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謹贈給

中國社會科學院民族研究所圖書館

劉鳳翥

一九八九年八月廿日

221217
391

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The Legacy of Confucianism

Liu Ts'un-yan

In Ch. 47 of the *Records of the Grand Historian* (Shih-chi) a biographical account of K'ung-tzu, or Confucius as he is known to the West, is found. In this it is recorded that in 500 B.C. when Confucius served the State of Lu as its Commissioner of Police, Lu made peace with its neighbouring state, Ch'i. During the summer, Duke Ting of Lu had a meeting with Duke Ching of Ch'i at Chia-ku (present-day Lai-wu County of Shantung) and Confucius and his men were charged with responsibility for the security measures round the earthen platform where the meeting was to be held. At the meeting when wine had been offered, Ch'i's master of ceremonies stepped forward and asked, "May we play the Music of the Four Quarters?" The biography goes on:

Upon Duke Ching's assenting, men with pennants, feathers, spears, halberds, swords and shields advanced to the roll of drums. At once Confucius stepped forwards, rushed up the steps and, raising his sleeves, protested, "Our two rulers are meeting in friendship: what is the meaning of this barbarian music? Let these men be dismissed by the officer in charge!" The master of ceremonies made them step back, but they did not go. The attendants looked at Yen Ying (the Chief Minister of Ch'i accompanying Duke Ching) and Duke Ching, and the shamefaced Duke waved them away.

However, this was not the end of the incident. Presently the master of ceremonies of Ch'i ordered a second group of jesters, singers and dwarfs move in to perform. Again Confucius stepped forward, rushed up the steps and protested, "Commoners who beguile their lords deserve to die. Let them be punished!" Thereupon the officer in charge had the players cut in half at the waist.¹

It is difficult for us to know whether this anecdote was completely accurate, as it varies to some extent from a much plainer account in the *Tso-chuan*, but agrees in the basic facts with the *Ku-liang*. The *Ku-Liang* suggests that the Ch'i people planned to seize the Duke Ting of Lu during the commotion.² Whether this Commentary is reliable or not, one thing is certain. Had Confucius lived long enough to witness what happens in the eighties of the twentieth century, he would have hesitated, to say the least, to stick to the book and suggest such drastic measures. In our times Pope John Paul II chose to pay a post-Christmas visit to Mehmet Ali Agca, his unsuccessful assassin, in a prison in Rome early 1984, while Bob Hawke, our Australian Prime Minister, when he was pelted by an uranium protester at the National Labour Women's Conference held in the Adelaide University, only wiped his face, without saying a word, and retired to a nearby rest-room to change his suit.³

Confucius lived in a particular period of antiquity full of disturbances and intricacies. We

now live in a modern age, also full of turmoil and uncertainties, but of quite a different order of complexity and dimension. In his time Confucius had heard a lot about internecine wars, regicide and usurpation, all of which he strongly condemned, but he couldn't have imagined what modern warfare would be like, let alone modern terrorism. It was true that once moved by a mixture of feelings, he uttered: "In one's household, it is the women and the small men that are difficult to deal with,"¹⁴ he knew nothing of the in-vitro fertilisation births or the anti-sex-discrimination law. During his several visits to Wei, Confucius must have known that Mi-tzu Hsia, a favourite of his host, the Duke Ling,⁵ was a catamite, but AIDS, or the Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome, would surely have sounded to him like a joke. Moreover, although Confucius spoke sometimes about Heaven, and in his school of teaching maths was a compulsory subject, I don't think that one of the legacies of his teaching was to enable us to calculate the astronomical figures of budget deficits.

Remote from us as his person and background are, Confucius is nevertheless regarded by the scholarly world as one of the three most distinguished thinkers of ancient times, the others being Sakyamuni and Socrates. He was praised either directly or indirectly by the Western philosophers who came out of the ruins of the First War, searching for some miraculous cure to heal the wounds of unprecedented human destruction. After the Second War and in our present time when a search for a spiritual Utopia has been the quest of thousands of thriving cults, large and small, the serious research work on Chinese civilization carried out by modern scholars including H. G. Creel, David S. Novison, Arthur F. Wright and Wing-tsit Chan have managed to give Confucius and Confucianism a more analytical and more balanced assessment. Even in Communist China at the height of the Cultural Revolution, Prof. Yang Jung-kuo, the arch-enemy of Confucian beliefs, could not deny the fact that Confucius "was the first to have started private lecturing," and when his practice was followed by the protagonists of many other schools, "the Golden Age of Chinese academic thought was thus unveiled."⁶ Prof. Jen Chi-yü, another leading scholar who has often played an important part in ideological debates taking place in mainland China, also maintained in the four-volume *History of Chinese Philosophy* he edited that "although the many pre-Ch'in thinkers had their own works, none of them placed such an emphasis on the historical, cultural heritage as did Confucius and his disciples. Confucius advised his pupils about 'getting to know what is new by keeping fresh in their minds what they are already familiar with.' He also said, 'I transmit but do not innovate; I am trustful in what I say and devoted to antiquity.'⁷ He preserved for later generations such important cultural material which enriched the contents of the ancient classics after some edition and textual re-arrangements had been made by him and his followers." Though Prof. Jen believes that Confucius was conservative representing the declining slave-master class and was opposed to the feudal forces which were in the ascendant, he still asserts that "for carrying forward and disseminating the ancient Chinese culture, the contributions made by Confucius and his disciples were unequalled by any of the ancient philosophers."⁸ In a footnote found in the same quoted work, the editor adds, without additional comment, that "there are some academics in China who believe that Confucius's thought represents that of the progressive landlord-class, and was in fact against the thinking of the slave-masters."⁹

