

A HISTORY OF CHINESE CULTURE

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PREFACE

So far as I know, this may be the first history of Chinese culture to be written in English and published in China. There is a crying need for such a book, which is intended for Chinese students of English, who should be able to talk and write about Chinese culture in the context of international exchanges, and for foreign students of Chinese, to whom a background knowledge of Chinese culture is essential for proficiency in the Chinese language. It is obvious that culture and its primary bearer, language, are inseparable.

Any developed culture consists of four parts or layers:

1. Social productive forces, productive and non-productive skills;
2. Relations of production, social, political and religious institutions;
3. Tangible results of mental creation, dance, architecture, arts and literature;
4. Intangible results of mental creation; music, mythology, religion, logic, philosophy, values and conventional ideas.

But as is commonly done, this book concentrates on philosophy, institutions, literature and arts, and touches on other aspects which may interest foreigners most. This will be understood and excused, since Chinese culture is a vast subject, and what a volume of small scope can do is limited.

It has long been my wish to promote international knowledge of Chinese culture, so I congratulate the authors on their

effort. It is hoped that suggestions and criticisms from the users of this book will help improve it in its future revised editions.

Qiu Ke'an
Beijing
July 1993

AUTHORS' FOREWORD

This, as far as we know, is the first book on Chinese cultural history compiled in English by Chinese compilers.

Chinese culture, long in history, varied in form and rich in content, has remained one of the most original, ingenious, and vital traditions among all civilizations. The best testimony to this is found not only in its miraculous continuity and unremitting enrichment throughout Chinese history, in its observable influence on the cultures of Japan, Korea, Vietnam, and other Asian countries, but also in the wide interest it has aroused in the past decades throughout the whole world.

For quite a long time, and especially in recent years, Chinese culture has been a topic of keen interest to some Western scholars who endeavour to seek the quintessence of the teachings of ancient oriental sages such as Lao Zi, Kong Zi and Meng Zi in an attempt to discover the reasons for the successes of Chinese culture. Many enterprises in Asian countries apply the tenets of ancient Chinese sages to the management of their companies, which proves impressively effective; and Western businesses are also alert to some of these trends. So scholars and students of quite large numbers successively come to China for cultural pursuits. Chinese culture is gaining worldwide acceptance.

In sharp contrast to foreigners' enthusiasm for Chinese culture, the Chinese studies of their own culture, especially its introduction and dissemination to other countries, obviously lack zeal and vitality. Even quite a number of Chinese visiting scholars to foreign countries, when consulted about Chinese cultural issues, do not know how to express themselves in English. Many university students of English, upon graduation, do not know

how to say very essential terms such as 儒学, 经学, 《论语》, 《三国演义》 in English. What is more, Chinese culture was recommended years ago as one of the necessary courses for English majors by the State Education Commission of China, but has not been adopted so far in most universities because of the lack of a proper textbook.

This book has been written to answer these needs. It is not easy, of course, to tackle such a large topic within the limited space of a book this size. In consideration of the cultural knowledge the readers have already acquired, we underscore systematic introduction with considerably detailed facts and value objective description rather than subjective comment. In accordance with this principle, the book consists of five parts, namely, *Philosophy and Religion*, *Systems and Institutions*, *Literature*, *Art* and *Miscellanies*.

The striking differences between the Chinese and the English languages and cultures pose a great challenge in writing about Chinese culture in English. Some Chinese cultural terms vary greatly in meaning, and therefore it is extremely difficult to find accurate English counterparts. Nonetheless, we have tried our best to use the most appropriate English version.

This book is primarily aimed at Chinese readers, in particular, Chinese college students majoring in English, tourism, foreign trade, foreign affairs and international cultural exchange. It is also of great use and hopefully a necessity for Chinese students studying abroad, for foreign students of Chinese, and all those who know English and are interested in Chinese culture. This book can be used as a textbook in a one-semester course with some chapters being used as supplementary reading, in a full year course, or as supplementary reading in courses dealing with various aspects of Chinese history or culture.

We express our gratitude here to all the heads, friends, editors, and colleagues who gave us their kind help and valuable suggestions in the course of writing this book. We offer heartfelt

thanks to Rebecca Neufeld and Jay Van Bruggen, professors of English working at Henan University, who were kind enough to go over the manuscript and make various improvements. We are particularly indebted to Professors Qiu Ke'an, Zhang Jin, Zhao Fansheng and Miao Pujing for their most invaluable encouragement and suggestions. Acknowledgements must also be made to all the authors of the reference books that we used.

Since this book is only an attempt, there must be some things to be improved. We sincerely invite the readers to join us in perfecting it in the future by their valuable criticism and suggestions.

