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# PREFACE

To have a great nation of six hundred million organized people, which for the past century and a half had been under chaotic government, suddenly standing resolutely on its feet again, and able to take a strong, independent position in international affairs, has been the greatest event of our day and generation.

Many who find China now included in their horizon, are conscious that they need to know a great deal more than they did about this vast living force — how it came into being, and what is behind it. Is it, as some propaganda has stated, simply an imported thing with power wielded by the very few, or has it come as the working out of a whole historical process carried through by the Chinese themselves, on the solid basis of the genius and aspirations of the very great majority of the whole people?

These few chapters, picked from the glittering mosaic of China's long history, together with the pictures that go to illustrate them, are put together in the hope that they will encourage folk who have not thought much about the subject in the past, to now go deeper into it. Naturally, the interpretation, which is that of the writer himself, may be questioned on many points. However, if it gives rise to fruitful discussion and a desire to know more, it will have accomplished its aim.

Rewi Alley
September 5, 1957

# CONTENTS

# THE ENGINEER KING

Man had been making history for a very long time before anyone got the idea of writing it all down. So of the wealth of story and legend handed down to us from these early days, it is often difficult to sift out truth from fiction. We cannot spend too much time, however, bothering about whether all stories of early historical or semi-legendary figures can be checked in detail. The important thing is to know what people throughout the historical times have thought of them—how stories of them have affected people's thought and action.

In the early days of primitive communism, various groups of people occupied what is now China. Some would have one totem, some another. Life was a struggle against wild animals and against other men, as it was throughout all the world of men emerging from the old Stone Age into newer forms of life.

Gradually some of these groups, principally those along the banks of the Yellow River and on the central plains of north China, began to take ascendancy. They had evolved a kind of organization which was superior to any other; they probably used their captured enemy as a slave rather than eating him for food. They evidently gained greater economic power than the surrounding tribes and could amass wealth which they used for their own well-being and advancement.

From this period have come down stories of a person called Fu Hsi, who is said to have taught people the use of nets for fishing, the making of musical instruments, how to establish marriage.

Then there was Shen Nung, the "Divine Farmer," who invented the hoe, harness for animals to work for men, and who so experimented with herbs for medicine that he continually poisoned himself in the process. He also started

the system of market-places, and taught how to evaporate salt.

After the "Divine Farmer" came Huang Ti, the "Yellow Emperor," who is said to have invented the compass in order to withdraw his armies out of a fog that encompassed them.

The wife of the "Yellow Emperor" promoted the use of silken textiles, and different ranks of society could be recognized by their different dresses. Arrows were invented; so were astronomical instruments and writing. Buildings were constructed and the country divided into administrative areas.

After these very accomplished persons, came the idolized Yao and Shun, who have been set up as patterns of what kings ought to be. Yao, finding that the affairs of the country were in a bad way, went to find a partner who would help him rule. He found a man living in the hills, called Hsu Yu, who, however, became indignant when the proposal for power was presented to him, and went off quickly to wash his ears of the sound of the proposer's voice. Hsu Yu's friend, asking what was the trouble and being told, quickly stopped watering his ox in the stream lest the water had been contaminated by the proposal.

Finally Yao found a man of great strength of character, who agreed to accept responsibility with him, and so came the co-ruler, Shun, an embodiment of family virtue and practical statesmanship. Shun had had serious family trouble but had managed to overcome all difficulties, to the admiration of his neighbours.

Yao sent him to all parts of the kingdom to inspect and report on the condition of the people and to improve conditions for them. In spite of all the difficulties he found, Shun succeeded. He succeeded by building up men around him who could do things too — like "Prince Millet," who taught the people how to sow and reap on the land cleared of forest; another, who was a great schoolmaster; and then the one who finally succeeded Yao and Shun as ruler, the

engineer Yu, who controlled the waters and brought livelihood more abundantly to the people.

The old king, Yao, had taught well. He would move amongst his people and see their conditions. When he heard a man singing a song of how he got up in the morning, dug wells and drank water, went to bed at night, without fear of the power of the court, then was Yao happy. Happy too when he heard children singing of how people followed his way without knowing it. Of these old stories, the Chinese people in these four thousand years have taken, with their intensely human and rational approach to life, much that has been of use to them. Certainly the engineer king Yu, who followed in the old tradition, owes much of his greatness to their inspiration.

Yu emerged into the epoch of attested history, though with a thousand mythical stories clinging to him. His father had got into serious trouble with his ruler over a piece of unsuccessful conservancy work, but Yu learned a lot and did much better.

When Yao and Shun died, Yu went straight ahead with his river control, digging the channels deep and not relying entirely on high dykes — a policy he followed both in regard to rivers and in regard to his own subjects. It is written that he himself carried a spade and led the people to work on the irrigation systems, that his ordinary garments were poor, he ate coarse food and lived in a low, mean house, expending his whole strength on the ditches and water channels.

The new age of bronze was coming in and Yu had nine great bronze tripods cast, one to represent each of the nine provinces of his empire. A ruler with a sense of responsibility to his people, he had a bell placed in such a position that even his poorest subject could ring it and get audience for any complaint.

There are many such stories, one of the most common being that he worked so hard that though he passed his own home three times on tours of inspection of works, on none of them

did he have time to enter. On one occasion, he even heard the cry of his baby inside. When he went south where people did not have the custom of wearing clothes, he decided his own to be one with them.

Over many parts of today's China, people will point out some old irrigation work that legend says is the work of the Great Yu. One day in Sandan, in far west Kansu, the surveying students of the school in which the writer was working were looking over the site where it was proposed to build a dam, when an old peasant approached and told them this was a good place, for Yu had built one there in the olden days and had irrigated much land with it. Since China's liberation in 1949 a modern dam has been built there.

