

## PHILOSOPHY IN CONTEMPORARY CHINA<sup>1</sup>

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Since the emphasis of the present Congress, as we are informed by the Organizing Committee, is on "the criticism of the prevailing philosophic ideas in relation to the needs of life," and "the analysis of the influence of philosophy upon public affairs," in the brief report I will not touch the technical philosophical problems that are discussed in the academic circle, such as the constitution of the universe, or the validity of knowledge. I will confine myself to what I consider to be the intellectual expression of the spirit of the time in China, which is the indication, if not the guidance, of where China is moving.

China is now at a present that is not the natural growth of her past, but something forced upon her against her will. In the completely new situation that she has to face, she has been much bewildered. In order to make the situation more intelligible and to adapt to it more intelligently, she has to interpret sometimes the present in terms of the past and sometimes the past in terms of the present. In other words, she has to connect the new civilization that she has to face with the old that she already has and to make them not alien but intelligible to each other. Besides interpretation, there is also criticism. In interpreting the new civilization in terms of the old, or the old in terms of the new, she cannot help but to criticize sometimes the new in the light of the old, and sometimes

<sup>1</sup> Read before the eighth International Philosophy Congress. Prague, 1934.

the old in the light of the new. Thus the interpretation and criticism of civilizations is the natural product in China of the meeting of the West and the East and is what has interested the Chinese mind and has constituted the main current of Chinese thought during the last fifty years.

It may be noticed that the interpretation and criticism of the civilizations new and old, within the last fifty years, differ in different periods according to the degree of the knowledge or of the ignorance of the time regarding the new civilization that comes from outside. Generally speaking there have been three periods. The first period is marked with the ill-fated political reformation with the leadership of Kan Yu-wei under the Emperor Kuang Su in 1898. Kan Yu-wei was a scholar of one of the Confucianist schools, known as the Kung Yang School. According to this school, Confucius was a teacher with divine personality. He devised a scheme that would cover all stages of human progress. There are mainly three stages. The first is the stage of disorder; the second, the stage of progressive peace; and the third, the stage of great peace. In the stage of disorder, every one is for one's own country. In the stage of progressive peace, all the civilized countries are united in one. In the stage of great peace, all men are civilized and humanity is united in one harmonious whole. Confucius knew beforehand all these that are to come. He devised accordingly three systems of social organization. According to Kan Yu-wei, the communication between the East and the West and the political and social reformations in Europe and America show that men are progressing from the stage of disorder to the higher stage, the stage of progressive peace. Most, if not all, of the political and social institutions of the West are already implied in the teaching of Confucius. Kan Yu-wei was the leader of the

New Movement at his time. But in his opinion, what he was doing was not the adoption of the new civilization of the West, but rather the realization of the old teaching of Confucius. He wrote many commentaries to the Confucian classics, reading into them his new ideas. Besides these he also wrote a book entitled *The Book on the Great Unity*, in which he gave a concrete picture of the utopia that will become a fact in the third stage of human progress according to the Confucianist scheme. Although the nature of this book is so bold and revolutionary that it will startle even most of the utopian writers, but Kan Yu-wei himself was not a utopian. He insisted that the program he set forth in his book cannot be put into practice except in the highest stage of human civilization, the last stage of human progress. In his practical political program he insisted to have a constitutional monarchy.

One of the colleagues of Kan Yu-wei in the New Movement of that time was Tan Tse-tung, who was a more philosophical thinker. He wrote a book entitled *On Benevolence* in which he also taught the Confucianist teaching of the three stages of human progress. According to him, although Confucius set forth the general scheme of the three stages, most of the teaching of Confucius was for the stage of disorder. It is the reason why Confucius was often misunderstood as the champion of traditional institutions and conventional morality. The Christian teaching of universal love and the equality of men before God is quite near the Confucian teaching for the stage of progressive peace. The teaching that is near the Confucian teaching for the last stage of human progress is Buddhism which goes beyond all human distinctions and conventional morality.

