

TRENDS OF THOUGHT AND RELIGION  
IN CHINA TODAY

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## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

WE ARE in the midst of another period of intercultural contact of China and the outside world. Once more her civilization is in a state of flux. Thought patterns, modes of living, time-honored traditions and institutions, all are undergoing far-reaching transformation. Changes in form of government, momentous as they may be, are accompanied by more fundamental changes in ideology, in the outlook on life, and in intangible realities, such as tastes and standards, beliefs and loyalties, which make up the spirit of a new age.

The present period of intercultural contact began in the middle of last century. The leading industrial nations of the West were then looking for foreign markets to absorb the output of their factories; and as Asiatic countries were unindustrialized, both diplomatic and forceful means were used to open up these countries to foreign trade. Because of lack of modern scientific and technical knowledge, the Chinese were placed at a disadvantage in these political and economic relations, and to remedy the situation, the government took steps to encourage the study of foreign languages, translation of scientific books, sending of students abroad, and employment of foreign experts. The Tung Wen Kwan was opened in 1880 at Shanghai for the study of European languages and sciences. A translation department was maintained by the newly established Arsenal at Shanghai for the translation of scientific and technical books. The eminent scholar Yen Fu translated Huxley's *Essays on Evolution*, Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*, Mill's *Logic*, and Spencer's *Principles of Sociology*. Another scholar, Ling Shu, rendered into Chinese masterpieces of western fiction, such as the works of Scott, Hugo, Dumas, Balzac, Ibsen, Cervantes, Tolstoi, and others. These introduced our students to a new world of thought and life. Some time in the nineties, Liang Chi-ch'ao was able to list three hundred European works then available in Chinese as the result of twenty years of translation. In the preface of his compilation

he wrote, "Knowledge is power. When we compare the Westerners' knowledge of sound, light, chemistry, electricity, agriculture, mining, industry, with our own learning in historical criticism, literature, and ethics, we realize how little we do know; and yet we still slumber on dreaming of our own greatness! Therefore to make our country strong, it is our first duty to translate more western books. If students wish to become accomplished, the most effective way is to read more western books. I hear that the national library in London has more than three hundred thousand different works. What we have translated is like a piece of hair in a herd of oxen."

Liang Chi-ch'ao's distinguished teacher was K'ang Yu-wei, the father and leader of the first Reform Movement of 1898. An advanced thinker and accomplished writer, his memorials to the throne on the necessity of political reform and the adoption of western methods and institutions in government, education, industry, and agriculture were literary models, which provoked admiration even in conservative circles, though his ideas were too radical for acceptance. His chance for putting his ideas into concrete form, at least on paper, came in the summer of 1898 when he was made adviser to the emperor Kuang-sü, who under his guidance sought to transform the country overnight by edict. This episode, known as "One Hundred Days of Reform," ended disastrously for the reformers.

K'ang Yu-wei's political ideas are found in his essay *Ta t'ung shu* ("The Utopia of Great Harmony"). The inspiration came from a passage in the Book of Rites (*Li ki*) which describes the beautiful Confucian conception of the ideal state:

When the Great Teaching prevails, the world will be a commonwealth. The wise and able will be selected (for office); people will be bound by universal ties so that none will claim only his own kin as kin, or have regard only for his own children; the aged will be looked after; those in full manhood will find useful employment; the young will be properly nurtured; the widowed, orphaned, and disabled will be taken care of; the men will have their proper duties, and the women will be suitably married. As for property, while disliking to have it go to waste, none will keep it as private possession; as for men's talents, while not refusing to develop them, none will utilize them for selfish purposes. In this way, rebellion will not raise its banner, robbers and thieves will not pursue their misdeeds, and house-doors need not be locked at night. Such a state we call *Ta T'ung*.

