

RELIGION AND PHILOSOPHY IN ANCIENT CHINA.¹

BY HARDIN T. MCCLELLAND.

Ts'ang Chieh, now revered as a Tzu Shen or god of letters, was a minister of instruction under the Yellow Emperor (2700 B. C.), and is credited with having been the inventor of the Chinese written characters whence he may also be credited with initiating one of the world's most profound and prolific enterprises—the literature which contains the record of Religion and Philosophy in China. It was during an age which, by immediately preceding the Wu Ti Shih² or period of the five emperors, about 2850-2205 B. C., held the distinction of bringing into the world some of Heaven's most cherished secrets, among them being righteous government, intelligible language, the use of fire, cookery, clothing and music. It was also an age which served the lofty purpose of preparing the empire for a greater and nobler civilization yet to come. For as we are told, the rulers even of that remote time not only taught the people courtesy and true amiability, but further, they were personal exemplars whose lives promoted benevolence and encouraged an actual regard for all humanity. If for no other reason, it could yet be said that this very principle of goodness, which

¹ This whole article is really no more than a "general survey" of such a fertile and profound subject as Chinese Religion and Philosophy. I will therefore ask my readers to consider that it is not my purpose to fully explain any particular situation or doctrine on which I may touch in the course of this writing. I will feel that they value it properly only when it arouses them to seek further into the traditions of a nation whose civilization far antedates ours, but yet seeking with the aim to understand the native viewpoint of a people whose aspirations and intellectual achievements have survived for fifty centuries.

² This is a semi-legendary period whose dates were worked back from subsequent times. While we find that the reigns of the Yellow Emperor's son and grandson, and of Yao's father are usually absorbed into the reigns of the former and latter respectively, the period is divided as follows: Fu Hsi (c. 2850-2738), Shen Neng (c. 2738-2697), Huang Ti or Yellow Emperor (c. 2697-2435), Yao (c. 2435-2255), and Shun (c. 2255-2205 B. C.).

was their constant instruction, entitles them to all the ancestral worship they have had throughout the thirty dynasties of Chinese History; it makes them as worthy of the sacrificial offerings as it makes their worshippers worthy of the blessings they enjoy.

The course of civilization, like everything else, follows a natural series of causal events. In the particular case of early Chinese civilization it followed a series which may be illustrated by their conception of filial piety. According to this conception there was a series of three stages or degrees making up complete filiality: the first and superior degree was that of the T'ien Ching or standard of Heaven consisting of filiality to God; the second and medium or constant degree was that of the T'u I or norm of the Earth which is filial to Heaven alone; while the third and inferior degree was that of the Jen Hsing³ or Duty of Man whose conduct should be filial alike to his fellow man, Earth, Heaven and God. Herein we see a melioristic conception; it was an upward attitude nobly aspiring each toward the next higher degree which marked their notion of the Cosmos and Man's relationships therein.

Altogether a race of great prudence and tranquil thought, the Chinese saints and sages of antiquity offered up their intellectual treasures in the simple faith that they were conceived in moral truth and could not but be sought by the courageous and received by the humble. They seemed to know that the aspiring and inquisitive spirit of man can always give hospitable ear to any tongue which speaks nobly and intelligibly. It was accordingly their own peculiar merit to have laid the lasting foundation for a national heritage of literary skill, ethical latitude, religious exaltation and philosophical depth which has seldom been surpassed for semi-universality and length of duration, especially when we acknowledge the difficulties of language under which the ancient sages must surely have labored. Thus we can doubly appreciate the meritorious endeavors of those remote times when the Yellow Emperor composed his Canon of Inner Life;⁴ when the Great Yü gave his moral injunctions to the

³ These are often called San-hsiao shang t'ien-ching chung t'u-i hsia jen-hsing, literally meaning "Triune filiality: first, Heaven standard; second, Earth norm; third, Man's conduct."

