others. *Jen* grows out of the natural affection one has for his parents and kinsmen. What Confucius did was extend this feeling beyond the immediate family. To be one with Heaven is to treat everybody with human-heartedness, to help them to live and grow. For Confucius, *jen* was the basis for a philosophy of benevolent humanism and the foundation for a group ethic applicable to all mankind. Bestowed upon men by Heaven, *jen* provides a practical instrument for the relative betterment of the social order, until individuals attain self-perfection and an ideal world is achieved. Unlike philosophies which emphasize the exercise of power, the goal of Chinese humanism is to move people's hearts with virtue.

The Confucian ethic originated with Master K'ung's intense desire for political and social participation. He waited for a wise ruler who could use him, because he wanted to be involved in the creation of a better world. He himself possessed a strong sense of mission as the superior man. Using his learning, virtue and *jen*, he wanted to put into practice his political ideals.

Specifically, the aim of superior men is to make old people comfortable, help friends trust each other and raise well-bred children. Concern for the elderly shows one's respect for the past; devotion to friendship reveals one's interest in the present; attention to the young indicates one's hope for the future. Cultivating one's own virtues and giving benefit to others represents the Tao of *chun-tzu*. Through active involvement in the social process, the superior man can bring happiness and comfort to all.

According to the Confucian ethic, the mandarin becomes learned and cultured in order to implement his love for humanity. By loving and caring for the young, he will inculcate in them great respect for the merits of their ancestors and reverence for man's cultural heritage. Filial love means for Confucius that the present

generation should treasure the values of the past and add to human civilization the unique contributions of their own time in order to prepare for the Great Commonwealth to come. This was Master K'ung's philosophy of history and his hope for an ideal world."

As Confucius insisted, if a *chun-tzu* departs from *jen*, he is unworthy of being called a superior man. Not even for the space of one meal should *achun-tzu* act contrary to *jen*.¹⁸ Summing up what he meant, Confucius invented what has been called the Silver Rule: "What you do not wish to yourself, do not do to others."¹⁹ According to the *Chung Yung* this Heavenly Way of the superior man means 1) "to serve my father as I would have my son serve me," 2) "to serve my sovereign as I would have my minister serve me," 3) "to serve my elder brother as I would have my younger brother serve me," 4) "to set an example in behaving to a friend as I would have him behave to me."²⁰

IV. CHINESE PIETY

Many writers, Chinese and Western, claim that Confucianism is not a religion but merely a system of ethics. According to a recent Chinese scholar, Confucianism is a practical moral system without any trace of the metaphysical and supernatural. A contemporary American scholar agrees noting that Confucius expounded a consistent humanism, believed in no flight into the beyond and had no concept of a Creator who made man in his own image. Confucianism, it is said, begins and ends with man.² Because this interpretation of the purely moralistic, humanistic, and anti-mystical Confucius is widespread, it is necessary to insist upon the

¹⁸Cf. Ki-Kun Chang, "The Absolute Value in Society and Restoration to the Way of Heaven" in proceedings of the fourth International Conference on the Unity of the Sciences, ICF, Inc., N.Y., 1975, vol. 1, pp. 387-395.

¹⁹Analects, IV:5.

²⁰Ibid, XII:2.

²¹The Doctrine of the Mean, X111:4.

²²Liu Wu-Chi, *A Short History of Confucian Philosophy*, p. 11

²³Charles Corwin, *East to Eden?*, Wm. B. Eerdmatis, Grand Rapids, Mich., 1972, pp. 53, 65.

religious dimension of Confucianism.

Confucianism does lack several of the important characteristics of most religions. It never possessed a specialized priesthood. It wrote no creeds. Its scriptures were never considered "revelations." Nevertheless, Confucianism is concerned with the ultimate meaning of human life and destiny, and has manifested a deep sense of dependence upon a supreme spiritual power. In addition, it has fostered an intimate relationship with the world of spirit, created elaborate rituals and relied on the efficacy of prayer. For these reasons, Confucianism should be classified as a religion rather than simply an ethico-political philosophy of self-betterment.³

Confucius' teachings reveal his intense religious feelings. According to him, the superior man is calm and quiet, waiting for the mandate of Heaven. He does not grumble against men nor murmur against Heaven. In order to know men, one cannot dispense with a knowledge of Heaven.

The good life is connected with man's relationship to Heaven. As sincerity is the way of Heaven, the attainment of sincerity is the way of men. Illustrious virtue comes from contemplating and studying the decrees of Heaven. Only by possessing the most complete sincerity that can exist under Heaven can man fully develop his nature.

Confucianism teaches that the cosmic order is benevolent and that the social order should imitate Heaven's uprightness. Heaven and Earth are the parents of all creatures, of which man is the most highly endowed. Bright and high Heaven enlightens and rules our world. Heaven has compassion on all the people; Heaven will give effect to what they desire. For the help of the masses, Heaven made rulers and instructors that these might aid God and secure the peace of the entire kingdom. If the rulers do not reverence Heaven above, they inflict calamities on the people below. If a sovereign pos-

³D. Howard Smith, *Chinese Religions*, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1968, pp. 32.33. For additional information, see C.K. Yang, "The Functional Relationship between Confucian Thought and Institutions, in J.K. Fairbank, ed., *Chinese Thought and Institutions*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1957, pp. 269-290.

sesses all the sagely qualities which can exist under Heaven he becomes the equal of Heaven. By assisting the transforming and nourishing powers of Heaven and Earth, the sage joins them to form a trinity.⁴

The religious spirit of Confucianism is clearly expressed in an ode of King Ching to be found in the *Shih King*:

Let me be reverent, let me be reverent,
The way of Heaven is evident,
And its appointment is not easily preserved.
Let me not say that It is high aloft above me.
It ascends and descends about our doings;
It daily inspects us wherever we are.⁵

Another way to demonstrate Confucian piety is to look at one of the classics, the *Li Chi* ("Treatises on the Rules of Propriety or Ceremonial Usages").⁶ *Li* has been translated variously as "rites," "etiquette," "good manners," "decorum," "customs," "social usages" and "propriety." In the ancient Chinese dictionary, *Li* is defined as an act by which one serves the spirits. Originally, *Li* referred to a vessel used in performing sacrificial rites. Confucius made *Li* one of his key concepts, implying that the awe and respect with which man worships should cover every aspect of his behavior.