If an unbiased it is equally a baffling problem for us outside China, analysis of Confucius's thought has been so difficult to carry out for some scholars in China, I believe, chiefly for two reasons. The first is that Confucius was supposed, and to some extent

this has been confirmed, to have edited all the Classics he had read at his time, and in the course of history over six hundred years form the Warring States period to the end of the Later Han numerous textual corruptions and interpolations, including forgeries intermingled with some possibly genuine writings, slipped into the works. The labyrinthine bibliographical confusion gave birth to the controversies, centred on the appearance and disappearance of the archaic versions of some of the texts at different times, which resulted in a long-drawn dispute over the authenticity of the sagely works, debates over which were as impassioned in the early part of this century as they were centuries ago.¹⁰ Speaking about Confucius and Confucianism, therefore, one can hardly offer a judgment, no matter how careful one may be, without showing some inclination of being less than objective. Secondly, and perhaps more important, is the deliberate misrepresentation of Confucius and his teachings by some immediate-interest seeking scholars in Former Han who distorted considerably the progressive if undeveloped ideas of Confucius to curry favour with the rulers at the time, and make them adopt their interpretations of Confucianism as the orthodox state-cult. This state-cult of bogus-Confucianism initiated by them, officially launched in 136 B.C., and further strengthened in later dynasties, has fettered and shackled the freedom of Chinese thought for nearly two thousand years.

Because of these and other factors concerned, in my discussion of the legacy of the true Confucianism I will restrict myself to using only those works which I believe to have a closer relationship to the core of confucian teachings, albeit some to them may still need clarification to reveal to their significance. For instance, the nature of the classic *Chou-li* has been controversial since its debut in Han times. The *Kung-yang*, one of the three traditionally respected commentaries on the *Spring and Autumn Annals* might have fared better in this connection, though it is universally recognized that before its text was written down on wooden tablets for five generations its transmission had relied entirely on a good verbal memory.¹² The *Book of Changes*, another classic I shall cite now and again in my discussion, is known to have contained some ideas tallying with the teachings of the sage, but the authorship of the *Great Appendix* (Hsi-tz'u) and other appendices which altogether form the totality called the Ten Wings (Shih-Yi) alleged to have been Confucius have not always met with the approval of either modern scholars or of earlier scholars since the 11th century, and these works have been normally treated as apocryphal. My attitude towards them is selective. Some background information about them may be mentioned, if necessary, though I shall be brief so that the main trends of the discussion will not be interrupted.

The moulding of a person's character

I shall start with some observations on the moulding of a person's character in Confucian teachings.

Prof. D. C. Lau, in the Introduction to his translation of *The Analects*, has convincingly pointed out that to the mind of Confucius, "since in being moral one can neither be assured of a reward nor guaranteed success, morality must be pursued for its own sake."¹³ Elaborating this very unusual view of the sage Prof. Lau says:

Behind Confucius' pursuit of the ideal moral character lies the unspoken, and therefore, unquestioned, assumption that the only purpose a man can have and also the only worthwhile thing a man can do is to become as good a man as possible. This is something that has to be pursued for its own sake and with complete indifference to success or failure. Unlike religious teachers, Confucius could hold

out no hope of rewards either in this world or in the next. As far as survival after death is concerned, Confucius' attitude can, at best, be described as agnostic. When Tzu-lu asked how gods and spirits of the dead should be served, the Master answered that as he was not able even to serve man how could he serve the spirits, and when Tzu-lu further asked about death, the Master answered that as he did not understand even life how could he understand death (XI. 12). This shows, at least, a reluctance on the part of Confucius to commit himself on the subject of survival after death. While giving men no assurance of an after life, Confucius, nevertheless, made great moral demands upon them. He said of the Gentleman of purpose (*chih-shih*)¹⁴ and the benevolent man (*jen-jen*) that while it is inconceivable that they should seek to stay alive at the expense of benevolence it may happen that they have to accept death in order to have benevolence accomplished (XV. 9). When such demands are made on men, little wonder that one of Confucius' disciples should have considered that a Gentleman's 'burden is heavy and the road is long,' for his burden was benevolence and the road came to an end only with death (VIII. 7).