The main spirit of this time is that the leaders were not antagonistic to the new civilization that came from the West, nor did they lack appreciation of its value. But they appreciated its value only in so far as it fits in the imaginary Confucian scheme. They interpreted the new in terms of, and criticized it in the light of, the old. It is to be noticed that the philosophical justification of the Revolution of 1911 with the result of the establishment of the Republic was mainly taken from Chinese philosophy. The saying of Mencius that "the people is first important, the country the second, the sovereign unimportant" was much quoted and interpreted. The teaching of the European revolutionary writers such as Rousseau also played its role, but people often thought that they are right because they agree with Mencius.

The second period is marked with the New Culture Movement which reached its climax in 1919. In this period the spirit of the time is the criticism of the old in the light of the new. Chen Tu-siu and Hu Shih were the leaders of the criticism. The latter philosopher wrote *An Outline of the History of Chinese Philosophy*, of which only the first part was published. It is in fact rather a criticism of Chinese philosophy than a history of it. The two most influential schools of Chinese philosophy, Confucianism and Taoism, were much criticized and questioned from a utilitarian and pragmatic point of view. He is for individual liberty and development and therefore he found that Confucianism is wrong in the teaching of the subordination of the individual to his sovereign and his father, to his state and his family. He is for the spirit of struggle and conquering nature and therefore he found that Taoism is wrong in the teaching of enjoying nature. In reading his book one cannot but feel that in his opinion

the whole Chinese civilization is entirely on the wrong track.

In reaction there was a defender of the old civilization. Soon after the publication of Hu Shih's *History*, another philosopher, Liang Shu-ming, published another book entitled *The Civilizations of the East and the West and their Philosophies*. In this book Liang Shu-ming maintained that every civilization represents a way of living. There are mainly three ways of living: the way aiming at the satisfaction of desires, that at the limitation of desires and that at the negation of desires. If we choose the first way of living, we have the European civilization; if the second, the Chinese civilization; if the third, the Indian civilization. These three civilizations should represent three stages of human progress. Men should at first try their best to know and to conquer nature. After having secured sufficient ground for their place in nature, they should limit their desires and know how to be content. But there are certain inner contradictions in life that can not be settled within life. Therefore the last resort of humanity is the way of negating desires, negating life. The Chinese and the Indians are wrong not in the fact that they produced civilizations that seem to be useless. Their civilizations are of the first order and in them there are something that humanity is bound to adopt. The Chinese and the Indians are wrong in the fact that they adopted the second and the third ways of living without living through the first. They are on the right track but at the wrong time. Thus the defender of the East also thought there must be something wrong in it. His book therefore is also an expression of the spirit of his time.

The third period is marked with the Nationalist Movement of 1926 with the result of the establishment of the

present National Government. This movement was originally undertaken with the combined force of the Nationalists and the Communists. Sun Yat-sen, the leader of the Revolution of 1911 and of this movement, held the communistic society as the highest social ideal. But he was not a communist in that he was against the theory of class struggle and the dictatorship of the proletariat. He thought that the ideal society should be the product of love, not that of hatred. The Nationalists and the Communists soon split, and the latter is being suppressed. With this movement the attitude of the Chinese towards the new civilization of the West takes a new turn. The new civilization of the West as represented in its political and economical organizations, once considered as the very perfection of human institutions, is now to be considered as but one stage of human progress. History is not closed; it is in the making. And what is now considered as the final goal that history is achieving, the peace of the world and the unity of man, looks more congenial to the old East than to the modern West. In fact, if we take the Marxian theory of human progress without its materialistic explanation of it, we see that between it and the teaching of the Kung Yang School as represented by Kan Yu-wei there is not without similarity. Indeed Tan Tse-tung, in his book *On Benevolence*, knowing nothing about either Hegel or Marx, also pointed out what the Marxists may call the dialectical nature of human progress. He pointed out that there is some similarity between the future ideal society and the original primitive ones. But when we attained to the ideal, we are not returning to the primitive, we advanced.