⁴ This work, as published in 1893 at Shanghai, is in three volumes containing 81 Discourses, some of them treating of the heavenly endowments of remote antiquity (1), life, spirit, reason and heaven (God) 3, the Yin and Yang elements (5-7), the five treasures (virtues) make life complete (10), perverse laws disregard harmony (12), blood and spirit, body and purpose (24), general discussion of purity and truth (28), taming the shrew (34), arguments explained (49), errors examined (63), 5 cardinal virtues (70).

people;⁵ when Wen Wang and Duke Chou developed their mathematical analysis of Nature;⁶ when the Viscount of Chi composed his "Great Pattern"⁷ for rulers and thinkers to adopt; and when Lao Tzu and Confucius were setting forth the fundamental principles of reality and conduct.⁸

It is the usual thing in practical research for philosophical sinologists to draw a line between those thinkers who are popularly looked up to as moralists and those who for the most part are cherished for having patronized and developed the Yih hypothesis; between those who have made efforts to popularize the notion of Man's divine heritage and relationship, and those who have sought to criticize and purify this notion in an inquiry into its actual rationale and possible sublimation. To a sensible degree this is the proper thing to do; but it is not the primary thing to do. We should first distinguish between those who take Reality, both human and divine, to be independent of what we think about it, and those who try either morally or scientifically to make Reality subject to "the vanity of human wishes". Illustrative of this distinction mention might be made of Yü, Chi, Lao Tzu, and Yang Chu as representing the former while Wen Wang, Confucius, Mencius and Chou Tun-I are found implicitly holding to the latter.

On the one hand, and apart from the empirical application, the argument is that all things have a root and branch, that is they have an essential causal nature as well as an actual manifest structure, and that the proper inquiry into the nature of things has nothing to do with the secondary inquiry into their structure, relationships, or manifestive effects. Wisdom and tranquillity then may be obtained not by means of the latter, but by means of the former. On the other hand the argument is that any such inquiry as the former is a vain and idle pursuit, that such a goal is unknowable and unattainable except to the degree that we can reach practical certitude by means of observational methods and ceremonial practices. Together with a sufficient faith in their adequacy we can be happy,

⁵ These injunctions have been lost, but mention of them is made on a stone tablet set up in Yü's honor on Mt. Lou, E. Hunan.

⁶ These two men gave great impetus and elaboration to the method of calculating natural phenomena with abstract symbols called Kwa.

⁷ The Hung Fan seems to be also an esoteric document which embraces the substance of Yü's advice on government as well as what were then the latest developments of the Yih calculus.

⁸ The favorite terms for these principles were, for Lao Tzu, Tao and Teh, but for Confucius they were T'ien and Li.

and knowing how to hold ourselves within the bounds of the empirical constitutes true wisdom.⁹

Thus there may be found a division of the ancient thinkers of China into two sorts of viewpoint and method, the mystic philosophers and the scientific religionists. Thus also we have reasonable grounds for judging their intelligence, their faith-energy and their moral fibre; and will not, like many native scholars, require to make a list of those who were or were not orthodox. In this way for instance there would be no need for questions of this or that sort of orthodoxy so long as we find that the Yellow Emperor really canonized the Inner Life, that Duke Chou's occult calculus was the true touchstone of the Cosmos, that Lao Tzu really sought for reason and virtue, that Mencius really lived to further introduce and secure the Confucian teachings in the hearts of the people, that Mo Ti had a real altruism in his daily practice, or that Yang Hsiung actually taught self-cultivation and by his own example showed people how to dwell in the hermit's hut contented with the ecstasy of righteousness and meditation.

These and many other similar points stand eloquently advising how Western Philosophy may qualifiedly look to the Chinese for some very keen discernments of the "goodness of Reality and the beauty of Truth";¹⁰ some notes of criticism not far below those of Kant or Maimon; and not a few remarks quite as keen as those of Croce or Bertrand Russell on our own smug notions of what is at the bottom of real wisdom, just and honorable conduct. The Chinese have produced a vast fund of documentary evidence showing many anticipations of western culture, and it is a known fact that they long antedated our discovery of paper, printing, indelible ink, the compass, thread-twisting and silk-weaving machinery. All they lacked, it might further be said, was the genius for perfecting and simplifying their inventions; but this they have left for western brains and capital to do. However, in the matter of ethical and governmental advice, mystic speculation, religious fealty, and even in a fairly thorough lexicography their literature abounds. All these subjects usually find a conjoint harmony in the Chinese

⁹ One of the constant refrains which is figuratively followed throughout the *Shih Ching* or *Book of Odes*. The first half of the Chou period, i. e., from 1122 to 600 B. C., was the golden age of Chinese poetry, being now often called *Shih Shih* or period of *Odes*. A large part of the philosophers' war on man-made theism, after Confucius' time, was in opposition to the anthropomorphic *Odes*.