He further says:

If a man cannot be assured of a reward after death, neither can he be guaranteed success in his moral endeavours in this life. The gatekeeper at the Stone Gate asked Tzu-lu, 'Is that the K'ung who keeps working towards a goal the realization of which he knows to be hopeless?' (XIV. 38). On another occasion, after an encounter with a recluse, Tzu-lu was moved to remark, 'The gentleman takes office in order to do his duty. As for putting the Way (*tao*) into practice, he knows all along that it is hopeless' (XVIII. 7). ... This is, perhaps, the most fundamental message in Confucius' teachings, a message that marked his teachings from other schools of thought in ancient China.¹⁵

While wholly agreeing with Prof. Lau's remarks, let us trace whence this attitude of Confucius towards life was derived. I believe it came from his profound understanding of the *Book of Changes* which he had said he would be anxious to study at 50, according to the most popular version of *The Analects*.¹⁶ In other part of the text of *The Analects* which is undisputed we read:

The Master said, 'The southerners have a saying: A man devoid of constancy will not make a shaman or a doctor. How well said! "If one does not show constancy in one's virtue, one will, perhaps, suffer shame."' The Master went on to comment, 'The import of the saying is simply that in such a case there is no point in consulting the oracle.'¹⁷

The quotation cited by Confucius here is found in the hexagram *heng*, the third unbroken line in the text. The style and rhetorical structure of this passage in *The Analects* is, nevertheless, very similar to some of the passages included in the *Great Appendix* to the *Changes*. For instance:

The Master said, 'He who keeps danger in mind is he who will rest safe in his seat; he who keeps ruin in mind is he who will preserve his interests secure; he who sets the danger of disorder before him is he who will maintain the state or order. Therefore the gentleman, when resting in safety, does not forget that danger may come; when in a state of security, he does not forget the possibility of ruin; and when all is in a state of order, he does not forget that disorder may come. Thus his person is kept safe, and his state and all the clans can be preserved. This is in accordance with what the *Book of Changes* says, "[Let him say] 'Shall I perish?

Shall I perish?' [so shall his state be firm, as if] bound to a clump of bushy mulberry trees."¹⁸

The resemblance may be found even closer in the following passage which is also taken from the *Great Appendix*, Section 2:

The Master said, 'I may venture to say that the son of the Yen family (i.e. Yen Hui) had nearly attained [the standard of perfection.] If anything that he did was not good, he was sure to become conscious of that; and when he knew it, he did not do the thing again. As is said in the *Book of Changes*, "[The person] returns from an error that has not led him far away. There will be a great fortune."¹⁹

Prof. Tai Chün-jen, of the Taiwan University, believes that "the tone of the above passage must be of Confucius', and no one else."²⁰ Hui Tung (1697-1758), an early Ch'ing sinologist and a great expert in the study of the *Changes*, even took the trouble of checking it syntactically against *The Analects* and found that but for one character its first line was identical with a sentence in *The Analects*.²¹ Although we should not be so obstinate as to accept word for word Ssu-ma Ch'ien's assertions in the *Shih-chi* that Confucius compiled the appendices and that "he studied this book (the *Changes*) so much that the leather thongs binding the wooden strips were cut three times,"²² it can do no harm if we regard some of the basic ideas from these appendices as representing Confucius' words recorded by his more distant followers active indefatigably in pre-Ch'in times.

Let's now return to character moulding in the Confucian school. In the third, unbroken line to the first hexagram, *Ch'ien*, in the main text of the *Changes*, we have the following lines:

All day long the gentleman is creatively active. All nightfall his mind is still beset with cares.²³

Confucius has remarked about them in the appendix *Wen-yen*:

The gentleman improves his character and labors at his task. It is through loyalty and faith that he fosters his character. By working on his words, so that they rest firmly on truth, he makes his work enduring. He knows how this is to be achieved and achieves it; in this way he is able to plant the right seed. He knows how it is to be brought to completion and so completes it; thereby he is able to make it truly enduring. For this reason he is not proud in his superior position nor disappointed in an inferior one. Thus he is active creatively, careful and apprehensive as the time requires. Even if he is in danger, he is free from blame.²⁴

The unremitting activity described above which is essential in Confucius' thought comes undoubtedly from the *Hsiang-tz'u* (Treaties on the Symbolism of the Hexagrams in the *Changes*) in which human actions are likened to the silent but unrelenting movements of the celestial bodies:

The movement of heaven is full of power.