Guo Shangxing
Sheng Xingqing
20 August, 1993

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CHAPTER ONE

PHILOSOPHY DURING THE PRE-QIN PERIOD(1)

I INTRODUCTION

Among the nations in the world, China is famous for her long history, and her splendid culture is, in fact, as long as her history. But owing to a lack of information, the discussion of Chinese philosophy can only begin with the Shang Dynasty which is the earliest information archaeology has given us.

During the Shang Dynasty religion rather than philosophy was the controlling force over the minds of men. Departed ancestors acted as intercessors between men and spirits, and the various spirits were ruled over by the Supreme Lord.¹ Elaborate systems were devised for consulting the will of spirits and ancestors, and courses of action were determined in line with the oracles obtained.

Wang Replacing the Shang as the ruling house, the Zhou Dynasty (11th cent. — 256 B. C.) brought with it the belief in Heaven.² The Supreme Lord was gradually supplanted by Heaven as the supreme spiritual reality. Its anthropomorphic character decreased, and its wishes were now expressed not in unpredictable whims but in the Mandate of Heaven.³ This mandate was absolute and constant, beyond man's control. In time, however, as man grew in importance, it was felt that rewards and punish-

1 上帝 2 天 3 天命

ments depended on man's virtue. Thus, man's virtue became the determining factor; man could now control his own destiny. Religious sacrifices continued to play a great role in the lives of the people; the meaning of sacrifice however was changing from a magical to an ethical one; that is, from ways to placate spiritual beings to pure expressions of reverence.

From the Eastern Zhou Dynasty (770—256 B. C.) the slave-owning structure began to decay and crumble with a notable rise in the value of the common people with a corresponding increase of disenfranchised nobility. The result was the appearance of a new class, consisting of scribes, counselors, and teachers, many of whom had an aristocratic background. Deeply concerned with the social chaos and moral decline brought about by the collapse of the slave-owning structure and by constant wars among the states, these people contended vigorously in proposing solutions, thus forming various philosophical schools. These schools began to take shape during the Spring and Autumn Period (770 — 476 B. C.), and flourished in the Warring States Period (475 — 221 B. C.). Historically known as the classical age, this period is also referred to as the age of the "hundred philosophers." ¹

The "hundred philosophers" were classified by Sima Tan² (? — 110 B. C.), father of Sima Qian³ (145—86 B. C.), as belonging to six schools: Confucianism,⁴ Taoism,⁵ Moism,⁶ the Logicians,⁷ the Yin-Yang School⁸ and the Legalist School.⁹ To these six schools, Liu Xin¹⁰ (? — 23), a late Western Han philosopher, added four others: the Agriculturists,¹¹ the Strategists,¹² the Eclectic School,¹³ and the Story-tellers,¹⁴ thus bringing the total up to ten.

This period occupies a primary position in the history of Chinese philosophy, whether it be in the number of its schools, the variety of issues discussed, its broad scope, penetrating in-

1 诸子百家 2 司马谈 3 司马迁 4 儒家 5 道家 6 墨家 7 名家
8 阴阳家 9 法家 10 刘歆 11 农家 12 纵横家 13 杂家 14 小说家

terest of investigations, or dynamic richness of its manifestations. In the following pages we shall have a concise discussion of the leading figures and principal tenets of the main philosophical schools.

II CONFUCIANISM

Confucianism represents the way of life followed by the Chinese people for well over 2,000 years. The influence of Confucianism is so predominant that if anyone should be asked to characterize in one word traditional Chinese life and culture, that word would be "Confucian." Primarily a code of ethics and a system of philosophy, Confucianism has left its mark on Chinese politics and government, family and society, and art and literature. In a certain sense, Confucianism even functions as a religion in the ancient community. The influence of Confucianism is not confined to China. Nearby countries, such as Korea, Japan, and Vietnam, embraced Confucianism in their national life and culture. For example, the design of the South Korean flag—with the *Yin* and *Yang* symbol and trigrams from *The Book of Changes*¹—is a clear indication of the Korean feeling of cultural affinity with Confucian China. The most imposing Confucian temple outside China stands today in Seoul, and it is there that the most authentic Confucian sacrifice, with elaborate classical music and dance, is to be witnessed. In Europe, Confucianism also has a lot of outstanding admirers. Some leading figures of the Enlightenment in Europe developed an overwhelming admiration for Confucian thought and letters. For instance, Gottfried Leibniz, an eminent 17th—18th-century German philosopher and mathematician, spoke of Confucian China with the deepest appreciation and displayed some knowledge of *The Book of Changes* and the system of thought of Zhu Xi.² While his theory of monadology suggests

1 《易经》 2 朱熹