¹⁰ One of Hsün Tzu's phrases. Cp. my article, *Open Court*, June, '21.

philosopher's way of conceiving the world, and we can only assume that it is because of their ingrained conservatism if anything new is considered heterodox to their racial traditions. This conservatism, as regards philosophical matters, was given a sturdy foundation by Confucius and was further driven into the popular oriental mind by the Mencean commentaries on the Confucian Canon. It served then the direct opposite to what such thinkers as Wen Wang, Lao Tzu, Chuang Tzu, Yang Chu, Hsün K'uang, Yang Hsiung and Wang Ch'ung were trying to establish: namely, that the world is of a structure and nature apart from human measures and analogies; that it is alive with growth, intelligence, power and spiritual possibilities not limited to or by any stretch of the human imagination. The latter viewpoint, therefore, would appear to us of the Twentieth Century to be the real orthodoxy because it was not of an absolutist or anthropomorphic outlook, and hence was able to let the Universe be itself, free and unlimited, secure from human meddling and independent of what is too often a dictatorial and rationalizing intellect.

Surely it was this purer manner of philosophizing which enabled Lao Tzu to propound his strange paradoxes of thought and conduct; Chuang Tzu to argue that possibly he was a butterfly dreaming he was a man; Yang Chu to believe in the ethical validity of true egoism and separateness; Hsün K'uang to show why it is that although God has made the universe beautiful and benevolent, He made man more often ugly and selfish; Yang Hsiung to say that even though both ruin and self-preservation are more primordial than prosperity, yet we can follow out the path of life rejoicing in heavenly guidance and living under the glory of divine protection. Wang Ch'ung, we may well suppose, also had this sense of the independence and plurality of things, else he would hardly have made his philosophy consist of theories of such a miscellaneous domain as he measures in his *Critical Essays*.¹¹ And as we might further note, who could say that Ma Jung¹² of Mou Ling was not orthodox merely because he departed from the ancestral conservatism enough to invent the use of commentary notes arranged with smaller type in double columns; or that the Twelfth Century poet Kao Ssu Sun committed a religious crime when, through an historical knowledge

¹¹ Called in Chinese, *Lun Heng*, translated by Anton Forke, formerly professor of Chinese at the University of California. (2 vols., Berlin, 1911).

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¹² Lived about 79-166 A. D. and was also called T'ung Ju, or the Universal Scholar.

of Ma Jung's invention, he was able to prove the so-called book of Lieh Tzu a spurious document? K'ang Kao and K'ang Hou commented critically and often adversely on the Confucian Canon, but are they to be considered any less justified than Chu Fu Tzu, the Aristotle of them all? Chu, for various talents and services, enjoys a great native reputation as an astute scholar, and a foreign one too, to a degree, through his "Lesser Learning", a work originally intended for the young. But should we not add that his reputation as a philosopher suffered materially when, in 1745, Wang Pu Ch'ing published that monument of constructive analysis entitled "The Four Books, Chu Tzu, and the Original Commentaries".¹³ The spirit of the age apparently has much to do with whether or not a certain philosopher is a heretic, or his books burned and his teachings proscribed.

Thus at the present time it is the popular custom to look more leniently on the notions of such oldtime targets of rabid criticism as Han Wen Kung, Wang An Shih, and even of those old rivals of Mencius, Yang Chu and Mo Ti. It might hereby seem reasonable to say that even the worst of us will some day be vindicated, and that some benevolent philosopher of a future age will champion our cause with the amiable power of a new logic. Our knowledge of Epicurus and Schopenhauer wins from us a sympathy for Yang Chu. The conception Comte has given us regarding the Religion of Humanity settles our differences with Mo Ti. And the literary nationalism and socialistic democracy which are current topics of modern belief and discussion may be said to minimize the shock we might otherwise receive at being informed of the anti-Buddhist exhortations of Han Yu or the radical governmental irreverence of the Peaceful Rock Prince.

