SYMPOSIUM

ON

CHINESE CULTURE

EDITED BY

SOPHIA H. CHEN ZEN

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PREFACE

RECENT publications on China have dwelt so much on her political and economic struggles that people interested in the Far East could think of China in no other terms than political upheavals and industrial revolutions. While these are important phases of actual progress, it is unfortunate that the steady and silent advance of the more fundamental aspects of China's national life have escaped attention. For after all, these forces which are less noticeable are of more far-reaching consequence than events which make better headlines in newspapers and feature articles in magazines.

It is to fill this gap in the literature on China that the China Council is publishing the present volume, under the able editorship of Mrs. Sophia Chen Zen. Mrs. Zen's interest is largely in the field of education and culture, and from that angle she has been able to present some of the most significant changes which China has gone through. Most of the articles deal with present day China and yet they never fail to give the historical background for the modern movements. While much space is devoted to recent developments, the underlying motive is not so much to describe these phenomena as to bring out the changing spirit that actuates every phase of China's life at the moment. Here lies the intrinsic value of this symposium.

With the collaboration of a group of recognized authorities in their fields, Mrs. Zen has succeeded remarkably in presenting China at her best, by acquainting her readers with facts and actual achievements which defy refutation. For the result, she deserves great credit, and the China Council owes her a debt of gratitude for having taken the responsibility for planning the book, and congratulates her for her success in securing the manuscripts from men who are not easily persuaded to write.

L. T. CHEN,

Executive Secretary,
China Institute of Pacific Relations.

EDITORIAL FOREWORD

THIS humble collection of cultural papers owes its origin to the Round Table Discussions at the Kyoto Conference of the Institute of Pacific Relations in 1929. Three days were devoted to discussions on cultural subjects during a conference of eleven days, a most generous allotment. But unfortunately very few data, especially with relation to Chinese culture, were available as a scientific basis of study. Some of my fellow delegates felt that something must be done in order to insure a more fruitful discussion of this topic at the Conference of 1931. The result was the decision to prepare a symposium on Chinese culture, and to me has befallen, by chance, the privilege of editing this highly interesting piece of work.

It has not been my intention, nor that of the authors of this book, to present a history of Chinese culture. That would be too ambitious a project for this little book to carry out. The object of the present volume is to present to its readers a graphic picture of the contemporary culture in China, with emphasis upon its changing phases. But in some cases, an introductory account of the historical background has been deemed necessary for a better understanding of the situation under consideration, and some of the authors have even preferred to take the historical aspect of their respective topics as the central point of discussion.

Though unity of central motive for this symposium has been emphasized, yet it would not have been polite nor wise for the editor to ask for any uniformity either of opinion or of style from the honorable authors, whose opinions individually or collectively carry great weight in the intellectual world of China.

Topics of political and economic nature such as the investment of foreign capital, migration, development of China's natural resources, and similar questions, have been deliberately

omitted in this book, because they have always been given a most prominent place elsewhere in the agenda of the conferences in the past, and no doubt will still be in the coming one at Hangchow.

The valuable co-operation of the writers of this symposium is greatly appreciated by the editor, especially in the case of Miss Tseng, who wrote her article on women during the communistic uprising in Changsha where her school was situated. The editor also wishes to mention her special thanks to Miss Lucy Knox and Miss Helen Chapin for the reading of the proofs and of some of the manuscripts; to Dr. Y. R. Chao for transliterating all the proper names into the Wade system; and to Dr. V. K. Ting, Dr. Hu Shih, and Mr. H. C. Zen for valuable suggestions and advice in general.

SOPHIA H. CHEN ZEN.

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CHAPTER I

HOW CHINA ACQUIRED HER CIVILIZATION

By V. K. TING

The Confucianist version of Chinese history, with its uncritical acceptance of the legends and its fanatical belief in the Golden Age as represented by feudalism and semi-communal holding of land, is as untrue as the Brahman version of Indian history before it was overthrown by scientific archæology. The European diplomatic officials and missionaries who began to study Chinese history in the middle of the last century found this version not unacceptable, for, coming to the Far East at a time when European expansion was making its vigorous beginning, drunken with the first fruit of the industrial revolution at home, they found in the idea of a retrogressive China as expounded by the Chinese themselves a justification of their own work and a flattering proof of the superiority of their own "progressive" civilization. Thus there has sprung up in the West a wide-spread tradition that Chinese civilization reached its zenith several thousand years ago, and has been decaying or at least stationary ever since. Again, the strong resistance offered by the Chinese against the traders and the missionaries produced the impression that the Chinese were ultra-conservatives and had always been immune from cultural influence from without. No doubt modern sinologists are more sophisticated, for historical science has now a different standard in their own countries, but the old tradition dies hard, and to this day, to many Westerners, Chinese civilization is merely another Egypt or Mesopotamia; only for reasons unexplained, its death has been particularly lingering. Even the learned Professor Granet entitles his last book on ancient China *La Civilisation Chinoise*, unconsciously suggesting that the period covered by his book, namely, that prior to 87 B.C., constitutes the sum total of Chinese civilization.