Thus the gentleman makes himself strong without tiring.²⁵

Filial piety is of course another element in the fostering of one's character. The 1970 edition of the *Webster's Dictionary* defines filial piety as "reverence for parents considered in Chinese ethics the prime virtue and the basis of all right human relations." In the traditional *Thirteen Classics*, the *Classic of Filial Piety* (*Hsiao ching*) has been honoured as a work only second to *The Analects* in order of importance. It was said that in the Later Han (25-219), "everyone in the world (China) was required to read and memorize" this work, and it was a textbook also for the training of the Guards of the Feathered Forest and Attendants of the

Gates.²⁶ In Ho Hsiu's (129-182) preface to his *Commentary on the Kung-yang* (Kung-yang chu-shu) he cites Confucius as having said that "my doctrine is contained in the *Spring and Autumn Annals* and my guide to [moral] conduct is to be found in the *Classic of filial Piety*."²⁷

Since the Later Han, Chinese intellectuals who are in the main Confucianists have been particularly interested in showing off their exemplary conduct in filial duties, marked especially by the prolonged period of mourning of one's parent, which was practised as a means to gain recognition for a government appointment reserved for such a candidate. The filial son lived by the side of his parent's coffin inside the grave, which was large enough for such a purpose, and he was supposed to lose interest in all mundane affairs. The normal period for mourning in Later Han was nominally 3 years. This was sometimes doubled by some filial children as if in competition with others, and there was a Chao Hsuan from Shantung who lived in the grave for over 20 years and became the champion of filiality, gaining the highest respect of the people in the neighbourhood. However, he was later found to have begotten no less than 5 sons within the prolonged mourning period, and was singled out and severely punished by Ch'en Fan (d. 168), the Grand Administrator of Le-an.²⁸ Prof. Hsiung Shih-li tells us in his *Yüan Ju* (On the Origin of Confucianism) that during the chaotic period of the Five Dynasties (the 10th century) there was another scholar who rubbed pepper into his eyes so that he could weep piteously for a dead parent.²⁹

Even at the time of Later Han, criticism against such hypocritical practices of bogus-Confucianism was to be heard, the most distinct voices coming from Wang Ch'ung (27-c. 91) and K'ung Jung (153-208), both of whom believed that, if I may borrow K'ung Jung's words, "there is no real affinity between father and son. A son is produced merely because of the father's impulse."³⁰ The interesting point is that Wang Ch'ung was not particularly regarded as being unfilial, and K'ung Jung's radical thought had definitely not been formulated when he mourned the death of his father, for he was seen to be so emaciated and weak that he practically needed the help of a staff of dark wood to walk.³¹ Without wanting to show any disrespect for historical critics, I rather believe that scholars like K'ung and Wang were genuine Confucian followers whose sarcastic words reflect merely disapproval of the perfidious practices of the time. In our modern times, the paragon of anti-Confucianism during the May Fourth Movement in China was Wu Yü (1872-1949), of whom interesting biographical account has recently been published, by Prof. T'ang Chen-ch'ang, in Szechwan.³² Prof. T'ang makes use of Wu's diary covering a period of more than 30 years, from 1911 to 1945, to illustrate that Wu Yü's father was such a devilish character that Wu's anti-filial piety motive cannot be separated from his very unhappy family background.³³ Relating to the period after May Fourth we can, of course, never forget Pa Chin's monumental fiction *The Family* (Chia) which vividly delineated the victims of patriarchal system in a semi-feudal environment in the early Republic.

When evaluating Confucius' legacy we cannot always blame Confucius and his earlier followers for the bogus-Confucianism practised in much later times. In *The Analects* there are 14 places where filial piety is discussed, but we haven't yet found any evidence which could prove that Confucius deviated from the understanding that parental love and love for parents should flow reciprocally from the same warmth of heart. *The Analects* records that When Meng Wu-po asked about being filial, Confucius replied:

"Give your father and mother no other cause for anxiety than illness."³⁴

Let anyone who has been, or still is, in the position of a parent read this thrice. The feeling of Confucius is so natural, so different from that nasty stuff and nonsense used to promote filial respects in later age. The conventional story alleging that in Later Han, Kuo Chü and his wife wanted to bury alive their three-year-old child so that his mother could be better provided with food is not only cruel and stupid, but also contrary to the natural feelings of any parent. The story does make use of a *deus ex machina* though, so that a jar of gold is found by Kuo when digging a pit for the planned burial, thus saving the child's life as well as giving the story a happier denouement. However, the moral of the story remains unchanged. It was the works of bogus-Confucianism of this kind which wrought themselves into the state-cult and strict conventions that made aspects of Chinese society of the past so gruesome and unbearable. Love for one's parents should never be misrepresented by such unwholesome nonsense.³⁵

Many of us nowadays believe, no matter what race, what people we are, or what religious denomination we belong to, that the love and respect for our parents cannot be so different from that felt by the ancients, but social conditions have already gone through more than one revolutionary change. Not being a sociologist, it is difficult for me to predict what the situation will be like in the next few decades, if the birth rates in many countries continue to drop, while the life-expectancies continue to increase in an aging world. Without evoking the spirit of Confucius, who died two thousand four hundred years ago, let us nevertheless hope that under no circumstances will a filial son (*hsiao-tzu*) be distinguished only by the sackcloth with jagged edges he wears in a funeral parlour.