Although polytheism had been part of the Chinese religious heritage, monotheism—worship of Shang-ti, Lord of Heaven—was well established long before the Chou dynasty period which Confucius took as his model for the good society. At that time, religion involved sacrifices to Shang-ti outside the home and worship of one's ancestors by every family.⁷ Ancestor worship

⁴ A. Doebelin, *The Living Thoughts of Confucius*, David McKay Co., N.Y., 1960, pp. 55, 68, 70, 73, 74, 77, 152-153, 156, 161.

⁵ *ibid.*, p. 165.

⁶ See J. Legge, translator. *The Li Ki*, Sacred Books of the East, Oxford University Press, London, 1926, vol. XXVII and XXVIII.

⁷ E. W.F. Tomlin says the Chinese family formed its own church, because reverence for ancestors was a cult stronger than devotion to any god. *The Oriental Philosophers*, Harper & Row, N.Y., 1963, p. 251.

was thought to be as indispensable as veneration of the Lord of Heaven. Only by showing respect for the dead and obedience to Shang-ti could one live a good life.

Li is therefore most important, according to Confucian theory. If one does not practice *Li*, he cannot worship properly the God of Heaven. Likewise, if mankind does not obey the law of propriety (i.e., good manners, in the deepest sense), the ruler and his subjects, fathers and sons, old and young, men and women will be unable to maintain their rightful status in society. Without *Li*, there will no longer be a social distinction between a man and his wife, parents and children or elder and younger brothers. For this reason—concern for a stable and structured society—the superior man and sage treasure *Li*.

As for the public official, he recognizes the value of propriety so that the social order he is called upon to govern will not be disturbed, disorganized or disrupted. For him too, *Li* means following the Way of Heaven. His is the responsibility to obey the commands of Heaven and act according to the mandate of Heaven. As ceremonial rites are based on the need for a proper relationship with Shang-ti and the ancestral spirits, so respect for the rights and welfare of one's subjects is derived from reverence for the Heavenly Way.

Throughout its history, Confucianism has been inextricably attached to ritualistic worship. In the imperial age the emperor served as the high priest at sacrifices conducted during spring, autumn and winter solstice festivals. Most impressive were those at the magnificent Temple of Heaven in Peking, held annually on December 22 until 1911. To these traditional rites were gradually added religious ceremonies honoring Confucius. Worship of Master K'ung became part of the state religion of China. ⁸ In 195 B.C. the emperor offered animal sacrifice at the tomb of the Sage. In 57 A.D. sacrifices to him were begun at all imperial and provincial colleges. After the year 287, Confucius was worshipped four times

⁸Cf. J.K. Shryock, *Origin and Development of the State Cult of Confucianism*, The Century Co., N.Y., 1932 and D.H. Smith, "The State Cult of Confucianism," *op. cit.*, pp. 140-147.

a year and in 555 A.D. temples to him were built at the capital city of every Chinese prefecture. By 1086 he was honored with the title of emperor and in 1906 the Manchu ruler declared that Confucius was equal to the deities Heaven and Earth."

V. APOSTLES OF CONFUCIANISM

Mencius (b. circa 369 B.C.—d. soon after 300 B.C.)

In the long history of Chinese philosophy, Master Meng (Latinized as Mencius) attained a position next in importance to Confucius. Gradually, Mencius became honored as the Second Sage and his writings were added to the Confucian scriptures. He studied under a disciple of one of K'ung's students, so was a third generation Confucian. History has preserved no record of his birth or death, and what little we know about his life must be deduced from casual references in his works. He seems to have been a well-known exponent of government by benevolence (*jen*) and undertook journeys to the courts of various Chinese petty rulers on behalf of that Confucian ideal. However, for hundreds of years Mencius' thought was merely one of many conflicting interpretations of Chinese wisdom, simply one of "the hundred schools" of philosophy in the nation's period of intellectual ferment. His collected essays were not made part of the curriculum for Chinese officials until the Sung dynasty in the 12th century A.D.' The book *Mencius*, a volume made up of seven distinct parts, contains Meng's own writings plus additions by his disciples.

Mencius once told the story of what happened to a mountain to illustrate his conception of the human predicament. It was covered with lovely trees but people living nearby cut the woods down and the place lost its beauty. Hence, men think the mountain was always bare. Similarly the natural state of man was far differ-

°R.E. Hume, *The Worlds Living Religions*, Charles Scribner's Sons, N.Y., 1924, pp. 114-115. Cf. Julia Ching, "The Problem of Self-transcendence in Confucianism and Christianity," *Citing Feng* (Hong Kong), vol. XIX, no. 2, 1976, pp. 81-97.

· A. Waley, *Three Ways of Thought in Ancient China*, Doubleday Anchor Book, Garden City, N.Y., 1956, pp. 105-111.

ens from what we see now. Originally man possessed feelings of decency and kindness. If they are now frequently absent it is because they have been tampered with, cut down and burned away. What chance has human nature, like the mountain, had to keep its original beauty?

