CHINESE PHILOSOPHY IN CLASSICAL TIMES

Edited and Translated by

E. R. HUGHES

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PREFACE

I ACKNOWLEDGE with a great sense of gratitude my debt to two contemporary Chinese philosophers. One is Dr. Hu Shih, now serving his country as ambassador at Washington. The reading of his famous *Chung Kuo Ku Tai Che Hsüeh Shih Ta Kang* (1921) in 1923 was an immense stimulus, and the second reading of it later suggested to me the necessity for studies in the development of the language of logic in Classical Chinese. The other is Professor Feng Yu-lan, whose *Chung Kuo Che Hsüeh Shih* (2 vols.) became another landmark in my philosophical education. Since the first volume of this work has been translated by Professor Derk Bodde, working in collaboration with the author, I also owe a debt to Dr. Bodde, which I gratefully recognize. It is inevitable and right that reference should be made to his book, *A History of Chinese Philosophy* (1939, Peiping and London), for there is no other book for the English reader to compare with it; but its value to me has been more of a general nature than of a kind to warrant an accusation of plagiarism. Yet here, as in the case of other translators, it has been my pleasure to salute from time to time *le mot juste*, and to substitute it for my own less felicitous rendering.

There is only one passage which I have taken word for word from another translator. It is Chapter XLVIII in Mr. Arthur Waley's *The Way and its Power*, and I thank him and his publishers for the privilege of using that rendering. I am also grateful to Messrs. Probsthain for their permission to use Dr. Duyvendak's *Lord Shang*, and Dr. W. K. Liao's *Han Fei*, vol. i. My original intention was to take the translations I needed word for word, for that seems the only respectful course to take. I found, however, particularly in Dr. Liao's work, as to a less extent in Dr. Duyvendak's, certain roughnesses of expression which seemed better emended. I apologize, therefore, for taking these liberties with their work. If it had been feasible to

communicate with them, the one in Holland and the other in China, I would have done so.

No English scholar can work in the field of Classical Chinese without owing a great debt to James Legge, the first Professor of Chinese in the University of Oxford, for his monumental labours in translating ten out of the thirteen Confucian Classics.

With regard to the innumerable debts to Chinese commentators and editors of all ages, I can only make a general recognition. And yet there are three to whom I owe most of all: Juan Yuan at the beginning of the nineteenth century for his edition of the Thirteen Confucian Classics, Sun Yi-jang at the end of the nineteenth century for his edition of the *Mo Tzu Book*, and Ma Hsü-lun in this generation for his edition of the *Chuang Tzu Book*.

E. R. HUGHES.

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INTRODUCTION

THERE is something particularly appropriate about an 'Everyman' volume on Chinese Philosophy, for the Chinese people and their tradition have been impregnated with a sense of Everyman. It is true that there has been, and still is to-day, a great deal of virtuosity in their approach to matters of learning; a Chinese scholar can be ineffably highbrow. But from a quite early date in Chinese history most thinkers and scholars never succeeded in forgetting that the ordinary man, and in particular the peasant, is a vitally important member of the Great Society. So also with the exquisite art of painting in China, and with that other great art which the modern West tends to ignore, that of ritual in daily life; the plain man in the plainness of his humdrum life has always claimed in China a good share of the expert's attention. It is the Chinese sense of a common humanity; and in spite of all the inhumanities which have been perpetrated by proud aristocrats and conscienceless money-makers, this sense continued to bear fruit, has indeed been an integral part of that common sense and matter-of-factness for which the Chinese people have become famous throughout the world.