Besides creative activities and filial duties which I believe are at the core of Confucius' teachings for moral edification, the practice of rituals and the sublimating influence of music also played an important role in his masterly plan for both the formation of one's character and the nurture of good citizenship. Needless to say, the rituals and etiquette he taught were basically for the nobility, and normally country-folk who dwelt outside the walled city will not have benefited much from the instruction he gave. Still it was known that he often taught people who sought knowledge and information irrespective of their social status, and when the old feudal system deteriorated, many of his disciples went to the different states with their new knowledge, and became ministers or advisers to the new aristocrats.³⁶

The whole chapter 19 of the *Book of Rites* is devoted to the theories of music and its influence in the moulding of one's character. By definition the 'music' here could have nothing to do with the cacophonous and vehement performances of Ch'i recorded in the *Shih-chi* which I cited at the beginning of this paper. Confucius' teachings seem to have treated this subject more in terms of a very close relationship between music and rituals, and their common function for the stimulation and moderation of emotions. The transforming process of the combined forces of rituals and music is gradual, slow, but sure. Confucius and his followers believed that "in music, more than other things, there should be nothing that is pretentious or hypocritical,"³⁷ and also that "the instructive and transforming power of rituals is subtle; they stop depravity before it has taken form, causing men to move towards what is good, and keep themselves farther apart from guilt without being themselves conscious of it."³⁸

The great design for prolonged unity and peace

In his life of seventy-two years Confucius had many frustrations, but the severest blow of all came from the political side. He had been employed by Lu for only very short period

before he was compelled to leave and visit other states. In his 13-14 years of wanderings outside Lu, he was received, sometimes very warmly, by several rulers, but his dreams of settling down properly and convincing at least one of them to appoint him to a responsible position were always foiled, either by intrigues, or by hard luck. In the end he returned to his native-land Lu where he edited the several important Classics, and in his editing, in particular in the *Spring and Autumn Annals*, he had tried very hard to chart a course for later generations, though in cryptic language, towards the realization of his political ambition and great design.

The work *Spring and Autumn Annals* or *Ch'un-ch'iu* was but a chronicle recording the events which happened in the state of Lu, or outside it but were still of its concern, from 722 to 481 B.C. The language it used was succinct, and sometimes vague, mainly in the form of direct statements without further elaboration. The Confucius' involvement in this case is said to have been rhetorical remarks which he made on the text to embellish its content, while at the same time his criticisms or political remonstrations are to be read between the lines. Some of these remarks are cited and explained in the *Shih-chi*:

Then he compiled the *Spring and Autumn Annals* based on the historical records of twelve reigns, from that of Duke Yin down to the fourteenth year of the reign of Duke Ai. In this book Lu is given the position of a [semi-] independent state, Chou its nominal sovereign, and Shang, [the dynasty preceding Chou,] is relegated to the past. But the spirit of the Three Dynasties³⁹ is still used as a guiding principle. The language used in the *Annals* is concise, its content profound. Thus though the rulers of Wu and Ch'u had styled themselves kings, the *Spring and Autumn Annals* denounces them by calling them barons. Although the Duke of Chin actually summoned the king of Chou to a meeting at Chien-t'u (632 B.C.), the *Spring and Autumn Annals* records that "the King [by] Heaven's [Grace] went to hunt at Ho-yang."⁴⁰ These examples can be used as criteria in any age to criticize or condemn men's actions, and later princes should uphold this tradition and broaden its application. When the principles of the *Spring and Autumn Annals* are carried out, all traitors and evil-doers in the world must tremble. When Confucius as a government official tried a case, he consulted others before he put his verdict in writing. But in editing the *Spring and Autumn Annals* he recorded certain events and omitted others [following the dictates of his conscience,] so that not even men like Tzu-hsia (who was known to be very good at literature) could make any comment. The disciples of Confucius studied the text of the *Spring and Autumn Annals* under him, and he said, "It is these annals by which later men will know me, and it is these annals by which make men condemn me."⁴¹

