

A HISTORY OF
CHINESE PHILOSOPHY

VOL. II

THE PERIOD OF CLASSICAL LEARNING

(FROM THE SECOND CENTURY B.C. TO THE TWENTIETH CENTURY A.D.)

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With introduction, notes, bibliography and index

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CHAPTER I

A GENERAL DISCUSSION OF THE PERIOD OF CLASSICAL LEARNING

Historians of Western philosophy usually divide their subject chronologically into the three periods of ancient, medieval, and modern. This is no mere arbitrary division, for the philosophies of these three periods have, in fact, each their own individual spirit and character. Chinese philosophy, similarly, if considered purely from the point of view of time, may be divided into the same three periods. Their names, indeed, have already been used in the present work. From another point of view, nevertheless, it may be said that China has actually had only an ancient and a medieval philosophy, but still lacks a modern one.

This does not mean that China in modern times has had no philosophy. It does point, however, to an important difference between China and the West. The medieval and modern philosophy of the West are distinguished, quite aside from their obvious temporal differences, by very evident differences in spirit and character. Thus the systems established by such men as Plato and Aristotle became the central core of the ancient philosophies, and even with the coming of medieval philosophy, many persons continued to center themselves around these old systems. At the same time, to be sure, new elements appeared, such as the Christian view of the universe and of man, coincident with which, the medieval philosophers inevitably advanced new views of their own. Despite their newness, however, these elements and views all continued to conform to the ancient philosophical systems, and to be expressed in the ancient philosophical terminology. The saying that new wine cannot be poured into old bottles is applicable here. Thus despite the fact that Western medieval philosophy did not wholly lack new wine, it nevertheless remained possible for this new wine, either because it was small in quantity, or because, after all, it was not very new, to continue to be poured into and successfully stored within the bottles of classical philosophy.

In modern times, on the other hand, man's thinking in the West has undergone a complete transformation, and modern philosophers, much more than before, have attempted to make direct observations of facts. Their philosophy, as a consequence, has stripped itself of the old supports, while their terminology is also, in large part, newly coined. In modern times, in other words, the new wine has become so abundant and so new that it can no longer be contained in the old bottles; the old bottles, as a consequence, have burst, and new bottles have taken their place. This is the reason why I say of Western medieval and modern philosophy that, quite aside from their temporal differences, they also display very evident differences in spirit.

In Volume I of the present work, the age extending from Confucius (551-479 B.C.) to the Prince of Huai-nan (died 122 B.C.) has been referred to as the Period of the Philosophers, whereas that from Tung Chung-shu (179?-104? B.C.) to K'ang Yu-wei (A.D. 1858-1927) has been described as the Period of Classical Learning.¹ In order to gain a hearing for their ideas, the philosophers of this later period, no matter whether these ideas were new or not, were all obliged to attach themselves nominally to one or another of the schools that had flourished during the Period of the Philosophers, and more particularly, to the school of Confucian classicism. Likewise, in order to express their views, they usually had to make use of the terminology belonging to this ancient Period of the Philosophers.²

Thus the wine brewed by the philosophers of the Period of Classical Learning, regardless of whether it was new or old, was poured into the old bottles of the ancient philosophy and, for the most part, of Confucian classicism. Only very recently, indeed, have

¹ See Vol. I, p. 403. The Period of the Philosophers (*tzü-hsieh shih-tai* 子

學時代) is so named by the author because of the many thinkers who flourished simultaneously during this time with no one of them being deemed orthodox.

The Period of Classical Learning (*ching-hsieh shih-tai* 經學時代), which might also be called the Period of Scholasticism, is so named because, after Confucianism became orthodox around 100 B.C., most philosophical development, as we shall see, centered around the interpretation either of the Confucian classics, of the Taoist classics, or, in the case of Buddhism, of the Buddhist scriptures. — Tr.

² In both Occidental and Chinese medieval philosophy, to be sure, it was possible to continue using the ancient terminology, while, at the same time, attaching to it new concepts. The appearance of such new concepts in medieval philosophy, however, without the development of corresponding new terms to express them, is but another example of the new wine that continues to be poured into old bottles.

these old bottles been broken. From this point of view, therefore, it may be said of Chinese philosophy that the whole period from Tung Chung-shu to K'ang Yu-wei has been that of medieval philosophy, while a modern philosophy still remains only in its budding stage.