It is not always easy to trace the development of anything in China; and especially is this difficulty noticeable when we attempt a survey of the religious ideas and philosophical methods which have so effectively aroused the Chinese mind to achieve its long chronicle of devotion and speculation. However, we can mention a few of the leading conceptions and viewpoints, analyses and criticisms which have held the interest of educated Chinese for the last fifty centuries. Among these various points of interest, divided more or less uncertainly into speculative and ethical groups, and represented more or less in gradual chronological order as developed by

¹³ 四書朱子本義匯參

the numerous saints and sages, may be mentioned conceptions such as were represented by such terms as T'ien (Heaven, meaning both the divine realm and the astronomical universe), Tao (the undeviating Way and Principle of all existence), Ti (the Earth as immediate Mother of Life as we know it), Jen (Mankind), Shang-ti (the Lord Supreme over all these various realms), Yih, the mathematical calculus of universal evolution), Li (the rationalia of things), and Teh (Virtue or the power of individual character over circumstance).

There are two expressions of faith which have been held inviolable ever since the pre-Confucian days when the Yih philosophy was the mystic sesame of life and government was administered as a divine dispensation. These are the two venerable symbolic maxims of Chinese Masonry: one announcing cryptically that "In the Beginning there was the Way, the Compasses and the Square",¹⁴ and the other enumerating "Heaven, Earth, Ruler, Parents and Teachers as the five sorts of Reverence".¹⁵ There are three other mystic symbols known only by oral communication by the Upper Five composing the inner council of the Triad Society. They are known popularly as being represented at the esoteric Taoist festivals of the Three Great Primordial Powers,¹⁶ the greater, middle, and lesser ceremonies being held for the last two thousand years on the 15th of the first, seventh, and tenth moons, respectively. Their first arrangement and practice took place in the Taoist monasteries grouped around the foot of Lo's Floating Mountain near Canton

元始有道有規有矩 ¹⁴ Yüan shih yu Tao, yu Kuei, yu Chü. Tao is not only the Divine Reason, it is the *way of life*. Compasses are used to draw circles and spheres, hence Kuei is a symbol of Heaven; while the Square for lines and angular measurement is a symbol for Earth.

天地君親師五敬 ¹⁵ T'ien Ti Chün Chin Shih, Wu Ching. These five are said to constitute the full religious duty of man.

上中下三元 ¹⁶ Shang Chung Hsia, San Yüan. The first is the Feast of Lanterns celebrating God, Heaven and paternal devotion; the second is the Feast of Departed Spirits celebrating Earth, Water, Fire, Motherhood and Culinary Arts; while the third is the Feast of Food and Drink, a sort of thanksgiving for abundant crops, man's work and secular affairs. With the Buddhists the second is a sort of All Souls' Day when hungry ghosts are fed; while with the Taoists it is also called Burning Clothes because all the old clothes of the deceased are gathered up and burned at a public fire lasting three days. In either case the miserable condition of the departed is supposed to be alleviated.

which were supposed to have been founded by Lao Tzu's successor Fou Chiu Kung, and the third century saint, An Chi Sheng.¹⁷

Chinese religious faith is a matter of very simple devotion but extremely complex and often confused as to the divinities which are recipients of that devotion. Their pantheon is as crowded with both male and female divinities as is their literature with legends¹⁸ of how they came by such divine nature. There are gods and goddesses of almost everything under the sun: gods of Nature, agriculture, literature, war, luck, retribution; and goddesses of mercy, house-keeping, beauty, and sericulture. Even St. George and the Dragon¹⁹ are claimed to have had their original combat on Chinese soil. But throughout all the vast forest of legend and superstition the saints and sages of Ancient China still managed to follow the blazed trail of rational thought, trusting with unfathomed devotion that the light of Shang-ti would now and then shine through, enlightening the path of human wisdom and virtue.

II:—FU HSI to LAO TZU. (2850-520 BC.)