Is the spirit of this third period the same as that of the first? No, while the intellectual leaders of the first period

were interested primarily in interpreting the new in terms of the old, we are now also interested in interpreting the old in terms of the new. While the intellectual leaders of the second period were interested in pointing out the difference between the East and the West, we are now interested in seeing what is common to them. We hold that if there is any difference between the East and the West, it is the product of different circumstances. In different circumstances men have different responses. If we see the response with the circumstances that produce it, we may probably say with Hegel that what is actual is also reasonable. Thus we are not interested now in criticizing one civilization in the light of the other, as the intellectual leaders of the first and the second periods did, but in illustrating the one with the other so that they may both be better understood. We are now interested in the mutual interpretation of the East and the West rather than their mutual criticism. They are seen to be the illustrations of the same tendency of human progress and the expressions of the same principle of human nature. Thus the East and the West are not only connected, they are united.

The same spirit is also seen in the work in technical philosophy. The Chinese and European philosophical ideas are compared and studied not with any intention of judging which is necessarily right and which is necessarily wrong, but simply with the interest of finding what the one is in terms of the other. It is expected that before long we will see that the European philosophical ideas will be supplemented with the Chinese intuition and experience, and the Chinese philosophical ideas will be clarified by the European logic and clear thinking.

This is what I consider to be the characteristics of the spirit of time in the three periods within the last fifty years in Chinese history. If we are to apply the Hegelian dialectic, we may say that the first period is the thesis, the second the antithesis, and the third the synthesis.



## WHY CHINA HAS NO SCIENCE—AN INTERPRETATION OF THE HISTORY AND CONSEQUENCES OF CHINESE PHILOSOPHY.<sup>1</sup>

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In one of his articles published last year in *The New Republic*, Professor Dewey said:

"It may be questioned whether the most enlightening thing he (the visitor) can do for others who are interested in China is not to share with them his discovery that China can be known only in terms of itself, and older European history. Yet one must repeat that China is changing rapidly; and that it is as foolish to go on thinking of it in terms of old dynastic China as it is to interpret it by pigeon-holing its facts in Western conceptions. China is another world politically and economically speaking, a large and persistent world, and a world bound no one knows just where."<sup>2</sup>

It is truly a discovery. If we compare Chinese history with the history of Europe of a few centuries ago, say before the Renaissance, we find that, although they are of different kinds, they are nevertheless on the same level. But now China is still old while the western countries are already new. What keeps China back? It is a natural question.

What keeps China back is that she has no science. The effect of this fact is not only plain in the material side,

<sup>1</sup>In publishing this paper I take the opportunity to thank many members of the faculty of the Philosophy Department of Columbia University for encouragement and help. By science I mean the systematic knowledge of natural phenomena and of the relations between them. Thus it is the short term for Natural Science.

<sup>2</sup>The New Republic, Vol. XXV, 1920, New York, p. 188. Vol. XXXII—No. 3.

but also in the spiritual side, of the present condition of Chinese life. China produced her philosophy at the same time with, or a little before, the height of Athenian culture. Why did she not produce science at the same time with, or even before, the beginning of modern Europe? This paper is an attempt to answer this question in terms of China herself.

It is beyond question that geography, climate, and economic conditions are very important factors in making history, but we must bear in mind that they are conditions that make history possible, not that make history actual. They are the indispensable settings of a drama, but not its cause. The cause that makes history actual is the will to live and the desire for happiness. But what is happiness? People are far from agreeing in their answers to this question. It is due to this fact that we have many different systems of philosophy, many different standards of value, and consequently many different types of history. At the end of this paper I shall venture to draw the conclusion that China has no science, because according to her own standard of value she does not need any. But before we come to this conclusion, we have first to see what the older Chinese standard of value is. In doing so a general survey of the history of Chinese philosophy is indispensable.

## I.

At the end of the Chow Dynasty, the emperors lost their power to control the feudal princes who began to regard themselves as independent, and the land was subjected to warfare. It was an age of political confusion indeed, but of great intellectual initiative. It was equivalent to the Athenian period of mental vigor in Europe.