All human thought, of course, is affected by the limitations imposed by its material and spiritual environment. Thus in the case of China, the crumbling of feudalism during the "Spring and Autumn" (722-481 B.C.) and Warring States (403-221 B.C.) periods resulted in fundamental political, economic, and social changes. Later, however, with the political unification that took place under the Ch'in (255-207 B.C.) and Han (206 B.C.-A.D. 220) dynasties, a corresponding crystallization also occurred in the economic and social orders. From this time onward, despite the frequent change of dynasties, there were no fundamental changes in the political, economic, and social spheres. In all these fields past achievements were merely preserved, so that there was less opportunity than before for new developments in human environment and experience. And with this crystallization, a corresponding phenomenon occurred in the realm of thought which, in contrast to its broadness and diversity during the preceding period, inevitably tended from the Han dynasty onward to lean conservatively upon the past.

During this Period of Classical Learning, nevertheless, Chinese thought did receive a wholly new element from the outside: that of the alien faith of Buddhism. Yet this Buddhism, too, as preached in China, was essentially medieval in spirit. This was because the Chinese Buddhists, regardless of the originality of their ideas, all tended to depend upon earlier Buddhist doctrines for the expression of their views. In so doing, moreover, they generally made use of the technical terms that had already been employed in the Buddhist scriptures (*sūtras*). Chinese Buddhism, as a consequence, may also be termed a sort of "classical learning," even though the classics it depended upon were the Buddhist *sūtras* rather than the "Six Disciplines" of the Confucian school.

Buddhism, as developed in China, nevertheless supplied a definitely new element to Chinese thought, which the Neo-Confucianists of the Sung (960-1279) and Ming (1368-1643) dynasties even incorporated into their expositions of the Confucian classics. Therefore to say that China lacks a modern philosophy does not mean that in medieval and modern times new elements have been wholly lacking, nor that the philosophers of these periods have wholly lacked new

vision. The course of history never permits men to continue living under completely unchanging conditions. Thus, from the Han dynasty onward, those men who have expounded the philosophies of Confucius, the *Lao-tzu*, Chuang Tzu, and the other ancient philosophers, have indubitably been clearer and more perspicacious in their lines of reasoning than were these philosophers themselves, and the data on which their reasoning has rested have been more abundant and rich. Many new interpretations, too, have been propounded. What was said in the first volume of this work (pp. 4-5), that history means progress, may still quite appropriately be applied here. The new views thus presented by these men became the new wine of the Han dynasty onward.

Because, however, this new wine was not overly abundant or was not, after all, very new, it continued to be successfully contained within the bottles of the ancient philosophy, and even, for the most part, of the study of the ancient classics. Moreover, being extremely elastic, these old bottles were able to expand when they became filled by so much new wine that they could no longer contain it within their original compass. Thus the Chinese classics, which had been six in number, gradually increased to thirteen. Similarly, the four little works known as the *Im Yü* or *Analekts*, the *Mencius*, the *Ta Hsüeh* or *Great Learning*, and the *Chung Yung* or *Doctrine of the Mean*, eventually, owing to the stress laid on them by the Sung Confucianists, became the established basis of Chinese education under the title of the "Four Books." As such they enjoyed a prestige greater even than that originally held by the "Six Disciplines" during the Han dynasty.

A similar phenomenon occurred in the case of Buddhism, in which, as expounded by the Chinese, many new ideas were developed. Thus the great material and spiritual differences between the Chinese and Hindu environments made it quite natural that the former, when they took over Buddhism, should organize it, select from it, and interpret it according to their own Chinese point of view. And in so doing they added new ideas of their own. This, then, is another instance of the brewing of a new wine. Yet because this new wine, too, was not overly abundant or very new, it could still be successfully poured into the old bottles of Buddhism. Even in the case of the Ch'an or Zen school, which was the most revolutionary and purely Chinese development in Buddhism, its success depended upon its claim to be a separate "esoteric teaching," meaning by this that it pretended to

go back to the true teaching of Buddha. Here again, therefore, it was a case of pouring new wine into old bottles. Hence Chinese Buddhism, like other philosophic developments of the time, remained essentially medieval in spirit while its learning was a sort of classical learning.