The two milleniums covered by this period were almost totally given up to the pioneering efforts of civilization and political organization, and are now commonly represented by the nine wise men of antiquity, viz.: Fu Hsi, Yellow Emperor, Yao and Shun, the Great Yü, Wen Wang, Duke Chou, the Viscount of Chi, and Lao Tzu.²⁰ Early tradition claims that Fu Hsi was born to his mother by the miraculous inspiration of Heaven (Possibly a comet) after a twelve years' period of gestation. But letting this be as it may, he

¹⁷ Many legends and miracles center around this famous patriarch. One account in the *Chronicle of Exalted Scholars* (Kao Shih Ch'uan) says that he was an itinerant apothecary and magician who lived a thousand years and wandered along the shores of the Eastern Sea where he one day met the First Emperor to whom he explained the occult Tao and promised another meeting in the Isles of the Genii—a fabulous Utopia for which the mystics have been searching ever since.

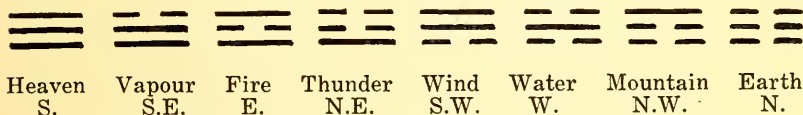
¹⁸ Among the numerous collections of travels and legends bearing on mysteries, supernatural beings, apotheoses, etc., may be mentioned: Wu Shu's *Liao Chai Chi I* (tenth century), greatly enlarged and rearranged by P'u Sung Ling (1710); Kuo Po's "Green Satchel Treatise" (276-324) on Taoism, alchemy, miracles; and the work referred to in the next note. See also note 59.

¹⁹ The first account in Chinese literature of this almost universal legend appears in the *Sou Shen Chi*—Researches into the Nature of the Gods, supposed to have been written by Kan Pao of the Chin dynasty, i. e., sometime between 265 and 419 A. D.

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九師伏羲堯舜
禹文周箕老

subsequently became, as a successor to the primordial divine beings, the first ruler over the temporal empire, founder of the Chinese social polity, innovator of the peculiarly human custom of cooking food, and is also credited with the invention of various agricultural and musical instruments. To further encourage his efforts toward raising humanity up from savagery, legend has it that Heaven caused a supernatural being, the dragon-horse, to appear in the world, one day rising out of the waters of the Yellow River and on its back presenting to Fu a diagram of the eight Kwa.²¹ These Kwa were the eight possible groups in series of three of the Yang and Yin symbols,²² and were used by Fu to philosophize about the numerous aspects and changes of physical Nature. These dual symbols, originally called Liang I, meaning the two essential powers of Nature, (Heaven and Earth, Sun and Moon, Male and Female) and often pictured as a sigmatically divided circle of White and Black with a germ of evolution in each side, were later on made to include the supplementary power of Man, and were therefore called San I. The word Kwa is the literary designation of each of these groups, but in their diagrammatic combinations they are represented by full and broken lines, thus:



They are here given in their original order as produced by the dragon-horse in an octagonal design, and are said to indicate respectively: Strength, Pleasure, Brightness, Mobility, Penetration, Danger, Rest; and Docility. Thence according to the various combinations allowed by changing and regrouping the Yang and Yin elements of the Kwa, it was possible to account for the existence of all things, their nature, uses, and ultimate fate in the cosmic game. From this early start was soon derived the many methods of abstract calculation, which are now grouped together into the intricate science or system of cosmogonic permutation as developed in the

²¹ 八卦

²² Yang and Yin as symbols in diagrams are written as full and broken lines respectively. In trigrams three Yang and Yin elements are used in proportions of 3-0, 2-1, 1-2, or 0-3. In hexagrams six are used, squaring the possibilities of the trigram formations thence making 64 different combinations.

Yih King and the writings of its vague but industriously inventive commentators.²³

One of the foremost of these early commentators was Wen Wang, posthumously known as Hsi Pei, Chief of the West. Having been imprisoned in 1143 B. C. by the cruel Chou Hsin, last ruler of the Shang Dynasty, Wen Wang found great consolation in his mystic interpretation of Fu Hsi's magical Kwa, not resting content in holding to Fu's symmetrical diagrams, but gave them an irregular order so as to more faithfully represent the actual conditions of universal life and mobility of form. In this he was aided by the enthusiastic genius of Yu Hsiung and Duke Chou;²⁴ the result was that another permutation was added, producing 64 diagrams arranged as a larger octagon of two rows on each side. The inner row was called Chen, meaning pure, high-principled, and applied to divination; while the outer row was called Hui, meaning to repent, and applied to the calculation of effects. These abstruse diagrams are given an even more esoteric interpretation in the "Chou Tz'u or similar argument" of the 17th century mathematical poet Pan Lei, who appends metrical blank verse notes of different (but significant) lengths under each diagram.