There is another aspect in which an 'Everyman' is particularly appropriate. For a very long time, dating as far back as the twelfth century and the Fukien popular printers, public opinion has always been in favour of books being published in a simple form so that the prices might be within the compass of the plain student's purse. Not only so: the later categories of Chinese literary history have been distinguished by a continual succession of 'Collectanea,' as the libraries call them, that is to say, reprints of notable works brought together in fifty, or a hundred, or even many hundreds of uniform volumes. Thus the 'Everyman' series has many counterparts in China, though not one quite so catholic in its devotion to literature in every form, including novel writing and drama

The table of contents shows a division of this volume into eight parts, with two to four chapters to each part. In these twenty-three chapters the reader will find selections from the writings, or in some half-dozen cases the recorded sayings, of nearly thirty men who lived between the seventh century B.C. and the end of the first century A.D. The number of men quoted might have been a considerably larger one, but it became obvious that the more important thinkers should be allowed to speak for themselves at some length, and the volume not be a medley of rather scrappy quotations.

The period covered is ordinarily described as 'the Classical.' That means that the people who first began to study the development of Chinese civilization saw that in the early phases of it there was a stage which compared with the Graeco-Roman stage in the development of our Western civilization. To call that period 'the Classical,' therefore, enabled people to begin to place 'China' in their minds. In other words, they began to know something about it; for it is only by comparing, by placing the unknown in relation to the known, that we begin to know. This comparing, however, is, as both Western and Chinese philosophers have realized, a ticklish business. One has to be careful, or the result is not knowledge but a mixture of truth and error, or even a monstrous misconception. And care entails being careful not to use unconsciously an adjective of comparison in two different senses, and in not making one of the things compared unconsciously the standard for the other.

The adjective 'Classical' or 'classical' has two meanings, the primary one being 'conforming to a standard.' For a very long time in south and north-western Europe those highly influential people, the teachers of youth, impressed on their pupils that our civilization owed a very great debt to ancient Greece and Rome: so much so that in matters of right thinking and good taste what Greece and Rome thought and did at their highest levels was in the nature of a standard. They did not mean that these achievements

were an absolute standard, and that our modern life and thought must conform to it in every respect. It is indeed difficult to define what they did mean, for so many of them were clergymen who believed that Christianity was the chief source of inspiration for 'our great Christian civilization'; and they would have been greatly shocked at the accusation of setting up any other standard as that to which we should conform.

This state of affairs is not so much characteristic of the Middle Ages as of post-Renaissance and modern times, coming right down to our twentieth century. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and well on into the nineteenth, our fathers before us were being taught in this way by their pastors and masters, so that, for example, Hardy could depict his Jude the Obscure and his generation, only the one before ours, respond with real emotion to the tragedy of that picture. Yet we are fully conscious to-day of the fact that our civilization has burst its bands and is moving inexorably into a future which, whatever its debt to our Graeco-Roman past, and all other pasts, cannot be estimated *solely* in terms of *our* Great Tradition.

It is a matter then of some moment that as we look round this world of ours we should have a judicious mind as much to the past as to the present. This applies particularly to the three other existent civilizations, those of the Near East, the Middle East, and the Far East, each with its Great Tradition behind it. The 'Everyman' series has realized this, and has taken steps accordingly so that alongside of this present volume of Chinese Philosophy the 'Everyman' reader has material on which to exercise his judicious mind; he has something to compare. This raises at once the question of 'petrified civilizations,' or rather 'petrifying civilizations.' Is there any true sense in which the civilizations of Turkey and Egypt, India, and China and Japan were petrifying when our modern Western civilization thrust itself on them, and assailed the verity of their Classical traditions?

Our fathers were, for the most part, convinced that there was a real sense, and in the case of China a number of

outstanding thinkers there during the last thirty years have conveyed the impression that they also felt the accusation—for accusation it undoubtedly is—to be true in fact. If that is so, there would seem to be a good deal of reason for believing that 'Classical China' has meant something different in the history of the Chinese people from what 'Classical Greece' and 'Classical Rome' have meant in the history of the West; that there was, indeed, in that era a standard set up, conformity to which was maintained for the space of eighteen centuries. On the other hand we have seen, in relation to our modern England and its Graeco-Roman heritage, that an outsider might get a very exaggerated impression of the extent of our conformity to the Classical standard. The real point to be considered is not whether the civilization of western Europe and the civilization of China are comparable in inheriting ancient formative traditions, for they both have them, but whether in the one case the people concerned were susceptible to outside and later influences, and in the other case not.