The above account agrees with two shorter narrations found in the *Book of Mencius*⁴² and one passage in the *Kung-yang Commentary*, under the 12th year of Duke Chao (530 B.C.), the first line of which reads "Kao Yen of Ch'i led a force, and replaced the Earl of North Yen at Yang."⁴³ Of the three conventionally recognized commentaries on the *Spring and Autumn Annals*, the *Tso-chuan* is known to have recorded more detailed events than the others but originally it may not have been a commentary to the text at all.⁴⁴ *Kung-yang* and *Ku-liang* are two commentaries which aim at expounding the hidden message of the sage, analysing the rhetoric and criteria he used when passing judgment on people, whether in approval or disapproval. They also try very hard to uncover the great design for the unification of China and a prolonged peace that sage might have had in mind when editing the text. But the teaching of the *Ku-liang* School was officially established slightly later than that of the *Kung-yang*, and

sometimes fails to reveal as much of the unswerving criticism made by the sage.⁴⁵

Before the discovery of the Archaic Texts of the classics to which the *Tso-chuan* belongs, the text of the *Kung-yang* and the *Spring and Autumn Annals* were combined and there was no separate text called the *Kung-yang Commentary*. That it was relegated to become one of the three commentaries was merely a historical development of later times. This explains to the exalted position enjoyed by the *Kung-yang* in the early Han. The reason it had to rely on verbal memory for transmission, until it was finally committed to writing in the early Han about 150 B.C., was purely a political one. In the "Treatise on Bibliography" of the *Han-shu* Pan Ku writes:

Thinking that the rituals and cultural objects were more complete in the state of Lu, it being the land inherited from the Duke of Chou, and that its chronicles more systematically prepared, Confucius read and studied its historical accounts together with Tso Ch'iu-ming, [before he compiled his own work.] He followed a humane course to read the conduct of people, establishing the merits of things, and condemning them where there was a course for distress. He noted the days and the months to fix the account of events, recorded the court visits of the feudal princes [to the King or to each other] to rectify the rituals and the music. Wherever there were causes for condemnation and criticism which he didn't want to commit to writing, he would dictate shame to his disciples, though these later expressed diverse views. Afraid that the disciples might move away from the sage's teachings irrevocably, [Tso] Ch'iu-ming wrote his commentary to the *Ch'un-ch'iu* based upon the fundamental facts, to illustrate that Confucius' remarks in the Classic were not merely empty words. The people whom Confucius severely criticized were the powerful rulers and ministers who enjoyed prestige and had great influence at the time, hence their deeds were discussed only in the Commentaries. The reason that these words were hidden and not made known to the public was merely to avoid danger. In later ages the oral tradition has become popular, and there are the Commentaries written by Kung-yang, Ku-liang, the Ts'ou's and the Chia's. Only the first two were taught with official recognition. The *Ts'ou's Commentary* had no teacher, and the Chia's no written text.⁴⁶

Although the involvement of Tso Ch'iu-ming in the passage may be open to dispute, from the general tone of the above remarks made by a great historian who lived in the first century A.D. it is rather difficult for us to be convinced by Prof. George A. Kennedy's otherwise interesting theory that "the omissions and variations in the *Ch'un-ch'iu* are the result of natural causes beyond the control of the author."⁴⁷

In Hsü Yen's Sub-commentary printed in Ho Hsiu's *Kung-yang chu-shu* citing a preface written by Tai Hung (fl. mid-2nd century),⁴⁸ the names of the descendants who had transmitted the teachings for five generations from the first master of the school, Kung-yang Kao, were given. The last one on the list is Kung-yang Shou, who was active during the reign of Emperor Ching (r. 156-141 B.C.) and is said to have written down the text of the *Kung-yang Commentary* for the first time on tablets, with the help of one of his disciples, Hu-wu Sheng, also known as Hu-wu Tzu-tu.⁴⁹ Tung Chung-shu (176-104 B.C.) was a colleague of Hu-wu and Kung-sun Hung (200-121 B.C.) had learned the *Ch'un-ch'iu* from Hu-wu. Master Hu-wu himself was made an erudite (*po-shih*) in Emperor Ching's time.⁵⁰

From the existing text of the *Kung-yang Commentary*, we find that there are two places where the words of Master Kung-yang are cited, and that it is possible that this Master Kung-

yang was Kung-yang Kao, the disciple of Tzù-hsia, and a second generation disciple of Confucius.⁵¹ But there are others such as Master Shen, Master Ssu-ma, Master Ju, Master Lu and Master Pei-kung whose sayings have also been identified in the text.⁵² These were the early masters who helped to transmit the oral instructions during the course of two and half centuries before the text was fixed in its final form. It was possible that while editing the text Kung-yang Shou and Master Hu-wu may have expunged some parts of it which they considered to be either dubious or unsavoury in the political atmosphere of the time, as had been suggested by some contemporary scholars, but so far no concrete evidence has been produced.⁵³