As a matter of fact, nothing is farther from historical truth. Modern archæology has proved the existence of a late neolithic age in China proper which was ancestral to the bronze age. Excavation at Anyang in North Honan has shown that the culture of the Yin or Shang dynasty was different in many important respects from that of the Chou. Textual criticism

of the classics and comparative study of all the available ancient texts including the oracle bone and the bronze inscriptions begin to enable us to determine the authenticity of the Confucianist traditions, and to establish a comparative chronology of their origin. Everything points to the fact that classical Chinese civilization was of slow but continual growth which did not stop in the subsequent periods in spite of civil wars and foreign invasions. For applying the same critical method to the study of all historical material, we can readily trace the different stages through which mediæval and modern China were evolved, each stage being characterized by its political and social institutions, mental outlook, and material achievements. Nor can China be regarded as more conservative than the civilizations that were her contemporaries, for we find that during the last 4,000 years Chinese civilization repeatedly came under foreign influence whenever sufficient contact was made with cultures that had anything worth while to offer. Only most of the cultural elements thus adopted were so Sinianised in character that superficial examination often fails to reveal their origin. It is the purpose of this paper to summarize very briefly the results of recent research which will prove beyond question the correctness of the above conclusions.

CHINESE CIVILIZATION COMPARATIVELY RECENT IN ORIGIN

To begin with, Chinese civilization began at a much later date than it has been supposed. We know now that most of the legendary emperors originated in writings posterior to the 4th century B.C.[1] We need therefore only occupy ourselves with the Three Dynasties. But not only the two chapters in the "authentic" part of *Shuking* (書經) attributed to the Hsia dynasty are now generally considered to date after the 4th century B.C.,[2] but even the chapters attributed to the Shang dynasty in the *Shuking* and *Sheking* (詩經) are regarded by the best Chinese scholars as having originated in the feudal dukedom of Sung, *i.e.*, posterior to 770 B.C.,[3] The inscribed oracle bones discovered at Anyang in North Honan however, supply us with authentic material about the Shang dynasty, and the available evidence indicates that the list of kings of Shang as given in *Shihchi* (史記) is substantially correct.[4] As a similar list of kings of Hsia is also given in the same book, the probabilities are that it represents something more than a mythical tradition. In fact we need not doubt the existence of the Hsia dynasty, as the term Hsia was used as a general name of the

Chinese before the formation of the Empire of Ch'in, just as the term Han was similarly used in subsequent periods. Beyond this we know nothing whatsoever of this dynasty.

It is a significant fact that, out of the thousands of authentic ancient bronzes found during the last 1,200 years, not a single piece can be attributed to the Hsia. The highly developed bronze art of the Shang seems to have no ancestral forms in China. There is also some evidence in supposing that chariot warfare was first introduced by the Shang.[5] The archaic character of the inscriptions on the oracle bones and the survival in the cultural remains at Anyang of the polychrome pottery,[6] so characteristic of the chalcolithic culture of Yangshao, discovered by J. G. Andersson in Honan, Kansu and Mukden,[7] all tend to indicate that the Chinese bronze age began with the Shang and that the preceeding dynasty was still in the chalcolithic, *i.e.*, that of Yangshao. If these conclusions are not far from the truth, then the bronze age in China began not earlier than 1700 B.C., which date is some 2,000 years later than either that of Sumeria or Egypt.

Iron was mentioned in *Yükung* (禹貢), *Kuantzu* (管子), *Mencius and Tsochuan* (左傳), but as the two first named books are not definitely dated, we must gather our evidence from the last two only. Tsochuan mentions that in the year 513 B.C., two officials of Chin levied 480 catties of iron to cast a tripod on which was inscribed the criminal code. For iron, 480 catties cannot be considered as a large amount, and the fact that not only the material used, but also the amount levied was expressly mentioned indicates that the material was still rare. Mencius mentions iron as being used for ploughing. Probably steel weapons came into fashion about the same time, but bronze weapons survived right down to the Han dynasty. We may therefore date the introduction of iron into China not much earlier than the 6th century B.C., which date is several hundred years later than the beginning of the iron age in Egypt or Mesopotamia, and perhaps more than a thousand years later than that in India.