A slightly younger contemporary of Wen Wang was the Viscount of Chi, one of the greatest of the Shang scholars. He was unfortunate in reproving Chou Hsin for his cruelty and debauchery and hence shared the same fate as Wen Wang; but when the latter's eldest son Wu overthrew the Shang Dynasty, Chi Tzu refused to serve under him and was offered a fief in what is now Korea. Before he departed, however, he composed for Wen and Wu's guidance a work called Hung Fan, a "great pattern" of governmental

²³ The octagonal design of the Kwa, both the eight and the sixty-four figure representations, follows the original Ho T'u or Map of the Yellow River which the dragon-horse presented to Fu Hsi. But the designs in square and circular formation follow the development given the Yih philosophy by Wen Wang and Duke Chou who first appended the explanatory notes in seven lines under each hexagram. While the first political applications of Yih symbology were made in Confucian days, it was not until the Sung period that any rational attempt was made to integrate the variable aspects of the Yih diagrams. The first of the Sung scholars to do anything approximating such an achievement was Ts'ai Yüan Ting (c. 1100-1126) who reduced both the Ho T'u and the Lo Shu to a sort of magic square like our old "15 problem of the digits". Others, even more abstruse but less mathematically simple, have been made by Ch'eng I (1033-1107) in a work entitled *Yih Ch'uan*, and Wang Chieh (1724-1805) whose lectures on the subject are called *Yih Shuo*. Cf. note 77.

²⁴ Duke Chou was Wen Wang's fourth son and lived about 1170-1116 B. C.

principles and practices in nine divisions, viz.: (1) on the five physical elements of Nature, (2) on conduct, (3) on the proper objects of government, (4) the division of time, (5) perfect kingship, (6) regal virtues, (7) on divination, (8) astrological verification of facts, and (9) happiness and misery. This rare production of ancient wisdom now constitutes an important part of the Shu King or Canon of Historical Records. Chi Tzu was a believer in speaking only to the point, one of his famous sayings was that "If there is much talk then an inferior sort of instruction is sure to follow".²⁵

Another famous statesman of the Chou Dynasty was Kuan Chung or Kuan I-Wu,²⁶ a minister under Duke Huan of the Ch'i state, whom he aided in crushing the savage tribes on the west and north frontiers. While the Duke was energetic but proud and sensual, Kuan was more sagacious and firm in his decision of policy. And although Confucius has criticized him for lack of propriety and as being small-minded, proud and covetous, we still find that he was popularly regarded as a wise and worthy minister. His fame as a philosopher rests upon a voluminous speculative work, supposed by many to be a forgery by some subsequent admirer, but which seems to be quite universally credited (at least in the principal subject matter) to his hand. This work, simply entitled "Kuan Tzu", was originally a compilation of 389 sections, but after the Burning of the Books only 86 remained, and since then ten more have been lost so that only 76 sections are now extant. The Shanghai edition of 1893, of which I have a copy, gives the titles and short explanatory notes on the ten missing sections. Some of the most important of the other sections deal with physical strength (2), balanced development (3), upright government administration (4), legal distinctions (29), exact expression (34), mystery of mind (36), the four seasons and the five elements (40-41), intelligent laws (46), developing one's person (6), trifling and serious affairs (80-86).