In general, the *Kung-yang Commentary* follows the tradition of Confucius quite faithfully. Let me cite here one or two examples to illustrate this point:

As we know in the *Kung-yang* there are no less than four passages where the military deeds of Duke Huan of Ch'i are mentioned. In three of them he is praised because he sent his men to rescue a smaller state under attack from barbarian invaders, and also for helping to re-build two walled-cities after they had been totally destroyed.⁵⁴ This coincides with what is said in *The Analects*, which praises Kuan Chung very highly, for helping Duke Huan to become the leader of the feudal lords and save the empire from collapse.⁵⁵ The fourth passage is not exactly the same as the other three. The text of *Kung-yang* reads:

*In Duke Hsi's seventeenth year (643 B.C.), in spring, a body of men from Ch'i, and a body from Hsü, invaded Ying-shih. In summer, the State of Hsiang was extinguished. Who extinguished Hsiang? Ch'i did. Why was the fact that Ch'i extinguished Hsiang not recorded? It was not mentioned for the sake of Duke Huan. The Ch'un-ch'iu offers an act of grace to men of worth. Was there any good point in extinguishing another's state? [No, there was none.] A gentleman hates the wicked deeds from the very beginning, but he is pleased with the good deeds and likes to see his praise [of them] last till the end. Duke Huan restored states that had been annexed, and revived lines that had become extinct. For this reason the gentleman did not expose him [in this connection].*⁵⁶

The key-words describing Duke Huan's merits in restoring states that had been annexed and reviving lines that had become extinct are also to be found in the last Book of *The Analects*.⁵⁷

In the last chapter but one of Book IX in *The Analects*, there is the following passage:

A man good enough as a partner in one's studies need not be good enough as a partner in the pursuit of the Way; a man good enough as a partner in the pursuit of the Way need not be good enough as a partner in a common stand; a man good enough as a partner in a common stand need not be good enough as a partner in the exercise of moral discretion.⁵⁸

The phrase "exercise of moral discretion" here is a translation of the character *ch'üan* in the original, literally "to weigh," or "to weigh or evaluate events" in a derived sense. In another part of *The Analects*, Confucius praises Yü Chung and Yi Yi, two recluses, for showing sound judgment in accepting their dismissal; the "sound judgment" here is again *ch'üan* in the text.⁵⁹ But Confucius has not told us how they acted according to circumstances. In the *Kung-yang*, however, a good illustration of *ch'üan* is to be found (in the 11th year of Duke Huan, B.C.701):

In the ninth month, the people of Sung seized Chai Chung. [The *Commentary* asks,] Who was Chai Chung? The chief minister of Cheng. Why is he not mentioned by his name? Because of his worth. In what way was Chai Chung worthy? He is considered so knowing how to act according to circumstances (*chih-ch'üan*). In what way did he know how to act according to circumstances?

Anciently the capital of Cheng was Liu. A former earl of Cheng was on friendly terms with the duke of K'uai and, plotting with his wife, he took the capital of K'uai, transferred that of Cheng to it, and left Liu to become a wilderness. After the death of Duke Chuang (of Cheng, who died in the fifth month of the same year), Chai Chung was going to inspect the state of Liu, and as his road lay through Sung, the people of Sung seized him, and said, "Drive out Hu (Duke Chuang's eldest son and was now the earl) for us and raise T'u (Hu's half brother whose mother was a daughter of Sung) to the earldom."

If Chai Chung did not do as they requested, his ruler must die, and the State perish. If he did as they required, his ruler would exchange death for life, and the State be preserved instead of perishing. Then by and by, [by his gradual management,] T'u might be sent forth as before, and Hu might return as before. If these things could not be secured, he would have to suffer [under the imputation of evil conduct,] but yet there would be the State of Cheng. When the ancients acted according to the exigency of circumstances, they acted in the way in which Chai Chung did.

[The Commentary continues:] What is meant by acting according to the exigency of circumstances? It is acting contrary to the ordinary course of what is right (*ching*), yet so that good shall result. Such a course is not to be adopted apart from the imminent danger of death or ruin. There is a way to regulate the pursuing of it. A man may adopt it when the censure or loss will fall on himself, but not to the injury of another. A gentleman will not slay another to save himself, nor ruin another to preserve himself.⁶⁰

This is exactly what Confucius meant by *ch'üan*.