In this connection historians and others who have studied the Far East have had a good deal to say on China being in an isolated geographical position, and the Chinese people being so much the cultural and intellectual superiors of the peoples within range of contact that they experienced no challenge to their self-satisfaction: that in fact until the nineteenth century there was nothing to make them 'neither sit nor stand, but go.' It is very difficult to know precisely what is meant by this, unless it be that they were isolated from Europe; in which case the reply has to be made that Europe was equally isolated from China and India, and very nearly as much from Arabia. And as for self-satisfaction, possibly the less we say the better. As a matter of fact, the whole idea of China's being isolated and impervious to outside influence is plain historical nonsense until we come to the eighteenth century. Even during the Ming regime, which Chinese historians have regarded as a very conservative period, the Jesuit missionaries were given an official welcome, and two Hanlin doctors were openly

converted to the Christian religion, not to speak of the Catholic congregations which came into existence in nearly every province of China.

There is, however, this legitimate contrast to be made between China and western Europe, these two cultural areas of great antiquity. In Europe the Christian religion, coming in from the Semitic country of Palestine, eventually discredited the later and less inspiring products of Greek and Roman religion and philosophy, and the amalgam called 'Christianity' became the dominant educational influence. In China the amalgam of indigenous religious practice and philosophical thought called 'Confucianism' was challenged by Buddhism from India, and from the sixth to the tenth century it was the foreign faith which was the more esteemed among live-minded people. It evoked a rich variety of intellectual response, and in its own way discredited the less inspiring products of Chinese thought. In the end, however, the indigenous tradition reasserted its power, proving able to inspire the Sung scholars to new syntheses of the universe and man.[1] Although the revival of Greek studies in Europe may be cited as in some ways comparable, the points of similarity in the two movements are not so cogent as the points of dissimilarity. And further, although an ardent Catholic can—and indeed to-day does triumphantly—point to Protestantism as leading on to Secularism and Rationalism, the fact remains that the Protestant movement was for a long time fervently religious and bore all sorts of notable fruits, cultural as well as purely spiritual. In China the renaissance of the Sung epoch, particularly the Chu Hsi synthesis which captured the widest approbation, was more consciously intellectualist, tending from the start to muffle the time-honoured note of Confucian religion.

The moral then of this discussion is that, taking the whole course of Chinese history into account, we have to assume that the Chinese people are pretty much like ourselves. They have had their ups and downs, bad times as well as

[1] Cp. my *The Great Learning*, Introduction, Chapter II.

good. If anything, they have been more susceptible to foreign influence than our Europe has been, and at any rate were just as much impregnated with foreign blood stocks as southern and western Europe were. Apart, therefore, from the inherent improbability of a great civilization being built out of a narrow set of homogeneous elements and going on century after century without any appreciable change, the history of the Chinese people flatly contradicts the notion. The peoples who have been inbred racially and culturally are the retarded peoples, such as the aborigines of Australia. There is, of course, the conservatism of a mainly agricultural community, the attitude to life which distinguishes the French peasant of to-day so markedly from the industrial town dweller in France and England and the United States. But that conservatism is not of a cast-iron kind, either in the West or in the East. And it is an entire mistake for the townsman to think that the countryman's life is less productive of individuality. In China every province very much has its own characteristics, its own cherished names of great men, some of them with special temples in their honour, its own specialities in art and craftsmanship, in some cases in education, its own customs, both good and bad; and this is true of sections of a province, particularly where hill country and plain, or seaboard, come within its borders.