More than anything else, Mencius stressed the innate goodness of man. In this he went beyond Confucius and counter to the opinion of Hsiin Tzu, one of the prominent later Confucian reformers. Against realists, legalists and pessimists Mencius championed man's basic goodness. For him *jen* meant compassion, a feeling of responsibility for the sufferings of others. Hence, he praised the human-heartedness of the legendary hero YU who said that if anyone drowned he felt as if he himself had drowned him. Mencius believed that good feelings and a capacity for goodness are the natural birthright of everyone. The problem is not how to get them but how to keep them. ²

However, Mencius did not rely on man's natural good sentiments alone, which would have made him a disciple of Lao-tzu rather than Confucius. *Jen* should be coupled with *yi* (righteousness). *Yi* means the moral imperative, the sense of duty, an unconditional and absolute standard. As Mencius phrased it, "*Jen* is man's heart, and *yi* is man's path."

Yi is also described as "shame and dislike." ³ For Confucianists, good is at least in part avoiding "loss of face." Nothing is worse than to lose the respect of one's superiors and equals. ⁵

As an advisor to many officials and several Chinese petty kings, Mencius advocated "government by goodness." In some cases his suggestions were practical while in others he was primarily concerned with pointing out the ideal. He encouraged rulers to reduce or abolish unpopular taxes, limit conscripted labor to times of the year when agriculture was slack, eradicate inhuman forms of

=A. Waley, *Ibid.* pp. 83.85. See especially Mencius' debates with Kao Tzu who taught that human nature by itself is indifferent to good or had. Meng Tzu VI A-11.

'Ibid. VI A-11.

'Ibid. VI A-6

⁵Hence, anthropologists contrast "guilt-centered" and "shame-centered" societies.

punishment, provide public aid to the aged and establish schools centered on moral instruction.⁶ Like Master K'ung, Mencius condemned the dominance of the profit principle at the royal court. Speaking to the king of Wei, he said: Why must your Majesty speak of profit instead of right and goodness? If the king seeks profit for his kingdom, his ministers will seek profit for their families and ordinary subjects will seek only profit for themselves. With equal enthusiasm Mencius criticized the common reliance upon warfare as a means of achieving national success. To King Hsiang, he said that if there were one ruler who did not delight in slaughtering men, he could unite the whole world. Such a king would attract men, as water flows downhill, in a flood no one could hold back.'

Like Confucius, Mencius taught that public officials have the chief responsibility in creating a new and better social order. The superior man's function is like that of the wind. When the wind blows, the grass cannot do anything except bend.⁸ When rulers doubted that "a government by goodness" could be established, Mencius offered a simple prescription for establishing a righteous society. The ruler has but to push his natural softness of heart (*jen*) far enough and he would become the protector of all. In the past sages excelled ordinary men because they continually extended their innate tenderness. For rulers to think that world government can be achieved by armed might is as foolish as thinking that they can get fish from a tree, said Mencius. To King Hsuan of Ch'i, he promised that if the monarch were on that very day to set up a government founded upon *jen*, at once all the officials under Heaven would want to be enrolled in his court, all the farmers would want to plough his fields, all the tradesmen would want to bring their goods to his market, all travellers would want to use his roads and all who had a grievance would want to lay their corn-

⁶For Mencius humane government was dependent upon political economy. When most men are only trying to save themselves from death, what time do they have to cultivate morality and good manners? he asked. Cf. Chai and Chai, *Confucianism*, pp. 62-63.

⁷Waley, *Ibid*, p. 91.

⁸*Ibid*, p. 94.

plaint before him. Everybody would be so determined to come to him that no power on earth could stop them.' 'Needless to say, China has yet to find the True King who conquers the world by goodness, as Mencius believed was possible.'"

Although he aspired to become a great statesman, he was far too wise to be crushed when no king made him prime minister. Eloquently he pictured the role of the sage: "He who dwells in the broad house of the universe, stands firm on the right place of the universe, and walks in the great way of the universe; he, who, if successful, walks along with the people, and if unsuccessful, walks in the way all alone; he whom wealth and honor cannot corrupt, poverty and obscurity cannot move, threats and violence cannot subdue—he it is who may be called a great man." ¹

Hsiin Tzu, the Confucian Pessimist (circa 323-238 B.C.)

Whereas Mencius was an idealistic and tender-hearted Confucianist, Hsiin Tzu expounded a different but equally influential version of the Master's teachings.' ² In thirty-two exquisitely written logical essays, he accepted Confucius' ideas about the need for *churl-tzu* and the importance of social institutions to achieve progress but added to them valuable insights derived from other schools of thought. Hsiin Tzu originated what has been called "tough-minded" Confucianism.

As a result of the tragic political and economic state of China in his day, Hsiin Tzu found it impossible to accept Mencius' notion of man's innate goodness. All about him he saw proof that human nature is evil. To demonstrate this, he carefully separated man's ability to reason from the egocentric desires which make up his intrinsic constitution as a human being. Men are born evil because they have a basic desire for personal gain which results in strife. They are envious and hateful. Such evils lead to cruelty and injury

¹Wiley, *Ibid*, pp. 105-111.

²For additional reading, see James R. Ware, trans., *The Sayings of Mencius*, New American Library, N.Y., 1960.

³*Meng Tzu* 111 B-2.

⁴For his life, see Chai and Chai, *Confucianism*, pp. 66-68. For his writings, see Burton Watson, trans., *Hsiin Tzu Basic Writings*, Columbia University Press, N.Y., 1963.

inflicted upon others. Man is also horn with sensual desires which uncontrolled produce social confusion and civic disorder. With these basic drives in human nature, what else can one expect but the disappearance of loyalty, courtesy, trust and righteousness?

Hsiin Tzu agreed with the Taoists that Heaven is indifferent to human standards of right and wrong. Unlike Mencius, he did not expect Heaven to uphold morality. Heaven is not an ethical order or a personal guarantor of righteousness; Heaven is merely the impersonal law of nature.