The great design for prolonged unity and peace which is supposedly contained in the *Ch'un-ch'iu* under Confucius' editorship has for many years been shrouded in mystery, but what the *Kung-yang Commentary* reveals perhaps gives some indication of what is still to be uncovered. The first line in the *Ch'un-ch'iu* under the first year of Duke Yin of Lu (722 B.C.) reads "It was the [duke's] first year, the spring, the king's first month." The *Tso-chuan* gives no particular explanation except to indicate that "the first month [here] was [the first month] in the calendar of Chou." The *Ku-liang Commentary* says that "Although there was nothing to be recorded [under the first month,] it was necessary to specify it; it being the commencement of the rule."⁶¹ Only the *Kung-yang* is able to shed some new light on this baffling problem. The *Commentary* reads:

What is meant by *yüan-nien* (first year)? The first year of the ruler. What is meant by *ch'un* (spring)? The first season of the year. What is meant by *wang* (the king)? It means King Wen [of Chou.] Why does [the text] first give "king," and then "first month"? [To show that] it was the king's first month. Why does it [so] mention the king's first month. To magnify the union of the kingdom [under the dynasty of Chou.]⁶²

As a matter of fact the dynasty of Chou, still the nominal rulers at this time, had indicated the extent of its decline by even sending officers to Lu asking for carriages and cash contribution.⁶³ Lu's itself was equally small and weak, and could not have had the faintest hope of reviving the former glories of a unified Chou. Confucius' unrealized ambition was to reunite the feudal China under a new political and social structure he planned, in which many of the

wrong-doings as recorded in the *Ch'un-ch'iu* would no longer occur. Therefore the union of the kingdom implied here was meant to be carried out only by a new dynasty which the text of the *Kung-yang Commentary* called the *Hsin-chou*, or a New-Chou. This is recorded in a passage concerning a fire which burnt down the temple of the brilliant ruler King Hsüan (r. 827-782 B.C.), in the Chou capital now functioning under reduced circumstances, in 593 B.C.⁶⁴ This shows that Master Kung-yang and his followers understood the concept of an ideal kingdom advocated by Confucius, and took this opportunity to inform posterity that the Old-Chou was dying beyond reprieve, if not yet buried. For similar reasons the first year of the ruler was called *yüan-nien* in the Chronicle. *Yüan* is found in the first line of the first hexagram *Ch'ien* in the *Book of Changes*. Expounding its meaning, the *T'uan-tz'ü* in the *Changes* says:

Great indeed is the sublimity of the Creative (*ch'ien*, to which all things owe their beginning and which permeates all heaven.⁶⁵

Since then the term *yüan-nien* has become a tradition in chronology for writing Chinese history. We still cannot know for sure why that in A.D. 496 the Toba Wei nobility decided to adopt *Yüan* as their surname,⁶⁶ but in 1271, when Kublai Khan proclaimed in Ta-tu (Peking) his sovereignty over China, and the name of the new dynasty *Yüan*, he had definitely heard the interpretation of this term in the *Book of Changes* from his Han-Chinese adviser, Liu Ping-chung.⁶⁷

On the basis of all the existing material, it is still difficult for us to determine whether there were any radical ideas of Confucius for the reform of late Chou system contained in the original verbal instructions of the *Ch'un-ch'iu*. Tung Chung-shu, who studied *Ch'un-ch'iu* together with Master Hu-wu in the Former Han and whose own interpretation of the Classic was accepted as the official school of this work during the reign of Emperor Wu (r. 140-87 B.C.), has given us some hint on this point in his *Ch'un-ch'iu fan-lu*. He says:

For the sake of righteousness, one should not slander one's superior; for the sake of wisdom, one should not endanger one's person. For this reason, events which happened in the past would not be discussed due to right-eousness, and events happening currently would also be proscribed due to fear. When righteousness and fear are combined in consideration, the result is that the more recent the time, the more cautious the words become. This is why when the *Ch'un-ch'iu* comes to the periods of Duke Ting and Duke Ai its words become more obscure. The idea was that when one's words were adopted by the ruler, the world would be at peace: but when one's words were not adopted by the ruler, one would still be in a secure position.⁶⁸

Although in *The Analects* Confucius does say that "he dislikes those who, being in inferior positions, slander their superiors,"⁶⁹ apparently his words were twisted by Tung and other Former Han scholars who started to utilize Confucian teachings for their own gains.

In pre-Ch'in times the teachings of Confucianism treated the relationship between a ruler and his subjects in reciprocal terms. Confucius says in the *Analects*, "The ruler should employ the services of his subjects in accordance with the rites. A subject should serve his ruler by doing his best."⁷⁰ Mencius, who lived during the Warring States Period went even so far as to tell King Hsüan of Ch'i, "If a prince treats his subjects as mud and weeds, they will treat him as enemy."⁷¹ Moreover, in the *T'uan-tz'ü* of the hexagram *Ko* (literally to change), the two revolutions led by King T'ang of Shang and by King Wu of Chou are hailed as having changed the mandate "in accordance with [the will of] Heaven, and in response to [the wishes of] men."⁷² These historical instances were cited repeatedly by Confu-