The common sense of this is that human nature is like that, East as well as West. Even primitive communities afford the clearest evidence that man has an incurable tendency to make life as interesting as he can. *Accidia* (boredom and its depression) is not only a sin in Catholic theology; it is also a biological weakness, one which statesmen have so often ignored to the desperate peril of the common weal. And this brings us to another contrast between our western Europe and China. The feudal social order in the one area gave place to a series of competing states, with the result that for the common man life has never for very long been really uninteresting. In fact, the constant wars have made life exciting to a high degree of

painfulness. In the other area the stage of feudalism came a millennium and and a half earlier, and broke down between the seventh and sixth centuries B.C. There ensued an epoch of the Warring States, and this led eventually to a short experiment in unified bureaucracy, and afterwards by revulsion to a compound of bureaucracy and feudalism which was the beginning of that unique institution, the Chinese State. The point here is that in spite of the country being split for generations on a north and south basis, with barbarians in control of the north, the end was a renewal of unity; and this unity became a solid determination of the people. It was part of the Great Tradition, and, in spite of periods of miserable confusion, there has been political unity in China on a territorial scale which Europe has not seen since the days of Rome. There is no need to look at this accomplishment through rose-coloured glasses and assume, as Marco Polo did from some rather superficial observation, that the Chinese were both more civilized and more blessed with happiness than any other part of the world. Close knowledge hardly sustains any such grandiose claim. On the other hand, the claim that fratricidal disunities as in Europe are a necessary concomitant of cultural vitality is definitely disproved by Chinese experience.

In conclusion, let us take these various angles of approach to China, past and present, and consider them in relation to what is so intimately connected with them, namely, the philosophy of Classical times. We can dismiss in a word the puerile sentimentality that here is some mysterious 'lore of the East,' which the crude, materialistic Westerner should reverentially receive. Neither can we allow the prejudices of insular pride to blind us to the evidences of a great accomplishment, one which may or may not be of the same ultimate value to the world as Homer and Aeschylus and Euripides on the one hand, and Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle on the other, but which is certainly not disqualified from attention because its methods of expression and inquiry, as also some of its affirmations, were different in grain. Here are matters for comparison with a judicious mind, the

human-hearted mind, as China's most honoured teacher, Confucius, would urge.

In doing this a little detachment is necessary from our prepossessions about reason and its slow but sure development. Part of the value of studying Classical Chinese philosophy comes from the fact that whereas the Greek and Roman philosophers have been subtle and discerning along certain lines, their opposite numbers in China, speaking chronologically, may appear rather stupid and undiscerning on those lines. But along certain other lines the Chinese may have been quick to see certain facts where the Greeks and Romans suddenly appear to have been curiously slow. Henri Bergson discovered in the twentieth century that the intellect is a tool made and sharpened primarily for practical ends, and not speculative: not a particularly difficult discovery to make, surely! We find this discovery made in China quite early on. Again, religious utilitarianism did not achieve conscious systematic form in Europe until the eighteenth century. In China, one Mo Ti, of the fifth century B.C., worked out such a system. On the other hand, although some Classical thinkers in China used the literary device of the philosophical dialogue, none of them achieved the power with it which Plato displayed, nor, I think, did any one take analysis as far as Aristotle did. The Chinese did not discover the syllogism, and though they made a start in geometrical thinking, they lagged far behind Euclid.

We are, therefore, liable to get jolts as to the levels of rational consciousness which emerge along with new challenges to the social order. And these jolts may be taken as healthy for us, since they save us from the devil of excessive reliance on rational speculation on the one hand, and the deep sea of finding no rhyme or reason in men's experience on the other hand. Thus, for example, with regard to religious utilitarianism, a matter of very considerable moment to the people who believe in 'spiritual values,' it is not only illuminating to recognize this theory at such an early stage in an ancient society. It is also highly instructive

to note that as Paley led on to Bentham and Mill, i.e. utilitarianism without the religion, so Mo Ti led on to Shang Yang and the irreligious Legalists. Our confidence is ultimately, therefore, reinforced in the existence of some order in history, and of our being able one way and another to get a rational apprehension of it.

Is Chinese Civilization based more on Intuition and Art than on Reason and Philosophy?