However, the only sage who has enjoyed the fame of being called the real philosophical light of China lived about five centuries after the foundation of the Yih calculus and two generations before the ethical establishment of Confucianism. Strange to say he does not appear to mention anything about the abstruse Nature-lore of Wen Wang's diagrams, nor does he emphasize ancestral worship,

²⁵ 若多談則小教
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but is still looked up to as a most profound and devout thinker. This sage is popularly known as Lao Tzu²⁷ and was keeper of state records at Lo Yang, the capital of the Chou dynasty. Because he was not mentioned specifically by either Confucius or Mencius, and was for the first time only quasi-authoritatively referred to by his great admiring follower, Chuang Tzu, Prof. Giles, the learned English sinologist, has some doubts as to the actual historical existence of Lao Tzu and claims that he at least should not be taken as the individual author of the Tao Teh King, a work on which the whole structure of his fame rests. Nevertheless, we can reasonably agree with King Shu Liu, the native Taoist scholar, writing in the *Monist* for July, 1917, that Lao Tzu must be taken as the founder of the religio-philosophical system called Taoism, if not the author in toto of the work in question, because the whole system is but a development of his cryptic paradoxes. This work then should not as a whole be expressly attributed to the Old Philosopher, but is more likely the subsequent compilation and abstruse simplification of various teachings which started with his original speculations, and which by the time of Chuang Tzu's writing had been put in need of some such fatherly countenance. At least this is the general situation as argued by Ho-Shang Kung, a most exacting scholar of the second century B. C., in the preface to his first edition of the Tao Teh King.

Shen Tzu, an astute and somewhat adverse critic of the ancient mysticism, tells us in his account of primitive jurisprudence that in Huang Ti, the Yellow Emperor (c. 2700 B. C.), from the 61st year of whose reign Chinese historians usually calculate their chronology, Lao Tzu had an early if not mythological predecessor,

老子道德經

²⁷ Is the commonly accepted title of the paradoxical little volume reputed to have been written by the "Old Philosopher" Lao Tzu (c. 604-520? B. C.). One of the favorite native schemes for establishing his actual historical existence is claiming that he once gave an interview to Confucius. Just such an incident as this makes up the very last lines of a work (Shanghai, 1893), called K'ung Tzu Chi Yu—Collected Discussions on Confucius, by the Commissioner of Revenue for Shantung, Sun Huang Yen. Herein it is said: "By imperial order for inspection, the 616th anecdote in the Shen Hsien Ch'uan recites that Confucius was one day reading a book when Lao Tzu saw him and inquiring said: 'What book is this?' Confucius replied: 'It is the Book of Rites; holy men likewise study it.' Lao Tzu then said: 'Holy men are already competent in virtue and propriety. Wherefore then do you study it repeatedly?' Practically every other anecdote extant which purports to cover a meeting between Lao Tzu and Confucius has this tone of haughtiness and mockery which seems quite foreign to the character Western interpreters have given Lao Tzu. However, for the reliability of the Shen Hsien Ch'uan, see note 59.

especially in his doctrine of the Wu Wei²⁸ which was an expression of the all-sufficiency of inaction and non-assertion. And Wang Hsü, the Taoist patriarch of the 4th century B. C., who is popularly known as "the Demon Gorge Philosopher",²⁹ also offers an item of emphasis on Lao Tzu's doctrine or *pas trop gouverneur* (don't govern too much) which was practiced with such rare success by Chi An, the shrewd minister of the warlike Wu Ti of Han.

The ancient Odes³⁰ continually celebrated an anthropomorphic God, no matter to what domain of Nature their devotion was directed; but Lao Tzu makes such a God depend, not only for his power, but even for his very existence, upon Tao: the Way, the Principle of Life, i. e., a conception similar to what we call Evolution. Thence it was that Tao, like the evolutionary method which Nature follows in her efforts to perfect things or like a hollow vessel which is free of all self-sufficiency, performs the functions and duties natural to it with no conscious effort or motive. Tao is pure spontaneity; its essence is expression and its only law is rectitude. Thence it is that a man devout with Tao and living after its unworldly example, has virtue, does good wherever he is, and therefore has happiness and long life.

The following are a few points of distinction in Lao Tzu's

²⁸ See the delightful interpretation in Henri Borel's little volume "Lao Tzu's Tao and Wu Wei" (1920).