Even if the engineer king had moved by modern transport over modern highways, he would have found it difficult to superintend all the work attributed to him — but evidently all water control carried out in his spirit and following the practice he had laid down was called his work, and not without justification.

The masses of the Yellow River Basin of those days were called the "Li Min," or the "Black-haired People," while their conquerors who gradually integrated with them were called the "Pai Hsing," written later as the "Hundred Names." The "Pai Hsing," possibly, were a little lighter in hair colour, and came from the north-west of China, most probably from present-day Kansu. As the process of integration went on, so did the dominating group of people who formed the core of the "Middle Kingdom" of ancient China begin to move slowly out of the age of slavery towards the more progressive, feudal one.

They spoke of their country as the one "within the four seas" and "under heaven." Engineer King Yu travelled, learned and taught, and brought peace to his people. When an armed expedition against the Miao people in the south-west was abandoned in favour of a peace policy which set out, in place of conquest by force, to demonstrate to the Miao

people how advanced the "Middle Kingdom" had become, the Miao people were won over, and submitted of their own accord, rendering tribute and acknowledging the superiority of the state ruled by Yu.

On one of his journeys, it is said, Yu saw a band of criminals being led off in chains. He stopped, alighted and wept, refusing to be comforted and saying that in the reign of Yao and Shun there had been no criminals and that the responsibility for these men's crimes was on his own shoulders.

Yu investigated soils, encouraged trade, and gathered all the geographical data he could find. When wine was invented during his reign he tasted it and found it good, but prohibited it on the ground that it would be bad for rulers.

He travelled so far and so fast that the boundaries of the country were called "the footsteps of Yu."

Well, all of this is quite a long time ago — about 2000 B.C. — and the main point of bringing it all up and making this the first story in a book of stories out of China is the fact that it has been an engineer king who has been made a revered figure for four thousand years. This makes a very good traditional basis for practical thinkers who are keen to finish all the work the Great Yu started, and make the waters of China work for the Chinese people.

The planned construction that China has now embarked upon will include many of the works which the "Black-haired People" have longed to complete for a long time. And those years since liberation have seen but a beginning to the irrigation and hydraulic construction that the descendants of the Great Yu will undertake.

Nearly three thousand years after the time of the engineer king, Yu the Great, the people still remembered him as the type of leader they needed and respected. The famous poet of the Tang dynasty, Tu Fu, has memorialized him with the following lines written in the eighth century A.D., their message still fresh and beautiful for us a thousand years later.

## *ON LOOKING AT THE MEMORIAL TEMPLE OF YU THE GREAT*

*Now look at the temple to the memory of*
*our Great Yu,*
*set amongst the vastness of the hills,*
*autumn winds blowing against it and*
*behind it the sun setting,*
*trees dropping their fruit in its courtyards*
*and along its walls the winding dragons,*
*white clouds of mists stealing through*
*its halls, while down by the river's edge*
*the sound of lapping on white sands*
*rises, reminding us*
*how here he worked with every way*
*he had to control the waters, to*
*irrigate for men to come.*

# MO TZU AND THE PHILOSOPHERS OF CHOU

Some half a millennium before the birth of Christ, and towards the end of the Chou dynasty, in the epoch that has been divided into the period of the Spring and Autumn Annals and, following it, that of the Warring States, there arose out of the people of China some mighty philosophers, whose doctrines were to influence thought for a long time to come. By any standard, these men were some of the greatest who have ever lived.

Of them all, one likes to start with Mo Tzu, for many of his ideas are still the cherished ones of most of the people in the world today.

Mo Tzu preached universal love, and also, in a very realistic way, defence against aggression. He felt strongly that the brotherhood of man was a practical thing to aim at, and much easier than the incessant organizing of people for war. He also taught that the narrow loyalty to family must give way to the wider loyalty to the whole community.

He was born in an age when slavery was still common but was already dominated by the more advanced, feudal system which was displacing it. He lived and taught after the death of Confucius (Kung Tzu) which took place in 479 B.C. and the rise of the Confucian collaborator, Mencius (Meng Tzu), who was born in 372 B.C.

Confucian teaching had many aspects which today men still pay homage to — the idea of responsibility towards family and state, of respect for old age of man towards man. He said, "Don't do to others what you would not have them do to you" — long before the Christian "Golden Rule." Then a whole succession of homilies that have become part of the

daily language of the people, such as "The father said to his son, 'Do not be a small man.'" It is also true to say that the development of other aspects of his teaching strengthened the feudal-bureaucratic system, especially as it was developed in successive imperial courts down through the centuries, assisting it in its stand against change.

Another eminent philosopher of the Spring and Autumn period was Lao Tzu or "the Old Philosopher," who taught that men should follow the way of nature. His followers were called "Taoists" after the word "Tao" which means "the way."

In the time of Mo Tzu there must have been quite a storm of argument about philosophical ideas. Mencius, for instance, in his time deplored the tendency of the common people to follow the teachings of Mo Tzu and their lack of respect to the already more officially accepted Confucian ones.

Following the Warring States period, came the rise of the short-lived centralized empire of Chin, which was soon followed by that of the long-enduring Han. Then came the beginnings of the great trade with the West. With trade, in those last two centuries before Christ, very naturally went ideas too, and one wonders how many of the concepts of Mo Tzu, Confucius and Lao Tzu were discussed around caravan camps that led to the other side of Asia.

Mo Tzu shines through history because of his so evident love of ordinary folk, and of his real concern for their well-being. He did not like to see what he considered waste, and felt there should be a hard-working government, having a planned economy. He had much faith in the good sense of the artisan, and held up the planned methods of working people as an example for the princes of his day. His words in this connection may be translated as follows:

*Workers in their duties*
*follow planned method; they*
*use a square and a compass*
*when each is needed; draw*