While Mencius perceived the goal of education to be "nothing but the search for the lost heart,"³ Hsiin Tzu considered "acquired training" to be more vital than man's original nature. The original nature comes from Heaven whereas acquired training rests with man. What we are born with is at best crude material which has to be refined and polished by culture. By itself human nature lacks beauty. It is up to man to beautify it. Education means improving oneself and restraining natural impulses toward evil. Human nature has to be "rectified," as Confucius taught—just as a knife needs to be sharpened.

Unlike Mencius who believed education served to bring out the good which is in man, Hsiin Tzu asserted that rigorous moral training is necessary to transform human nature, radically altering it by counteracting natural evil desires. Wisdom and value come from without, as an individual is reshaped by laws, a code of etiquette and inspiring ceremonies."

If men's desires are allowed free expression, chaos will result. Regulations become necessary to keep our impulses from disrupting the social order. This is the negative function of laws; the positive is that traditions, rules and rituals (*Li*) refine and ennoble human emotions. Through *Li*, love and hate, our two basic responses, can be tempered. Therefore *Li* is the culmination of culture.⁵

³*Meng Tzu* VI 11:4.

⁴Chai and Chai, *Confucianism*, pp. 69-77.

⁵The ancient historian Ssu-ma Ch'ien observed that Hs5n Tzu's writings were attacks on the superstitious belief in magic, omens and portents that dominated his age. Wm. T. de Bary, *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, Columbia University Press, N.Y., 1960, p. 113. For examples, cf. pp. 114-118.

Heaven, earth and man are three separate things, each of which has a distinctive purpose. Heaven controls the seasons; earth provides man with necessary material resources. Man's function, no less necessary, is to set up and maintain good government. Man's job is to employ his intelligence and talents so as to use Heaven's orderliness and earth's wealth to his advantage. To neglect human effort by relying on Heaven is to miss the true nature of things, according to Hsiin Tzu. Don't praise Heaven; domesticate it, he urged.

Chu Hsi (1130-1200)

During the Han and Tang dynasties, Confucianism had been concerned with the immediate practical problems of human society. By the twelfth century, followers of K'ung became interested in metaphysics, probably because of Taoism and Buddhism which were then prevalent. *Tao* was henceforth the main topic for discussion among the literati. Speculation about the true nature of things (ontology) took precedence over matters of ethics. For example, Ch'eng Hao (1032-1085) complained that simple memorization and recitation of the Classics had become mere playing with Confucianism without seeing its true meaning. Consequently, he stressed the need for a deep and systematic study of metaphysics. Since most Confucianists of his day had so overemphasized minor points, the original significance of K'ung's thought had become blurred, he believed. Feeling the necessity for reasserting Confucian orthodoxy, scholars like Chou-Tun-yi (1017-1075), Ch'eng Hao, Cheng-i (1033-1107) and Chang Tsai (1020-1076) initiated a metaphysical interpretation of Confucianism which was carried to completion by Chu Hsi. These learned mandarins founded the school of Neo-Confucianism. As a writer of numerous books, definitive commentaries on all the Classics and distillations of the best thinking of his predecessors, Master Chu systematized Sung dynasty Confucianism and finalized the authoritative interpretation of Chinese orthodoxy which was generally accepted for the next seven hundred years."

"See C.M. Schirokauer, "Chu Hsi's Political Career" in A.F. Wright and D. Twitchett, *Confucian Personalities*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, Calif., 1962, pp. 162-188.

Chu Hsi became the chief exponent of a school of Confucian rationalism known as the Philosophy of Principle (*Li*). Principle means that there is an immutable and immaterial element inhering in all existing objects. As he walked, Chu said to his disciples that the bricks of the steps beneath his feet have within them the Principle that pertains to bricks; and sitting down, he observed that a bamboo chair has within it the Principle which makes it what it is." In ethics, Principle is man's true nature, his mind and his essential goodness.

According to Chu, in the universe there has never been any material force without Principle, or Principle without material force. Principle exists above the realm of corporeality and material force exists within the physical realm. Although these two fundamental aspects of reality can be distinguished they cannot be separated. Chu Hsi insists on the basic polarity of Principle and material force. *Li* is prior to material force logically, in origin and in value, but it exists right in material force. Without matter, Principle would have nothing to adhere to. Using the five elements theory, Chu describes material force as metal, wood, water, fire and earth. *Li* by contrast is *fen*, righteousness, propriety and wisdom. There is only one Principle for Heaven, earth and the ten thousand things; however, in man each individual has his own particular Principle.⁸

Neo-Confucianism was designed to refute Taoism and Buddhism—both of which threatened to outshine Confucius' teachings. To overcome their ideological foes, the Neo-Confucianists turned to metaphysics, especially those of the *I Ching*. They also adopted Taoist and Buddhist concepts to defend Confucian wisdom. This greatly deepened and enriched their position. For Chu, as for the Taoists, *Li* is not personal, a creator God or an indwelling one. When specifically asked if Principle referred to "a Master doing all this up in the blue sky," he stated that Heaven

⁸Fung Yu-Ian, *The History of Chinese Philosophy*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, N.J., 1953, vol. II, pp. 535-536.

⁹Wing-tsit Chan, "The Great Synthesis in Chu Hsi," *Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*, pp. 588-653.

¹⁰Quoted in de Bary, *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, p. 537.

has no personal consciousness. Borrowing a Taoist expression, Chu spoke of the Principle as "the Supreme Ultimate," *T'ai-chi*. The Supreme Ultimate is to be found in Heaven, earth and each of the myriad of existing things. Because *Li* is a single reality, every separate thing possesses the Supreme Ultimate in its entirety, just as one moon casts its beams upon numerous lakes and rivers.

Principle is invisible, manifesting itself indirectly by means of the activity of yin and yang. *T'ai-chi* has no mind apart from the separate minds and will of men, animals, birds, grass and trees. Heaven and earth have their cosmic mind in all things, yet of themselves they have no mind. Presumably Chou means by this to avoid anthropomorphism. *T'ai-chi* has no separate, limited, specific and partial mind because the cosmic mind is all-inclusive, unattached and therefore impartial. *T'ai-chi* is the Principle beyond the limitations of being or non-being.