CHINESE CIVILIZATION OF GRADUAL BUT CONTINUOUS GROWTH

It is clear therefore that early Chinese civilization was of very gradual growth. This is in fact true of every aspect of Chinese civilization throughout all ages. The kings of the Three Dynasties were true priest-kings, functioning at the same time as the head of the ruling clan which monopolized

all political offices. From the 4th century B.C., onward the feudal principalities were gradually converted into military states by transferring the political power into the hands of the nobles not belonging to the same clan as their feudal chief. By that time kingship had become far less sacred. When the first Empire of Ch'in was formed in 221 B.C., the Emperor still had theocratic functions, but the relation of the clan to the state was entirely changed, and the old feudal nobility disappeared together with the Contending States. The plebeian origin of the Han emphasised still more the earthly character of the Emperor, but throughout the Han dynasty religion and politics continued to be intimately connected. The barbarian occupation of Northern China from the 3rd century A.D. to the end of the 5th and the increasing influence of Buddhism no doubt helped to secularize the imperial office, so that from the T'ang dynasty onward, although the Emperor remained as "the Son of Heaven," its character became totally different from the original sense of the term.

The land tenure, the selection of the governing officials and the organization of the army underwent parallel development. Before 359 B.C., when the state of Ch'in converted the rigid system of semi-communal farming into individual holding, the peasants were serfs of their feudal lords. With the formation of the first Empire, the free holding system came to stay in spite of the repeated attempts of "equalization," but the peasants were still liable to both civil labour and military service, and the land was, nominally at least, still the property of the state. It was in the beginning of the T'ang dynasty when private ownership was finally established. In the year A.D. 623, a system of taxation was inaugurated whereby the annual compulsory service of twenty days was commuted to a tax in silk, and with the establishment of a mercenary standing army in A.D. 722 the population became free from military conscription and nearly so from forced labour.[8] This gradual conversion of the cultivators of land from serfdom to citizenship is a fact of the greatest importance. Thanks to this, Chinese civilization was not built on slavery, which was confined only to domestic service, and very gradually disappeared in the 19th century.

The selection of the ruling officials underwent a similar evolution. Before the 7th century B.C., the hereditary offices were occupied exclusively by the members of the same clan as the ruling king or feudal prince. Then in some of the states the feudal lords began to select men from outside their own

clan as their advisers, but the choice was still limited to the nobility. Even during the time of the Contending States when state office became the prize of the talented, the successful candidates were always descendants of the younger sons of the nobility, as education was then the privilege of the ruling caste. With the formation of the Ch'in Empire in 221 B.C., class distinction became less marked, but the whole administration was so centralized that appointment to offices depended on the Emperor and his bureaucratic officials who were still largely descendants of feudal nobility. The Han dynasty, being plebeian in origin, opened the door of office to all classes, and in 136 B.C., a system of recommendation and examination was inaugurated for the selection of officials. But except for the pupils of the academicians or *Poshih* (博士), examination was rarely carried out, and throughout the Han dynasty appointments were usually made, not by any formal examination, but on the recommendation of the holders of higher offices, who were empowered also to select their own assistants and clerks from among whom such recommendations were usually made.

In the subsequent dynasties the system was even more open to patronage and abuse, for a permanent commissioner was appointed to each district or region to classify candidates into nine classes, purely on the personal opinion of the commissioner. It was said that sons of the influential families were always classed in the higher grade and the plebeians always in the lower. Not until the T'ang dynasty did the system of examinations become obligatory and open to all candidates without favour. But even then it was possible to enter the civil service by first becoming clerks of lower rank, and gradually climbing up the bureaucratic ladder, although the higher offices were reserved for those who had passed state examinations.

Again, after the 9th century the semi-independent military chiefs who monopolized political power in their own districts naturally appointed their own civil servants. In any case no examination was applied to military appointments. This system was continued in the Sung dynasty, but the number of successful candidates was largely increased, and the procedure became more strict, so that practically all the officials in the civil service were chosen by competitive examination. In the Ming dynasty a similar system was organised for the military service. Thus the system of state service examination took more than 1,200 years to become firmly established and perfected in detail.[9]

Chinese currency has a very interesting history. The earliest medium of exchange consisted of cowrie shells.[10] Later on jade and silk were also used.[11] Only silk was a Chinese product. It no doubt formed the most valuable article for export even in the earliest times, but it was too clumsy to be used in small units; hence the cowrie shell was the commonest form of money, and in addition to the real shell, bone imitations of it were current. The use of metals for currency purposes came much later, because China was very poor in precious metals, especially silver. Towards the latter part of the Chou dynasty gold and bronze began to be employed, especially the latter, which from the 6th century B.C., onwards was cast into small knives and shovels, and used as coin.[12] The round "cash" with a square hole was coined by the Ch'in and became the standard form of all subsequent mintage.