The Burlington House Exhibition of Chinese Art in 1935, coming as it did after the admirable introductory work done by Mr. Laurence Binyon and Mr. Hodson, did a great deal to create among English people respect and admiration for China. Literally a new world was opened up before their eyes; and they were drawn into it by its human magic, by the sublime austerity of it at one end of the scale, at the other by its gentle sweetness and subtle responsiveness to Nature. We had not known that men could feel like that, and put these translucent emotions into line and colour: in landscape painting with such convinced devotion and delight in a bird's-eye perspective. Even those antique bronzes, the outlandish work of craftsmen living in the atmosphere of primitive animism, touched a chord of sympathy and understanding: they revealed such an exquisite sense of proportion, so bold an imagination held in such artistic restraint.

This was not, of course, the first time that Chinese art had touched the imagination of the English people. The country houses of the eighteenth century were filled with Chinese cabinets, porcelain, and paintings, testifying to the delight with which our great-grandfathers and great-grandmothers welcomed these treasures from 'far Cathay.' So there is no question in the English mind but that the Chinese people are endowed with superb artistic gifts. And when we turn to the poetry and painting of the T'ang epoch, the epoch in which the Chinese themselves take especial pride and delight, a highly intriguing question arises. Did not the Chinese people, at this, one of the chief flowering

periods of their genius, arrive more or less consciously at the decision that the prosaic path of reason was not worth pursuing: that poetic intuition was the better, as it was surely the pleasanter, guide to life's meaning? True, the Sung age followed on the T'ang; but was that not because there must be a good hard core to all sensibility, and the way to treat that necessity is to get a good, plausible system of dogma fixed up and imposed, and so be free to devote the higher energies to the refinements of life, as the Chinese did in the Ming and Ch'ing epochs? The luxury art of these later ages points to a cultivated ability to enjoy the infinite variations of artistry, whether those were revealed in the glorifying of silk and clay, of precious stone and wood, the raw materials of Nature, or in refinements of manners trimming and lacquering the rough surfaces of human relationships. Even the prosaic business of letter writing must be made to assume elaborations of style, so that it mattered less what a man said than how he said it.

And when we turn back to that early formative age, the Classical era, was it not the Taoist philosophers, the main source of inspiration for the great T'ang poets, who followed the artist's instinct as against the scientist's, who scorned all knowledge that did not come from the illumination of intuitive appreciation? Did they not show by their ribald attacks on the serious Confucianist uplifters that their pompous rationalization of society was a mere glozing of the bandit instinct for getting all one could for oneself? And is not that the real Chinese attitude, the individual worth more than society, and the individual discovering himself not by reason but by intuition?

It can be argued in this way, and it is significant that from the very earliest days, from the time when the first pieces of evidence appear, artistic power is patently displayed in China. In neolithic geological strata the 'Yang Shao Pottery' has been discovered with wonderful bold yet ordered patterns of decoration, painted with that complicated tool, a hair brush. A later variation is the 'Black Pottery,' so different that experts surmise a separate cultural

influence at work. Then comes the overwhelming mass of evidence of the Bronze Age (late) culture in the heart of the Yellow River area. The excavations made at An Yang by the Academia Sinica in this last decade have brought to light tens of thousands of artifacts, the nature of which demonstrate the existence of a highly developed culture in this ancient seat of Chinese civilization.[1] Here we find the archaeologist confirming the existence of a society in the second millennium B.C. which must, judging from the mere wealth of its super-chieftain, have had some sort of political organization extending over a wide area. What type of organization that was the archaeologists cannot so far tell us; we have to turn to the historians and the earliest documents on which they can set their minds. These are the writings of the Chou era authors, whom we find ascribing the feudal characteristics of their own time to an earlier Hsia regime, and back beyond that to the age of Yao and Shun, traditionally dated as 2357–2206 B.C.