²⁹ Kuei Ku Tzu, during the time of the Warring States (460-220 B. C.), lived in retirement in Demon Gorge, a hermitage in the district of Ying Ch'uan, in the Wei state or what is the northern part of modern Honan. His only extant writings have been published (1893) as a short treatise in twelve sections and a supplement on magic, cosmology, alchemy and the seven arts. He probably also specialized in political advice, as we learn that his school was the center from which several of his pupils, called Yu Shuo Chih Shih or Peripatetic Politicians, journeyed to the surrounding states offering their services to the various rival princes. Two of the most famous of these pupils were Su Ch'in who was largely instrumental in joining the Six States, and Chang I who served the Ch'in state against the latter confederation, finally conquering them all. One of Kuei Ku Tzu's vague postulates was that "Altho we now live in a world of light, its origin was obscure (in darkness); altho Tao began in Chaos, Chaos gave birth to the visible universe."

³⁰ Most all the Odes are really secular events or incidents in someone's personal experience which are put in anagoge and given a religious significance thru the metonymy of mystic conception. Thus when God wines and dines his guests, it signifies Divine Grace and Hospitality; when He takes sides in a battle, it means that the one who wins was right more often than that the one who was right wins; Hou Chi's parthenogenesis signifies spiritual purity; Pan Ku's humorously man-like cosmogony means absolute human dependence upon Nature; and the width of the Ho river or the distance of Mt. Sung are simply moral difficulties.

conception of Evolution and Virtue, and are numbered according to the order provided both in Dr. Carus' English translation (1909) and the new Chinese edition (1893). The latter also contains an appendix consisting of a "standard pronunciation and interpretation" which I have made use of for verification:

Tao is the first ancestor of the Universe and apparently is a predecessor to the Lord Shang himself (chap. 4); T'ien or Heaven grows and endures, and the Earth is everlasting (7); the high beneficence of Heaven (81) may be known to the good man (79) whence the sage will assist Heaven in this, not by asserting his own will (64), but by keeping his self-control (66) and attending dutifully to his ethical obligations (74 and 79). Tao then, as the Godly Reason of the Cosmos, is free of all humanistic finite measurements, and is in fact the acme of all that is non-human (77). But by means of the spiritual nature of man he may imagine or name it, and to a practical degree judge of the divine power that is its standard (25). Thence, by holding to the profound wisdom and simple devotion of the good men of old, a holy proximity to Tao may be attained and its practical example followed (14-15); and this, with the inspiration of Heaven, is living according to Nature, it is the return to one's origin, the great Mother of all existence (51-52).

Thus we might say that Lao Tzu's philosophy was a primitive mystic naturalism, more metaphysical and paradoxical than that of Huang Ti and far less romantic in literary alchemy than that of his great successor Chuang Tzu. He bluntly emphasized the untenability of local analogies and temporal attributes as arguing any specific human character to the Deity. He urged instead that we attain to the divine more by way of renunciation, self-restraint, and charity of the silent heart, than by the strenuous bribery of worldly effort, material ceremonies, and expectations of post-mundane reward. Few people know the *way* to accomplish or preserve this rare achievement, for the truly sage and holy men wear hemp clothes but in their hearts may be found jewels. Their polish is not external but their spiritual splendor shines through high thought and simple living. It is all the result of Reason and Virtue, and with Lao Tzu (even if he did not measure up to its high ideals in practice) it was the logical development of his primary conception of Wu Wei,³¹ the non-assertion of self, the restraint of personal desire.

³¹

The Wu Ki spoken of in chapter 28 refers to the non-finite terms by which Heaven shelters its own. It is the absolute non-human sphere which protects and exemplifies, but is in no wise personal or worldly. In this sense it is correlative instead of synonymous with the Infinite which is Tao. The esoteric aspects of this conception, with a somewhat forced bolster from the Yih speculations, is given in a recent treatise by Zeikwas J. Boyle entitled *The Fundamental Principles of the Yih King Tao* (1921). But a simpler and more profitable survey of the ethical counsel of Lao Tzu's book comes down to us from the early part of the third century A. D., when Yü Fan, while banished to Chiao Chou during the last ten years of his life, composed the popular work entitled *Lao Tzu Ming Yu*.³² I have a copy of an ornate tuitzu or wall-motto bearing one of Yü Fan's quotations from the *Tao Teh King*.

虞翻老子命語 ³² Yu Fan, c. 164-233 A. D., was a native of Chekiang, having some measure, it is said, of royal blood in his veins.

(To be Continued.)