Neo-Confucianism, at least in some of its forms, has two additional characteristics worth mentioning. Once scholars began speculating on the meaning of the *I Ching*, they became enamoured of "the study of emblems and numbers." Since the Chinese language is made up of ideograms (little pictures) rather than letters, it was natural to think that diagrams could be worked out to solve the subtlest metaphysical problems. In the *I Ching* eight basic trigrams interpret every object and event in the world of space and time. Equally important was a "diagram of the Supreme Ultimate" created by Chou Tun-yi (1017-75) and employed by many of his successors.²⁰ Diagrams as well as words were relied on by the Neo-Confucianists to explain what they believed.

Also noteworthy was the Chinese fascination for the metaphysical and mystical significance of numbers. Some of the most prominent Neo-Confucian scholars were adepts of numerology. Shao Yung (1011-77) was one of these.²¹ If a thinker can understand the "mysterious, dark learning"²² in numbers, he can

²⁰Fung Yu-lan, *History of Chinese Philosophy*, vol. II, p. 436.

²¹Cf. Fung Yu-lan, *ibid*, pp 451-476.

²²The typical Chinese expression for the occult.

comprehend the nature and destiny of all things. For example, according to Shao Yung the secret of cosmology—Heaven's relationship to earth—can be found in the way 1 divides to make 2, 2 divides to make 4, 4 to make 8, 8 to make 16, 16 to make 32 and 32 to make 64 the total number of hexagrams in the *Ching*. Ten is another mystical number (because ten divides to become a hundred, a hundred to become a thousand and a thousand to become ten thousand—the symbol of the myriad of existing things.) Of the first ten basic numbers, 1, 3, 5, 7 and 9 are of Heaven and 2, 4, 6, 8 and 10 are of earth. One represents "the Supreme Ultimate." For Shao Yung the number 4 was the key to unlock the mysteries of the universe, because Heaven has four forms (greater and lesser yang, greater and lesser yin), there are four sense organs, four kinds of rulers, four ways of transforming the world, four different types of Mandates of Heaven, etc.²³

Chu Hsi's Neo-Confucianism determined the course of subsequent Chinese thought by adding four books to the Confucian Five Classics: the *Analects*, *Doctrine of the Mean*, *Great Learning* and the collected writings of Mencius. These nine books were henceforth accepted as Confucian scripture and in time were made the foundation for the education of all Chinese officials. Until 1911 and the fall of the Manchu empire, Chu Hsi's theory was the standard for Confucian orthodoxy. Except for a rather brief period when a rival school of metaphysical idealism was popular, Confucianism meant the School of Principle definitively expounded in the writings of Chu: his man-centered, rationalistic and un-mystical philosophy was considered normative.²⁴

Toward the end of the Koryo dynasty, Chu Hsi's views were introduced into Korea and later in Japan. Among scholars of the Yi

²³Chan, *Source Book*, p. 481. Shao Yung was strongly influenced by Taoism and in his own day he was a famous fortune teller. For these reasons, rationalist-minded Chu Hsi omits his writings from his anthology of early Sung philosophy. Most other Neo-Confucian scholars describe Shao Yung as one of the Five Masters of the early Sung period. (Chan, *Ibid.*, p. 482).

²⁴Cf. W.T. de Bary, "A Reappraisal of Neo-Confucianism" in A.F. Wright, *Studies in Chinese Thought*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1953, pp. 81-111.

dynasty, this type of Neo-Confucianism was predominant. Thinkers like Yi Hwang (Toe-gye) and Yi E (Yoolgok) in the 16th century further developed Chu Hsi's system. In China and Korea, though the School of Principle degenerated resulting in bitter political factionalism and social stagnation; ²⁵ however, in Japan Chu Hsi's ideas were used to overthrow the corrupt rule of the feudal shoguns and enhance the position of the emperor Meiji, thereby contributing greatly to the country's progress.

Wang Yang-ming (1472-1529)

Wang Yang-ming's monistic idealism shows a very different type of Neo-Confucianism from that taught by Chu Hsi. Yet the School of Mind, as it was called, has been almost as influential in Chinese thought as the School of Principle. Like Chu, Wang was a practical man of affairs as well as a philosopher, serving at various times in the Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Civil Service and Board of Censors. In addition he was an imperial governor, an army commander and the Minister of Military Affairs. Besides his success as an official, Wang was well-known as a teacher and praised as one of the world's great thinkers. ²⁶ In the long history of China, it is very rare to find one who was a great scholar as well as a great national hero.

Whereas Chu had emphasized the two factors *Li* and material force as the basis for every existing things, Wang was a thorough-going monist. For him, mind alone reveals the character of reality. What we call the external world is merely the object of consciousness. Common sense is mistaken to perceive the world in terms of external things, extra-mental objects or hard facts. Mind alone is real: all else is made up of the ideas which mind evaluates. Man's knowing is the core of reality. Matter is simply material for

¹⁵Cf. Chai Sik Chung, "Christianity as a Heterodoxy" as an example of the use of Chu Hsi Confucianism to refute Christian missionaries in 18th century Korea. (Yung-Hwan Jo, ed., *Korea's Response to the West*, Korea Research and Publications, Kalamazoo, Mich., 1971, pp. 57-86.

²⁵On Wang's life and thought, cf. Carsun Chang, *The Development of Neo-Confucian Thought*. Bookman Associates, N.Y., 1962, volume II, pp. 30-159. Chang uses the philosopher's other name, Wang Shou-jen.

mind to work with, merely data of consciousness. For Wang, there is no dualistic separation of man and the universe, mind and the physical world, mind and body, desire and reason, or knowing and doing. In other words, Wang believed in metaphysical idealism.