The philosophy of medieval and modern times in China, then, must for the most part be found within the scholarly studies made upon the early Confucian classics and the Buddhist *sūtras*. Differences in philosophy have arisen out of differences in the way the study of the classics has been conducted at various times. Conversely, these philosophical differences have resulted in differences of approach at various times toward the study of the classics.

A general characteristic of the several schools of the Han dynasty onward is that each has had its own particular age when it alone was dominant.¹ This phenomenon contrasts with that of the simultaneous flourishing of many schools of thought, characteristic of the Period of the Philosophers. It explains why the first volume of the present work covers only some four hundred-odd years, whereas the second covers over two thousand. Herein lies another difference between the two periods, and one stemming inevitably from their differing political conditions: China's ancient history was marked by the rivalry of many simultaneously active and politically separate feudal states, whereas from the Ch'in and Han dynasties onward a unified empire has been the more general rule.

China, until very recent times, regardless of how we view it, has remained essentially medieval, with the result that in many respects it has failed to keep pace with the West. A modern age, indeed, has been lacking in Chinese history, and philosophy is but one particular aspect of this general situation. We would do well to remember in this connection that what we regard as differences between eastern and western cultures are in many cases actually only differences between a medieval and a modern culture. In the case of China, however, this situation does not derive from any peculiar incapacity of the Chinese to move forward. Rather it results from the fact that changes in human thought and conduct usually conform to the necessities imposed by environment. Once a certain type of thinking has been developed, therefore, men quite naturally cling to it as long as it continues to respond adequately to these environmental necessities. Indeed, even if new ideas are developed from time to time,

¹ See the Chronological Table of the Period of Classical Learning on p. 722. — Tr.

they continue to be superimposed upon the ancient system; as long as the old bottles remain unbroken, the new wine continues to be poured into them. It is only when the environment undergoes great changes, so that the old ways of thought are no longer able to respond to the trends of the time, that new types of thought develop to the point where they can no longer be contained in the old bottles. Thereupon the old bottles are shattered and new bottles are set up to take their place.

Since the beginning of extensive contact between China and the West, just such fundamental changes have been taking place in Chinese government, society, and economics. During the late nineteenth century, however, when Western ideas first became really influential, such reformers as K'ang Yu-wei and his followers continued to superimpose these new ideas on the old system of classical learning, wishing thus to pour this entirely new wine into the old bottles. These, however, had by this time already stretched to their greatest extent, and the new wine was so abundant and new that they were finally shattered. It is only recently, therefore, with this shattering of the old bottles of classicism, that the Period of Classical Learning in Chinese philosophy has reached its conclusion.

CHAPTER II

TUNG CHUNG-SHU AND THE NEW TEXT SCHOOL

1—THE SCHOOL OF YIN AND YANG AND THE NEW TEXT SCHOOL

Translator's Note: The New Text school (*Chin Wen Chia* 今文家), which was dominant throughout most of the Former Han dynasty (206 B.C.-A.D. 24), gained this name only later in apposition to that of the Old Text school (*Ku Wen Chia*). The latter, as we shall see in Chapter IV, rose to prominence about the time of Christ and gradually gained pre-eminence during the Later Han dynasty (A.D. 25-220). Its name is derived from the fact that it based its doctrines on versions of the classics which supposedly, after centuries of concealment, had come to light in the first century B.C.; these were therefore written in the archaic and obsolete script of the Chou dynasty. The New Text school, on the contrary, based itself on versions which, having been committed to writing during the Former Han dynasty, were therefore written in the newer form of script in use at that time. The relative authenticity of these varying versions has ever since been one of the most hotly debated subjects of Chinese scholarship. The controversy between the two schools, however, was much more than one of mere textual criticism, for it embraced wide ideological differences as well. Textually speaking, the New Text school's version of the classics is generally considered more authentic than that of the Old Text school. Ideologically speaking, however, the New Text school tended toward various superstitious excesses (such as the belief that Confucius was a supernatural being) which were shunned by the more rationalistic and sober minded Old Text school.