K'ang Yu-wei elaborated this ideal into a socialistic world state or league of nations, with such features as state responsibility for the upbringing of children, equality of educational and vocational opportunities, abolition of private property, a universal language, uniform weights and measures, state enterprises in industry, sanitation, and medicine. The aim of such a state would be the abolition of human misery. He wrote, "The causation of misery assumes many forms, *natural*, such as floods, epidemics, earthquakes; *social*, such as the dependent state of widows and orphans, lack of medical care, and poverty; *biological*, such as still-birth, infant mortality, congenital deformities; *political*, such as heavy taxation, war, oppression; *emotional*, such as hatred, passion, stupidity. The common causes of conflict among men are the artificial distinctions of class, nationality, and sex. Hence the cure lies in their abolition."

As an historical document, the essay is valuable in mirroring the social conditions of the time which turned men's thoughts to the building of utopian castles in the air.

A close colleague of K'ang Yu-wei in his reform movement was Tang Tse-tung, who at the age of thirty-three forfeited his life as one of "the Six Martyrs of 1898." It is generally believed that he was the actual writer of the edicts of the Hundred Days of Reform and, when the movement collapsed, he refused to flee because he believed that "only by the flow of blood could the cause be advanced." His book *Jen Hsüeh* ("The Philosophy of Benevolence") is an exposition of his political and economic views, but it is also illustrative of the spirit of revolt against the thralldom of tradition and political corruption. He wrote, "In this vast universe I am like a minute drop of water in the ocean; how can one describe the miserable feeling of futility! Under the manifold oppressions (of the social order), one must in silence drink the cup to its dregs. If one attempted to protest against the ignorance, poverty, and weakness in the land, one would be scoffed at as a demented person. But should one not describe a thousandth part, like a cry in the wilderness, fighting against odds, to hasten the destruction of the net of ignorance and bequeath his words as medicine for an evil time? The net is heavy, ubiquitous, and manifold, but we must destroy it piece by piece—political ambition, literary formalism, social tradition, religious fatalism. Only by breaking through can the net be destroyed: only by destroying it can we hope for freedom."

He held advanced ideas about the use of machinery for production and the exploitation of natural resources, and urged men of wealth to use their means to build up industries. "The whole secret is in utilizing natural resources through human ability, and by aiming at benefiting the many one also benefits oneself. It is like trying to keep a small sprinkler on one's land during a drought. It will never last. The thing to do is for all to work together on some large irrigation project. We need machinery for large-scale production. One machine can duplicate the work of a hundred men. Thus labor is saved for other needed work, while the people will have an adequate supply of goods. Further, machinery will relieve our people from much of their hard toil. Our people sometimes sell themselves into slavery, and are driven like oxen; so low has human life fallen because of poverty. On the other hand, see what has happened to the nations that use machinery. Their wealth has increased, and the general plane of living is raised. Machinery has done it."

Liang Chi-ch'ao was the most brilliant of K'ang Yu-wei's pupils and the Erasmus of the Reform Movement. Encyclopedic in his scope of knowledge, well informed in modern intellectual and political trends, wielding a pen that is lucid, forceful, and scholarly, he more than any one else must be given credit for the national awakening of China in the beginning of this century. For forty years the productivity of his pen was like torrential rain on a thirsty land. His collected writings now fill eighty volumes. We shall have occasion to refer to his scholarship below.

In recent times, the most representative scholar is unquestionably Professor Hu Shih of the Peking National University, popularly known as the father of the Renaissance Movement of 1917. The chief features of this movement are emphasis on the scientific method, critical revaluation of China's cultural heritage, and the use of the vernacular style as literary medium. The last feature is epoch-making, being known as the Literary Revolution. Not that the use of the vernacular was a new idea; it had been widely used by novelists, dramatists, and Buddhist writers for centuries, but Hu Shih, Chen Tu-siu, and their colleagues were instrumental in overcoming the opposition of the scholarly tradition and making the vernacular the accepted medium of formal writing. Hu Shih's arguments in favor of the vernacular (*pai hua*), first published in 1915 in *La Jeunesse*, organ of the Renaissance Movement, were that the vernacular was the living language of the people, in daily use by

them, and thus a more accurate medium of expression than the classical style (*wen li*), which was highly artificial, unintelligible to any except a minority, and as far as the common people were concerned, a dead language.