Wang interpreted reason in terms of "intuitive knowledge" (Liang-chih). It embraces intellect, will and emotion. Reason is both knowledge (in the ordinary sense) and moral consciousness. This faculty for intuitive knowledge is not limited to man. Reason is shared by grass, trees and stones. For Wang "the investigation of things" (a famous Confucian phrase) means the "realization of knowledge." Therefore, he summed up his philosophy in the motto: unity of knowledge and action. To see what is beautiful is to know; to like what is beautiful is to do, he explained.²⁷

Wang interpreted jen to mean an awareness of man's unity with the entire cosmos. Love between parents and children which produces filial piety is only the beginning of benevolence. Human-heartedness should be extended to include love of all one's fellow creatures. In the Neo-Confucian School of Mind one learns to appreciate the spiritual kinship which exists among men, animals and plants. This is "the greater jen."

In 1871. General Tseng Kuo-fan who had suppressed the Taiping rebellion prepared a brief collection of mottos by which his family could understand what Confucianism meant. They were:

Vigilance in solitude makes the mind peaceful.

Concentration of mind makes the body strong.

Realization of human-heartedness makes one more
loved by others.

Hard work is approved by the spirits.²⁸

Confucianism grew and developed, schools appeared and controversies raged; but Mencius, Hsiin Tzu, Chu Hsi, Wang Yang-ming and all those who looked to Master K'ung for inspira-

²⁷ C. Chang, *Ibid*, p. 36.

²⁸ *Ibid*, p. 398.

tion and guidance would have agreed with General Tseng's "four reminders" to the coming generation.

VI. CONFUCIANISM IN THE MODERN WORLD

Wang Yang-ming lived at the time of Columbus, the Renaissance, the Reformation and the creation of Europe's first great adventure in imperialism and colonialism: the Spanish empire which spanned the entire globe from South America to the Philippines. Strange as it may seem to us, the great scholar-courtier knew nothing of these events, yet what was taking place would have momentous significance for the Confucianism he loved. China had remained isolated for centuries but the fate of Confucianism in the modern world has been determined, for better or for worse, by the impact of the West. While Chinese scholars argued about the authenticity of Classical texts,¹ used Confucius to buttress the status quo and professed to be residents of the Middle Kingdom located at the center of the world, westernization soon swept aside every venerable ideal and institution with the fury of a tornado.

Looking back on this period of transition, Chinese historians write about three distinct periods in the modernization of their country. First, China grudgingly acknowledged the superiority of western scientific and technological knowledge. Next, she began reforming politically in accord with European-American patterns.² Finally, there was a literary and ethical revolution, led by Hu Shih, an advocate of American pragmatism, and Ch'en Tu-hsiu, founder of the Chinese Communist Party.³ Each of these changes, implicitly or explicitly, undermined the Confucian tradition. As Chinese writers sadly, joyfully or with resignation admit, Confucianism was shaken to its very foundations. While some shouted "Down with Confucius and sons," others tried to salvage what they could of China's philosophical, ethical, cultural and religious heritage.

¹The controversy over the Modern and Ancient Scripts. Cf. Chang, *Ibid*, pp. 415-417.

²President Sun Yat-sen and his protégé Chiang Kai-shek belong to the second group.

³Chang, *Ibid*, p. 410.

⁴A motto of the Hu Shih westernizers.

K'ang Yu-wei (1858-1927) was one of the most controversial modern defenders of Confucius. His three books *Inquiry into the Forged Classics of the Wang Mang Period*, *Study of the Reform-Idea of Confucius* and *On the Great Commonwealth* combined the most audacious radicalism with ultra-conservatism. Chinese intellectuals compared the first to a hurricane, the second to a volcano, and the third to an earthquake. K'ang contended that the officially-approved texts of the Confucian Classics were forgeries made by the imperial librarian at the close of the Western Han dynasty (circa 200 A.D.). While few accept the validity of K'ang's charges, he could not have been more iconoclastic in his attack upon the scriptural foundations of Confucian orthodoxy.

K'ang also asserted that Confucius had as much right to be considered a "religion-founder" as Buddha, Jesus or Muhammad. Putting Confucianism on the same level as Christianity, Buddhism or Islam, K'ang implied that it was a religion rather than a humanistic philosophy or rational system of ethics, as some Confucianists had previously insisted in their denunciations of Buddhism, Taoism and Christianity. K'ang even tried to get Confucianism established as the state religion of China when the republic was set up, but to no avail. ⁶ Mixing conservative sympathies and radical criticism, he maintained that Confucius did not merely compile ancient traditions but actually composed all six Classics to expound his own views of the ideal society. Though K'ang's ideas were taken seriously for a brief period, he alienated the traditionalists by his criticism and could not retain the interest of the progressives for long. Nevertheless, as an important reformer in the last days of the Manchu empire, he aroused an enormous amount of discussion. As he put it, he was the Luther of China.

⁵Descriptions first used by Liang Ch'i-ch'ao and repeated widely. Cf. Hao Chang, "K'ang Yu-wei's Intellectual Role in the late Nineteenth Century," - *Liang Ch'i-ch'ao and Intellectual Transition in China*, Taipei, 1971, pp. 35-57.

⁶Liu Wu-chih, a staunch Confucian modernist, denies that Master K'ung founded a religion. In his opinion, Confucianism is "anything but religion." Even if ancestor worship and filial piety were the main props of Confucianism, more important is the fact that Confucius did not claim to be a god and never taught a faith that was supernatural. *A Short History of Confucian Philosophy*, pp. 183-184.