In this and subsequent chapters frequent reference will be made to the *yang* 陽 and *yin* 陰 and the Five Elements (*wu hing* 五行). The *yang* and *yin* are conceived of as two mutually complementary principles or forces, of which the *yang* represents masculinity, light, warmth, dryness, hardness, activity, etc., while the *yin* represents femininity, darkness, cold, moisture, softness, passivity, etc. All natural phenomena result from the ceaseless interplay of these two forces. Also conspicuous in Chinese cosmology are the Five Elements, which are earth, wood, metal, fire and water, and which are regarded as abstract forces rather than as the actual embodiment of these substances. Each element is believed to follow its preceding element in a fixed sequence, and hence each period of history is regarded as having flourished under the aegis of some one particular element. Extensive correlations are also made, as we shall see, of the Five Elements with the five directions (four compass points plus the

Classics to the greater and lesser divisions pertaining to Heaven or to man." This classification, as we shall see, differs from that of Liao's fourth phase, in which the *Spring and Autumn Annals* and *Book of History* respectively represented the lesser and greater phases of the study of man, whereas the *Odes* and *Changes* both represented the study of Heaven. In the new phase Liao now divides the Six Classics into six categories: three for the study of man, and another three for the study of Heaven. The first of the three categories pertaining to man is that of the lesser treatises on the rituals (*li*):

"Among the Six Disciplines there are first the lesser rituals¹ and lesser music.² These are the ritual classics for cultivating the person and regulating the family. They thus provide the basis for peaceful government. The cultivation of the person is the root, and this root consists in these rituals" (*Fifth Phase of Study*, 1.1).

Thus the lesser rituals and music have as their prime purpose the cultivation of the self, and thereby constitute the first of the three groups of classics connected with the study of man. As to the second group, we are told that the *Spring and Autumn Annals* "teaches how to give good government to the state, how to be a King or Tyrant, and how to practice love and righteousness. The *Royal Regulations* serves as its commentary." This and the preceding category comprise "the lesser plan for the study of man, having been accepted as basic by the Confucianists, Mohists, and the School of Names." As to the third group of classics, we are told that the *Book of History* "teaches how to give peace to the world, how to be a Sovereign or Emperor, and how to practice the Way (*Tao*) and its Power (*Te*). The *Chou Rituals* serves as its commentary." Together, those two works comprise "the greater plan for the study of man, having been accepted as basic by the Taoist and *Yin-yang* schools" (*ibid.*, pp. 4-11).

As to those other three categories of classics belonging to the study of Heaven, the first of these includes the works on music and the greater rituals. Regarding the former, Liao writes:

¹ Huang comments: "Such as the 'Summary of the Rules of Propriety' (*Book of Rites*, chap. 1), 'Lesser Rules of Demeanor' (chap. 15), 'Pattern for the Family' (chap. 10), 'Classic of Deportment' (chap. 39 of Chia Yi's *Hsin Shu*), and 'Duties of Youth' (*Kuan-tzu*, chap. 59)."

² Huang comments: "The *shao* which was danced at thirteen, and the *biang* which was danced as a full-grown lad." [See *Book of Rites*, chap. 10 (XXVII, 478), where these dances are mentioned as part of the curriculum for youth. Their exact nature is unknown today. — Tr.]

"The music of Kings and Tyrants has to some extent existed in China, but the epoch for the music of Sovereigns and Emperors is as yet there lacking, since the musicians for it have not yet been born. Hence I reserve what I have to say about it until they appear" (*ibid.*, 2.13).

On the greater rituals Liao likewise says little, perhaps for the same reason. These and music jointly comprise the first of the three groups of classics for the study of Heaven. Regarding the second group, we are told that the *Book of Odes* "teaches how to wander into the realm of the supernatural.... An example is the way in which the seekers for immortality transmute their soul to be like that of an infant, thus enabling their spirit to depart and leave their body behind. During the daytime, however, they are unable to shed their physical frame in this way and fly aloft.¹ This is why the *Odes* speaks only of the world of dreams,² in which, like a fish or a bird, one may rise aloft or descend below.³ The (*Huang-ti*) *Nei-ching*, *Ling Ch'u*, *Su Wen*, *Shan-hai Ching*, *Lieh-tzu*, *Ch'u T'zu*, and the ancient prose-poems and poems of the wandering immortals: all these serve as commentaries on it (the *Odes*)" (*ibid.*, p. 15).