Before attacking the different types of Chinese ideals, for the sake of convenience I shall introduce two words which seem to me to indicate respectively two general tendencies of Chinese philosophy: They are "nature" and "art," or, to translate more exactly, "nature" and "human." To illustrate this I cite from Chuang Tse a passage:

"What is nature? What is human? That ox and horse have four feet is nature; to halter the head of a horse or to pierce the nose of an ox is human."<sup>1</sup>

Thus "nature" means something natural; "human" means something artificial. The one is made by nature, the other by man. At the end of the Chow Dynasty there were two tendencies representing these two extremes and a third representing a mean between the two. The one said that nature is perfect in itself and that men are self-sufficient and need no help from outside; the other said that nature is not perfect in itself and that men are not self-sufficient and need something outside in order to be better; the third made a compromise. These three main types of ideal did not appear one after the other, but rather arose simultaneously, and expressed at one time the different aspects of human nature and experience. Now according to the "Book of Han," at the end of the Chow Dynasty there were nine branches of thought: Confucianism, Taoism, Moism, the School of Religion, the School of Law, the School of Logic, the School of Diplomacy, the School of Agriculture, and the Miscellaneous School. But among them the most influential at that time were Confucianism, Taoism, and Moism. In almost every book

<sup>1</sup> From the chapter entitled "The Autumn Floods." Compare with H. A. Giles' translation in his book, *Chuang Tzu, Mystic, Moralist, and Social Reformer*. London, 1889, p. 211.

written at the end of the Chow Dynasty, we are informed that these three were struggling for existence. To illustrate this I cite from the polemic speeches of Mencius, a great defender of Confucianism at that time:

"Philosopher emperors cease to arise; the princes of states give reins to their lusts; and the scholars indulge in unrational discussions. The words of Yang Chu and Mo Ti fill the world. The discourse of the people has adopted the views either of Yang or of Mo. Yang's doctrine is: each one for himself; then there will be no king. Mo's doctrine is: love all equally; then there will be no father. To have neither king nor father is to be beasts. . . . If the doctrines of Yang and Mo are not stopped and the doctrine of sages not set forth, then the perverse speakings will delude the people, and stop the path of benevolence and righteousness. When benevolence and righteousness are stopped, beasts will be led on to devour men and men will themselves devour one another. I am alarmed by these things and address myself to the defence of the doctrines of the former sages, and to oppose Yang and Mo. . . ."

Now Mo Ti was the founder of Moism, and Yang Chu was the disciple of the founder of Taoism, Lao Tse. This passage seems to me to be a vivid picture of the state of war existing between these three powers. They were not only struggling for existence, but each one of them had the ambition to conquer the whole empire.

To illustrate their doctrines a little more in detail I choose Lao Tse (570 B.C.?–480 B.C.), Yang Chu (440 B.C.?–360 B.C.), and Chuang Tse (350 B.C.?–275 B.C.) to represent Taoism; Mo Tse (Mo Ti, 500 B.C.?–425 B.C.) to represent Moism; and Confucius (551 B.C.–479 B.C.) and Mencius (372 B.C.–289 B.C.) to represent Confucianism. Referring to the three tendencies which I just mentioned, Taoism stands for nature, Moism for art, and Con-

<sup>1</sup> James Legge's translation, with some modification. See the *Chinese Classics*, second ed., London, 1895, Vol. II, pp. 282–83.

fucianism for the mean. It seems to me that in every aspect of their doctrines, Taoism and Moism were always at the two extremes and Confucianism in the middle. For instance, with regard to their ethical theories, Mencius agrees in arranging them in a scheme as I do. He said:

"The doctrine of the philosopher Yang was: each one for himself. Though he might benefit the whole world by plucking out a single hair, he would not do it. The doctrine of the philosopher Mo was: to love all equally. If by rubbing smooth his whole body from the crown to the heel, he could benefit the world, he would do it. Tse Mo held a mean between them. By holding it without leaving room for the changeableness of circumstances, he resembled them in maintaining his one point to the exclusion of others."<sup>1</sup>

It goes without saying that to hold the mean while leaving room for the changeableness of circumstances is the only right way of action. It is exactly the teaching of Confucianism. I shall make it clearer a little later.