At the very end of the 19th century, prominent Chinese intellectuals and all westerners accused Confucianism of being a reactionary force and a major stumbling block in the path of modernization and progress. Particularly for Christian missionaries, who were the main Occidental source of information about conditions in China, Confucianism meant the pigtail, opium smoking, concubinage, coolies, bound feet, warlords, the Boxers and the Dowager Empress. However, after a half century had passed, it became possible to look at Confucianism more objectively. Confucian scholars were seen to be a corrective and almost prophetic influence in imperial China. Since Confucius himself was the "uncrowned king," this implied that Chinese emperors were not Heaven's gift to man simply because they sat on the imperial throne. Confucianism placed numerous obstacles in the way of uncritical acceptance of the totalitarian state. For one thing, an emperor had to prove that he deserved the high post he held by being the father of his people. Secondly, he could not exercise his authority arbitrarily but must submit to the authority of past experience. A living emperor could always be judged by the example set by great rulers of the distant past whose actions were reported in the Confucian Classics. In the third place, the Son of Heaven was subject to ethical ideals. Even the ruler was not above the commandments to practice *jen*, filial piety, righteousness, wisdom and fidelity. Confucianism raised a standard which all office-holders, including the highest, must obey.

Chairman Mao and his adherents opposed Confucianism because they wanted to be free of such restraints. If one seeks to be a dictator he must deny the authority of the past. Confucianism was condemned by Marxists because it said that the ruler is subject to the moral law. For this reason, Mao compared himself to China's first emperor Shi-huang-ti, who unified the country; then he simply did what he pleased—burning the ancient classics, defying tradition, and executing the Confucian scholars who dared to defy him. Consequently, Maoists praised Legalists like Han Fei-tzu (d. 233 B.C.) who taught that a successful ruler can stay in power only if he rewards his friends and severely punishes all dissidents. In

contrast to the moral law upheld by Confucianists, the Legalists favored "positive laws" whose sole authority was that of the earthly ruler who could promulgate and enforce them.' Whereas Confucianism insisted upon government by ethical principles, the Marxists practiced the rule that might makes right. If a man has the power of Shi-huang-ti or Mao, whatever he decrees must be obeyed upon pain of death.

In their irrational infatuation with European and American ideas, Chinese professors were converted to every variety of philosophic novelty: the pragmatism of John Dewey, the vitalism of Henri Bergson, the neo-realism of Bertrand Russell and the Marxism of Lenin and Stalin. In each case the primary aim was to eradicate the supposedly pernicious grip of traditional Chinese philosophy. Typical of this destructive attitude was the New Culture Movement. ⁸ Wu Chih-hui (1865-1953) was a young Manchu official who studied in Japan, England and France. His foreign experience turned him into an anarchist, so when he came back to China he joined the anti-Manchu rebels and soon became a confidante of Sun Yat-sen and Chiang Kai-shek. Later an elder statesman of the Kuomintang, Wu first won praise for his attack upon Confucian traditions. The modern philosopher Hu Shih, for example, was delighted when Wu said all old-style books "should be dumped in the lavatory."⁹ According to Hu Shih, with one stroke of the pen Wu had ruled out God, banished the soul and punctured the metaphysical illusion that man is the most spiritual of all things. Wu denied that the idea of a soul meets any real need, insisted that man's spirit cannot be separated from matter, affirmed that science can explain everything in the universe, and claimed that men today are far superior to those in the past. With intellectuals talking like that, what chance did Confucius have in twentieth century China?

Ch'en Tu-hsiu, professor of literature at Peking National University who organized the Chinese Communist Party in 1921,

⁸De Bary, *Sources of Chinese Tradition*. pp. 136-158.

⁹Cf. Wing-tsit Chan, "The New Culture Movement" in de Bary, *Ibid.* pp. 813-857.

¹⁰De Bary, *Ibid.* p. 840.

was one of the prominent intellectuals denouncing Confucianism because of its alleged inferiority to Western thought. If China is to advance and become a modern nation it must adopt attitudes diametrically opposed to the traditional ones. In his opinion the West is successful because 1) it is individualistic, 2) warlike, 3) always pushing ahead rather than being bound to the past, 4) international, 5) utilitarian and 6) scientific. China by contrast is backward, weak and undeveloped because it has favored group harmony, peace, ancient customs, nationalism, excessive cultural refinement and superstition.

When Confucianism was being considered a possible state religion for the Chinese republic, Ch'en was among the severest critics of the proposal. He complained that Confucius advocated monarchical government but the modern world is committed to democracy. Secondly, the Confucian doctrine of "the three superiorities" (the ruler's, the father's and the husband's) is detrimental to the development of individual personality. Thirdly, Confucianism denies women their rights. How can women have a career and be free if Confucian rules are obeyed? Fourthly, Confucianism is the product of a feudal age and reinforces unjust class-distinctions. According to Ch'en, Chinese tradition reduced the minds of people to a dead uniformity at a time when survival required the acceptance of vast changes. Like Hu Shih, Ch'en concluded that Confucianism is the greatest hindrance to modernization because it is incompatible with contemporary ideals of liberty and equality."

After the Communist takeover of the mainland, many refugee intellectuals began to reevaluate the Confucian heritage as the political situation worsened. For example, Dr. Carsun Chang in 1962 attempted a defense of Confucianism against its numerous critics, complaining that the intellectuals in China had shattered confidence in national traditions, squeezed the country dry of all moral convictions, and initiated a "wild rush for new ideas and

"C. Chang, *The Development of Neo-Confucian Thought*, vol. II, pp. 433-436. Before Ch'en's death he broke with communism because of its dictatorial tendencies. Hence, Maoists try to ignore his role in the creation of their Party (Ibid, p. 434).

expectations of a miracle"" that resulted in the tragedy of Communist rule. In his view, China was conquered by Mao because of a maladjustment to Western ideas and institutions, a psychology of desperation, the intellectuals' love for originality without a sense of responsibility, wild and imaginative thinking and utopian experimentation. According to Chang, a mental state of romanticism, fancy, confusion and skepticism is no match for Marxist dictatorship. By attacking Confucianism, the intellectuals had caused the youth "to run wild and join the Communists."