Hu Shih is an ardent advocate of modernization. He is impatient with those who with false pride esteem eastern civilization as more spiritual and deprecate western civilization as more materialistic. On the contrary, he claims that eastern civilization is more materialistic in the sense that we are helplessly handicapped by our material environment because of lack of knowledge and enterprise for making use of natural resources. In his essay, "Conflict of Cultures" (*China Christian Year Book*, 1929), he wrote, "I regard as truly spiritual that civilization which makes the fullest possible use of human intelligence and effort in a search for truth and in the multiplication of instrumentalities in order to control nature and transform matter for the service of man and to reform social and political institutions for the greatest happiness of the greatest number." Using the evil custom of foot-binding to drive home his point, he continued, "Foot-binding is not an isolated fact; it represents the most cruel form of human suffering of a whole sex for a period of ten centuries. And when we realize that religion and philosophy and morals have conspired to blind and deaden the Chinese conscience for a proper recognition of its inhumanity and that poets wrote enthusiastic eulogies and novelists produced lengthy descriptions of the small feet of women, we must conclude that something must be fundamentally wrong in a civilization in which the moral and esthetic senses have been so grotesquely distorted."

A younger man among modern scholars is Professor Ku Chih-kang of Yenching University. Espousing the historical realism of Tai Tung-yüan, Tsui Tung-pi, and others of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Ku is devoting himself to a reconstruction of Chinese history according to the scientific method, and when the first volume of *Ku shih pien*, embodying the fruits of his research, was published, Hu Shih declared it to be the most epoch-making work in a century on ancient Chinese history. In the author's introduction to the first volume, an autobiographical document of intense human interest, he refers to his early fondness for philosophy. His failure to arrive at a satisfactory philosophy of life by way of abstraction led him to see the necessity of the study of facts as the basis of philosophizing. "I recognize now the mystery of the uni-

verse; the ultimate truth lies hidden in the 'box of the gods', and not published abroad for all to see. Man has the desire for knowledge, but not the ability, hence we try to do the impossible. We really do not penetrate the mystery of the universe; we just scrape the surface of things. Theologians and metaphysicians may say to the scientists, 'You deal with the phenomenal, we walk with the gods.' This sounds well, but is it not a delusion? Preferable is the slow, painstaking labor of scientists to learn about the truth of things. If we are after knowledge, we had better begin with details. It is like piling up earth; if we want to pile high, we must broaden the base. We may not strike the stars, but the pile will get higher day by day. Now my ambition is more subdued. I realize that ultimate truth need not be vainly sought; only like a farmer, I till the soil bit by bit, and sow the seed grain by grain. With this realization I see that past philosophies were built on speculation. The new philosophy of science is just beginning; we cannot tell of its final achievement. This much, however, may be said: if we want true philosophy, we must begin with scientific research. Let each adopt a specific field of knowledge and till it. When the different fields have been developed, there will come men who will synthesize them and form the new philosophy." The author's introduction has been translated by Dr. Arthur W. Hummel under the title "The Autobiography of a Chinese Historian."