The term 'formative' is very popular to-day in discussions of cultural origins: a useful term, since it recognizes that apart from extremely shattering events the accomplishments of an earlier age have a formative effect on the succeeding age, and so on all succeeding ages. Now the question before us is to what degree the Shang cultural accomplishment may be taken as formative in the development of Chinese civilization. Here was a community depending quite largely on agriculture, having domesticated the sheep and the ox and the horse and the dog: a community with special quarters in the township for bronze workers and bone workers, using writing for the recording of the oracles which they so constantly sought from on high. With their ancestor-worshipping minds and their observations of the heavens and consequent awareness of chronological times, it is even probable that these super-chieftains had started recording political events. There is a good deal to lead us to believe that the Shang Chinese were more culturally developed than the Chou border clans

[1]See Dr. H. G. Creel's *The Birth of China*. Jonathan Cape, 1936.

from the north-west who overran them in the twelfth or eleventh centuries B.C., and set up their great feudal system. And there is no question but that the Chou culture was an amalgam of Shang and Chou; so that we very reasonably surmise a hardier, ruder set of tribes or clans being civilized by the richer and more refined tribes they had mastered.

It is, however, only too easy to exaggerate the importance of the earliest known formative influence in a civilization. The problem is one of explaining how a semi-primitive society came to launch out on the highway of civilization. The solution of this problem is not to be sought merely in terms of the discovery of iron on the one hand, or on the other of feudalism leading inevitably to the birth of states and the resultant violence of competition providing the requisite spur to initiative. It is necessary to track down the quality of mind which was able to make creative use of iron, and out of internecine competition produce a determination for peace and order on a culturally stimulating scale. We are, therefore, considering one particular set of the phenomena which historians on the grand scale attempt to get into world perspective. Thus, taking for example the twenty odd major cultures which figure in the pages of these historians, and including the innumerable stunted cultures which belong to the retarded races, we find that it is in the last resort the possession of power in personality which made the former and lack of that power which made the latter. In this connection Mr. Arnold Toynbee's general idea of 'a challenge' successfully met is illuminating: not one challenge only, but a recurrent series of challenges over which a people may prove itself in the first or second instance adequate to the occasion, and then later prove inadequate. There is here no tidy line of demarcation between savage and civilized. The Greeks and Romans were part savage and part civilized, as indeed must be said of the creators and exponents of 'modern civilization.' The phenomenon is almost stupefying in its limitless variety.

What, however, is clear is that the feudal epoch, with agriculture well established and wealth for the first time

accumulating on a large scale, is a key-time in the history of any people. There is a transition going on from the old tribal 'closed society' to something strikingly different, and this change reveals itself chiefly when the fixed order of overlord and feudatory and of lord and serf breaks down, and individuals have to deal with a new world in which the old values do not count. The individual under these conditions becomes far more of an individual, far more self-conscious. He gets an image of 'himself' clearly in his mind in contrast with his image of 'society,' and these two images take the place of the old comfortable blur in his mind of self-in-society and society-in-self.

It is when this happens that history comes to be made, or not made, as the case may be. And it was in the late Chou era that this took place in China, during the earlier centuries of the period covered by the quotations in this volume. Granted that the Shang culture was on a higher level than that, for example, of the Matabele at the height of their power, and that the An Yang head township was more like Mycenae than Lobengula's kraal, there is still very inadequate evidence that the Shang chiefs possessed the requisite power in personality for the step forward. We have to examine the Chou regime for indications of such power.

There we may leave this problem for the reader to make his own judgment after reading the *ipsissima verba* of the Classical thinkers. Yet as editor I have perhaps the right, as well as the duty, of stating that the longer I have studied this problem in relation to the late-Chou intellectual developments of thought, and the more I have compared these developments with those in the Greek world, the deeper has become my conviction that the first two rungs of the ladder to a higher civilization are the rungs of self-consciousness in the individual, and of the conscious use of reason. It is therefore for the reader to judge whether during the formative period in the history of the Chinese people they did or did not mount these two rungs. From this the reader will be able to go on to make a decision on