## II.

The teaching of Taoism can be summarized in one phrase: "returning to nature." The omnipotent Tao gives everything its own nature, in which it finds its own satisfaction. For instance:

"In the northern ocean there is a fish, called the Leviathan, many thousand *li*<sup>2</sup> in size. This Leviathan changes into a bird, called the Rukh, whose back is many *li* in breadth. With a mighty effort it rises and its wings obscure the sky like clouds. At the equinox, this bird prepares to start for the southern ocean, the Celestial Lake. And in the 'Record of Marvels' we read that when the Rukh flies southwards, the water is smitten for a space of three thousand *li* around, while the bird itself mounts upon a typhoon to a height of ninety thousand *li* for a flight of six months' duration.

<sup>1</sup> James Legge's translation, with some modification. See the *Chinese Classics* Vol. II, pp. 464-465.

<sup>2</sup> The "*li*" is about one-third of an English mile.

. . . A cicada laughed, and said to a dove: 'Now when I fly with my might, it is as much as I can do to get from tree to tree. And sometimes I do not reach, but fall to the ground midway. What, then, can be the use of going up ninety thousand *li* in order to start for the South?'"<sup>1</sup>

This passage is cited from a chapter entitled "The Happy Excursion" from Chuang Tse's work. It shows clearly that both the great Rukh and the small cicada are perfectly satisfied, each with his own excursion. They continue to be so as long as they live in accordance with their nature without imitating artificially each other. So everything is perfect in its natural condition. Art simply disturbs nature and produces pain. For, as Chuang Tse said:

"A duck's legs, though short, cannot be lengthened without pain to the duck, and a crane's legs, though long, cannot be shortened without misery to the crane, so that which is long in nature cannot be cut off, nor that which is short be lengthened. All sorrows are thus avoided."<sup>2</sup>

Yang Chu's egoism, therefore, is not selfish in the ordinary sense of that word. He was simply teaching that every man should live as his nature wishes to live; but he need not impose upon others what he thinks to be good. So he said:

"If the ancient by injuring a single hair could have rendered a service to the world, he would not have done it; and had the world been offered to a single person, he would not have accepted it. If nobody would damage even a hair, and nobody would have the world for profit, the world would be in a 'perfect state.'"<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> H. A. Giles' translation. See his *Chuang Tse*, etc., pp. 1-2.

<sup>2</sup> From the chapter entitled "The Joined Toes." See Giles' *Chuang Tse*, etc., p. 101.

<sup>3</sup> From the chapter, "Yang Chu," in the work of Lieh Tse.

## Another passage from Chuang Tse:

"Tell me," said Lao Tse, "in what consist charity and duty to one's neighbor?" "They consist," answered Confucius, "in a capacity for rejoicing in all things; in universal love, without the element of self. These are the characteristics of charity and duty to one's neighbor." "What stuff," cried Lao Tse, "does not universal love contradict itself? Is not your elimination of self a positive manifestation of self? There is the universe, its regularity is unceasing; there are the sun and the moon, their brightness is unceasing; there are the stars, their groupings never change; there are birds and beasts, they flock together without varying; there are trees and shrubs, they grow upwards without exception. Be like these; follow Tao; and you will be perfect. Why, then, these struggles for charity and duty to one's neighbor, as though beating a drum in search of a fugitive? Alas! sir, you have brought much confusion into the mind of man."<sup>1</sup>

Thus the Taoists see only the good aspects of what is called the state of nature. Every kind of human virtue and social regulation is to them against nature. As Lao Tse said:

"Cast off your holiness, rid yourself of sagacity, and the people will benefit a hundredfold. Discard benevolence and abolish righteousness, and the people will return to filial piety and paternal love. Renounce your scheming and abandon gain, and the thieves and robbers will disappear. These three precepts mean that outward show is insufficient, and therefore they bid us be true to our proper nature: to show simplicity, to embrace plain dealing, to reduce selfishness, to moderate desire."<sup>2</sup>

The government, if the Taoists need any, must be extreme *laissez faire*.