K'ang Yu-wei and T'an Ssu-t'ung both agree that above the government of the Great Unity there exists yet another "realm created by Heaven," and it is this that Liao has in mind when he speaks of the study of Heaven. In his exposition, however, he is somewhat more explicit than the other two men.⁴

5—CONCLUSION OF THE PERIOD OF CLASSICAL LEARNING

Liao P'ing's ideology, whether judged historically or philosophically, is equally devoid of value. As marking the conclusion of

¹ Huang comments: "But through the *Book of Changes* one is able thus to roam about in one's own physical body."

² Huang comments: "It resorts to these dreamland roamings in order to make clear the principles of reality."

³ Huang comments: "Chuang Tzu dreamed that he was a bird soaring to Heaven; he dreamed that he was a fish swimming in the depths." [See the *Chuang-tzu*, chap. 6, p. 87, where, however, this statement is put in the mouth of Confucius. — Tr.]

⁴ The third of the three categories of classics dealing with the study of Heaven should properly be that of the *Book of Changes*. Liao fails, however, to discuss it in the remainder of his treatise, and the edition seen by me evidently contains textual errors. We know, furthermore, that the fifth phase in his thinking was followed by a sixth phase, but inasmuch as no printed description of it has been available to me, I am unable to say wherein it differs from the fifth phase.

the Period of Classical Learning, however, it secures for him a certain importance in the history of Chinese philosophy. In the first chapter of the present volume I have pointed out that the entire two thousand years from Tung Chung-shu down to the present century has belonged to the Period of Classical Learning, and that all its philosophers, irrespective of their own originality or non-originality, could gain a hearing for their ideas only by attaching themselves to one or another of the philosophic schools of antiquity—which, for most of them, meant the Confucian classics. This process I have described as that of filling old bottles with new wine. It is not surprising, therefore, that when, in the nineteenth century, China was shaken by the political, social, economic, and ideological changes resulting from the impact of the West, the first reaction of her thinkers was simply to try to fit these new external elements into the existing framework of Classical Learning—in other words, to continue pouring this radically new wine into the old bottles. The three men treated in the present chapter are representative of this effort.

Of the three, Liao was the last to die. The fifth phase of his approach to the classics, in fact, began only in 1918, seven years after the founding of the Republic. By this time the Classical Learning had been stretched to its farthest limits, so that it is scarcely surprising that what was forced into it contained much that was ridiculous. This very fact, indeed, was a definite indication that the old bottles had reached their final breaking point. Thus from the point of view of chronology and content alike, Liao's ideology truly marks the conclusion of that Learning.

The changes wrought by history, however, can rarely be assigned with mathematical exactness to any precise hour or day, for it usually happens that the close of one age overlaps the opening of the next. This, at least, is true in the present instance, for already before Liao's death in 1932—in fact, even before he inaugurated his fifth phase in 1918—there were other Chinese who were beginning to cast aside the Classical Learning in order to express their own new thinking. That is to say, before the Period of Classical Learning had yet ended, the modern age of Chinese philosophy was already beginning. Among these new thinkers, however, none was as yet strikingly successful in achieving a well rounded system. Hence, as the present book goes to press (1934), this modern age still remains in its formative stage. This is why, rather than try to discuss these

new developments, I close my account with the ending of the Period of Classical Learning.¹

¹ Since 1934, however, Professor Fung has himself written a series of five significant works developing his own philosophical system. Though in these he in part follows the Rationalistic school of Neo-Confucianism, he at the same time, in his own words, avoids its "element of authoritarianism and conservatism," and applies the fruits of his study of Western philosophy. One of these works has been translated by E. R. Hughes as *The Spirit of Chinese Philosophy* (London, 1947). For a brief account by Professor Fung himself of his philosophy, see his *Short History of Chinese Philosophy*, chap. 28. Still more recently, of course, Marxism has become a major intellectual force in China. — Tr.