Chang insists that the basic ethical stance of Confucianism is as valid now as ever. For him, Confucianism has a future because it understands the four dispositions which are cornerstones on which all worthwhile institutions must be built. Out of these innate dispositions—(1) feelings of commiseration, (2) shame and dislike, (3) modesty and complacency, (4) approval and disapproval—grow man's inherent benevolence, righteousness, propriety and knowledge. Chinese thought, in Chiang's opinion, is superior to Western because 1) it treats knowledge and morality as equally important whereas the West divorces them or extols knowledge for its own sake; 2) it keeps a sense of continuity with the past, emphasizing harmony and peace, as the West does not; and 3) it values comprehensiveness of understanding above the sort of originality which makes the West one-sided."

As a student of the Chinese intellectual tradition, Chang doubts that communism will last. Its economic interpretation of civilization violates man's principles. It denies human rights and the value of the individual. It is too dogmatic. Marxist party dictatorship is no more tolerable than absolute monarchy. Finally, Communist totalitarianism has no way of providing a peaceful succession of leadership.' * For these reasons, Chang predicts the

"C. Chang, *Ibid*, p. 439.

¹²/*Ibid*, p. 437.

¹³/*Ibid*. pp. 452-453.

p. 475. Cf. "A Manifesto for a re-appraisal of Sinology and reconstruction of Chinese culture" by Chang and Professors Tang Chun-i, Mou Tsung-san and Ho Fo-kuan drawn up in Taiwan in 1957 (*Ibid*. pp. 455-483). President Chiang Kai-shek encouraged a revival of Confucian studies as an antidote to Chinese Marxism. Although a Christian, he recognized that Confucianism represents an indispensable feature of Chinese culture.

ultimate doom of the Communist regime in China. Once Marxism is repudiated, China will revive its Confucian heritage.

VII. SOME CONFUCIAN GIFTS

As a result of two and a half millennia of testing, certain Confucian gifts to the storehouse of wisdom are incontestable. Foremost is the crucial role played by the sage. Confucianism paints the picture of the ideal leader as a man who is "inwardly a sage, outwardly a king." The sage represents the highest point of man's achievement. He knows Heaven, and serves Heaven. Confucianists taught that the sage is superior to the all-powerful political ruler. The sovereign rules only because of the mandate of Heaven and is a good ruler if he follows the advice of his learned advisors.

Confucianists also refused to identify the sage with someone who was merely scholarly. Being a sage depends upon virtue rather than knowledge. Man at his best possesses *fen*, which is not a matter of technical know-how or factual information. All the leader really needs is an open mind, impartial judgment and all-embracing sympathies. He is great not because of what he knows. Because of what he is, he can get all the talented men around him to do their best."

Secondly, Confucianism stresses the central role of the family. Because fathers love their children, the young respect their parents and brothers care for each other, a perfect social order becomes possible. For Confucian scholars the ideal is based upon the actual and grows out of it. At various times, Chinese have relied on the government to provide happiness or believed that legislation could bring contentment, or abandoned society and retreated to the solace of nature. Yet after experimenting with such alternatives, they have recognized the all-important function of the family as the foundation for a stable, secure and peaceful society.

When the Chinese faced an assault from the West, some

¹⁵Fung Yu-lan, "A New System," *The Spirit of Chinese Philosophy*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1947, pp. 215-220.

advised the adoption of European methods in order to protect the substance of Far Eastern culture. Admittedly it was difficult to distinguish between the secondary and essential features of Chinese civilization. Is the family structure indispensable? In the past there was no question about this matter on the part of most people. As a result of the destructive revolutions in the 20th century, however, even some defenders of Confucianism have doubts. Westernizers have contended that the individual rather than the family is of fundamental value. Nationalists in China, as elsewhere, proclaim the superiority of the nation over one's particular family. Still others, like the Marxists, insist that the Confucian concepts of family loyalty and filial piety stand in the way of the classless society of the future. For Chinese Communists, the traditional family structure of the Confucian empire is an evil which must be abolished to provide a better world order. For the Maoist nothing should threaten an individual's unwavering submission to the authority of the Marxist party and state. One must repudiate his father, disavow his friend, denounce his elder brother and set aside marital obligations if they interfere with one's primary duty to the People's Republic.

Confucianism has always affirmed the primacy of ethics. As a result of the chaotic situation in 20th century China, this belief has been severely tested, yet prominent contemporary Chinese thinkers have reasserted man's basic moral imperative. Professor Fung Yu-lan of Peking, for example, published *A New Treatise on the Nature of Man* (1943) which redefined the need for goodness to revive the essential Confucian spirit. According to Fung, there are four grades in man's moral life. First, he may live a purely instinctive type of existence. Without trying to understand what he does or why, an individual may simply respond to social pressures or inner feelings. Second, he may seek private gain on the basis of egoistic "profit." Thirdly, man becomes truly "moral" when he recognizes his duty to society by subordinating his personal advantage to the common welfare. Finally there is an even higher type of living which he calls "the transcendent sphere." At his best man extends his sense of obligation beyond society to embrace the

whole universe. The "transcendent" man is one devoted to the Great Whole. Fung uses religious language to explain this. By recognizing the existence of the Great Whole, man obtains "knowledge of Heaven"; by responding positively to the Great Whole one serves Heaven and identifies with Heaven. Man's duty is to elevate himself from the purely natural and utilitarian spheres of existence to the moral realm and finally to the transcendent level. '6

However, whether Fung Yu-Ian's thought, as well as the traditional Confucian ideals of the family and the sage, will hold a prominent place in the thinking of China in the foreseeable future is, at best, an uncertainty.

'6Fung Yu-lan, *The Spirit of Chinese Philosophy*, preface, pp. xiii-xiv.

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