With the establishment of the Han dynasty came peace and prosperity, and the problem of a sufficient supply of copper for coinage purposes became a difficult one in all subsequent periods, for the population tended always to increase more rapidly than the imperial mint's output. In 119 B.C., an attempt was made to introduce deer skin as money, but it was unsuccessful. Again in A.D. 807 negotiable certificates were introduced, but soon discontinued. All the time silk, being the most important export article, as well as the form in which much of the tax was collected, was used freely as the medium of exchange. The national budget in the T'ang dynasty was made up in terms of both copper coins and silk pieces. In the year A.D. 815 for example, the National Treasury set aside fifty million pieces of silk for military expenditure alone. When the Sung dynasty came into existence, the national income in silk considerably decreased, probably due to the introduction of cotton which began to replace silk. Much of the tax which used to be collected in silk was now reckoned in silver, which, for the first time, came to be used in China as money. But throughout the 11th century the government's annual income in silver varied between 500,000 to 3,000,000 taels, and from 10 to 20% of this was annually paid to the Kitans and the Tanguts as presents or tributes. In addition 5 to 10% of the silk income was used for the same purpose. So currency famine was the problem of the day. Iron was occasionally tried as a subsidiary coin, but it encouraged illegal mintage.

In the year 970, paper money was issued. For the next four centuries paper became the most extensive currency of the

empire.[13] The currency law promulgated by the first Ming Emperor in 1375 still made paper money legal tender, but the province of Yunnan, which produced silver and copper in considerable quantities, was conquered, and a larger supply of both metals was now available. Silver soon became the universal medium of exchange. From the 16th century onward, trade with Europe supplied silver in great quantities, in exchange for gold which was much cheaper in China, relative to silver, than elsewhere in the world. Paper money therefore was no longer necessary and gradually disappeared.

The evolution of literature and the spread of popular education were also of slow but continual growth. In the Shang dynasty we have only oracle bone records written in a language of the greatest conciseness. In the Chou dynasty the grand scribes began to compose religious hymns and formulate administrative prose. In the time of Confucius the written language was sufficiently developed to express philosophical ideas, but the *Lunyü* (論語), written down one generation after Confucius' death, say the latter part of the 5th century B.C., consisted still of very short dialogues. But less than a century after, *Tsochuan* was written in fluent prose. From that time onward the written language improved both in style and vocabulary. In the Han dynasty it became an effective instrument and compared favorably with the language of Cæsar. But from the 3rd century B.C., to the beginning of the T'ang dynasty the evolution of prose was arrested, probably because of the increasing divergence between the written and the spoken language, caused partly by the barbarian invasion in the north, and the migration of culture bearers into the Yangtze Valley, where the spoken tongue must have been different, and partly also by the versification of prose due to over-development of poetry. In the T'ang dynasty however a reaction set in and classical prose once more resumed its upward development. In the Sung dynasty colloquial expressions began to find their way into the writings of the philosophers, and although its development was very slow, and often arrested in the writings of the literati, the spoken tongue found its natural home in the novel and the drama, which have exerted far greater influence on the general population than the classics, and by means of which, literacy has spread among the mass—a movement continued right down to the present time.

This development of literature was paralleled and conditioned by the inventions of writing materials and printing.

In the Shang and the early Chou dynasties all writing was inscribed on bone or shell, or cast on bronze. The laborious technique naturally made brevity necessary. The more diffuse style of Confucius' time was made possible by the invention of the bamboo pen and ink in the form of lacquer, which could be used to write on wood or bamboo. Soon after, brush and lamp-black ink came into use, and silk was often employed instead of wood, although tradition attributes the invention of the two first named articles to a later date. In the year A.D. 105 paper was invented. Only then was it possible to have anything written down quickly and cheaply. But not until the invention of printing, which came about in the 9th century A.D., could books be placed within reach of the mass. It is no accident that the novel and the popular drama came into existence after the Sung dynasty, since these were at first entirely of plebeian character and could only flourish after the invention of printing.[14]

The history of Chinese porcelain is well known. Most of the Han dynasty wares known to us are low temperature potteries without glaze. Towards the end of that dynasty harder stoneware began to be made. Some of the thin stoneware had a greenish soft glaze.[15] In the T'ang dynasty glazed ware became the rule, and the glaze was of various colours, although it was still a low temperature lead silicate. Towards the beginning of the 9th century true porcelain with high temperature felspathic glaze was made, but it was comparatively rare. It was in the Sung dynasty that true porcelain became common, as evidenced by the beautiful products of the Tingyao (定窯). But most of these are white or monochrome and the colour was always in the glaze. Underglaze blue design was first found in the wares of the Ming, when true porcelain practically replaced all other wares. But here again, polychrome designs in enamel, formed by metallic oxides put over the glaze, were probably unknown. This latter method came into use in the 17th century and culminated in the middle of the 18th. Thus again it took more than a thousand years to perfect this art.[16]

In fact the same process is to be seen in every aspect of Chinese civilization. In the production of clothing, food, and shelter, slow but steady progress can be clearly traced. Silk dates from the chalcolithic age,[17] but it was always expensive, and the common people had to depend on hemp and skin until the introduction of cotton from India in the 8th century A.D.