"As restrictions and prohibitions are multiplied in the country, the people grow poorer and poorer. When the people are subjected to overmuch government, the land is thrown into confusion.

<sup>1</sup> From the chapter entitled "The Way of Nature." See Giles' *Chuang Tzu* etc., p. 167.

<sup>2</sup> Lionel Giles: *The Sayings of Lao Tzu*, p. 44.

When people are skilled in many cunning arts, strange are the objects of luxury that appear. The greater the number of laws and enactments, the more thieves and robbers there will be."<sup>1</sup>

Government should imitate nature:

"The Tao in its regular course does nothing and so there is nothing which it does not do."<sup>2</sup>

This is because Tao lets everything work for itself in its own way:

"Therefore the sage said: 'So long as I do nothing, the people will work out their own reformation. So long as I love calm, the people will be right themselves. So long as I am free from meddling, the people will grow rich. So long as I am free from desire, the people will come naturally back to simplicity.'"<sup>3</sup>

So what man ought to do is to accord with his nature and be content with his destiny. To illustrate this passive nature of Taoism I cite from Chuang Tse:

"Tse Lai fell ill. . . . Tse Li went to see him. Leaning against the door, he asked the dying man: 'Great indeed is the Creator! What will He now make you to become? Where will He take you to? Will He make you the liver of a rat? or an arm of an insect?' Tse Lai answered: 'Where a parent tells a son to go, East, West, South, or North, he simply follows the command. The Yin and Yang (the two forces of nature) are more to a man than his parents are. If they hasten my death and I do not quietly submit to them, I shall be obstinate and rebellious, but they are not mistaken. The great mass of nature makes me to be moved with the body, to be busy with life, to be at ease with old age, and to be at rest with death. Therefore what has made my life a good makes also my death a good.'"<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Lionel Giles: *The Sayings of Lao Tzu*, p. 38.

<sup>2</sup> James Legge: *The Texts of Taoism* (in the *Sacred Books of the East Series*), London, 1891, Pt. I, p. 70.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38.

<sup>4</sup> From the chapter on "The Great Master," James Legge's *Texts of Taoism*, Pt. I, p. 249.



**Knowledge is of no use and can do only harm:**

"Our life is limited, but knowledge is not limited. With what is limited to pursue what is not limited is a perilous thing."<sup>1</sup>

What we need and ought to know and to get is the Tao, but it is in us. It is like the God of the pantheistic philosophy. So what we ought to do is to know and to control ourselves:

"He who knows others is clever, but he who knows himself is enlightened. He who overcomes others is strong, but he who overcomes himself is mightier still."<sup>2</sup>

Besides, we have to use an altogether different method to know and to get the Tao. Lao Tse said:

"He who devotes himself to knowledge seeks from day to day to increase. He who devotes himself to Tao seeks from day to day to diminish. He diminishes and again diminishes till he arrives at doing nothing. Having arrived at the point of doing nothing, there is nothing which he does not do."<sup>3</sup>

As Tao is already in us, it can be known not by adding something artificially to it, but by taking away what has been artificially added to it before. That is what Lao Tse meant by "diminish." So the arguments of those who were simply interested in intellectual exercise were to the Taoists of little value. Thus in Chuang Tse's book one passage reads:

"To wear out one's intellect in trying to argue without knowing the fact that the arguments are the same is called 'three in the morning.' 'What is three in the morning?' asked Tse Yu. 'A keeper of monkeys,' replied Tse Chi, 'said once to his monkeys with regard to their chestnuts, that each was to have three in the morning and four in the night. But to this the monkeys were very

<sup>1</sup>From the chapter on "Nourishing the Essence of Life." *Ibid.*, p. 198.

<sup>2</sup>Lionel Giles: *The Sayings of Lao Tzu*, p. 44.

<sup>3</sup>James Legge: *The Texts of Taoism*, Pt. I, p. 90.