#### PHILOSOPHY, SCIENCE, RELIGION

The preceding sketch indicates that the main trend of thought in China today is realistic, scientific, and humanistic, with emphasis on the social objective, "the greatest happiness of the greatest number." As to philosophy in the proper sense of the word, sufficient time has not elapsed for any new system to appear. Principal attention is given to a reinterpretation of the traditional schools of thought—Confucianist, Taoist, Buddhist—in the light of the new knowledge that has come from the west. Among systematic treatises of this kind, the earliest to appear was the *History of Chinese Ethics* (1908) by T'sai Yüan-pei, formerly Chancellor of the Peking National University, while the best known work is Hu Shih's *History of Chinese Philosophy* (1919), a part of which was also published in English under the title, *Development of the Logical Method in Ancient China*." Liang Chi-ch'ao's *Chinese Political Thought before the Ts'in Dynasty* (1923) and Feng Yü-lan's *History of Chinese*

*Philosophy* (1931), like Hu Shih's work, cover only the ancient period, down to the unification of the country under the first empire-builder of the third century B.C. In Japan, several works covering the whole of Chinese philosophy have been published, the latest of which is Watanabe's *Brief Introduction to the History of Chinese Philosophy* (1922).

Between the traditional schools of thought and the infiltration of western philosophical ideas, certain significant tendencies may be noted. Reference has been made to the emphasis on the scientific method, or the emphasis on what is factual, which means first-hand knowledge as contrasted with book learning or mere speculation. This note is not entirely new; Yen Shi-chai (1635-1704) long ago had sounded it. He wrote, "It is like learning to play the violin. Merely to read music books and learn the laws of harmony does not bring you within ten thousand miles of the art. Practise with your hands, handle the violin, try the strings, and get the correct tones: in this way, the mind and the hands become unconsciously habituated. It is like studying to be a medical practitioner. Now students merely read medical books and despise clinical experience and the actual manipulation of instruments and herbs. You may be as learned as you want, but diseases will grow rampant, men will die of them, and you will never be able to help them."

Confidence in science has become an all-absorbing faith. Science is looked upon as the magic key that will ultimately open all doors of knowledge, solve all mysteries of the universe, and eliminate all the ills of life. William James somewhere in his writings referred to the dogmatic attitude of undergraduates about the omnipotence of science, so that to stop an argument all that was necessary was to call a man unscientific. Such an attitude prevails in China at present. An eminent thinker once publicly stated that philosophy was poor science, and theology, poor philosophy—a statement reminiscent of Auguste Comte's three stages of intellectual progress.

The assumed supremacy of science raised the question of the relative position of science and philosophy in the business of living. In 1923 a heated public debate was launched in the press; a dozen well-known writers and thinkers took part in it. It started with a lecture on the philosophy of life by Carson Chang, professor of philosophy at Yenching University, who maintained that, as science dealt with the objective world and with uniformities and averages, whereas a man's philosophy of life was subjective, volitional, and

individualistic, it was a sphere in which science could play but a small part, in which, however, personal influence and choice counted most. China's philosophers, from Confucius and Mencius down to the rationalists of the Sung, Yüan, and Ming dynasties, had emphasized this discipline of the inner life, and the result was a spiritual civilization. Europe, during the past three hundred years, had emphasized man's control of nature; the result was a materialistic civilization, which culminated in the catastrophic World War. China was at the fork in the road; she would have to choose which way to go; the key to the situation was an adequate philosophy of life.

This deprecation of science was strongly objected to by Dr. V. K. Ting, eminent geologist, who regarded Chang's thesis as a revival of medieval metaphysics. He considered the pursuit of science an excellent means of self-discipline; according to him, it would not only break down prejudices, but also create a love of truth; it would inculcate a calm and balanced attitude, and develop one's intellectual powers. Only by understanding biology and psychology could a man really know the meaning of life. Such appreciation of life could be acquired only by those who had looked through the telescope and realized the vastness of the universe, and through the microscope and realized the minuteness of life, but is denied to those who merely indulge in vacuous contemplation. Chang countered by saying that science is only one of several avenues leading to truth and that there are spheres into which it is incompetent to enter; a scientific analysis would be meaningless in an experience of the beauty of a sunset. Liang Chi-ch'ao showed that the truth of the matter probably lay somewhere between the two opposing views by pointing out that "a large part of the problem of life should be and can be solved by science, but that a small portion and a more important one is beyond science. Human life cannot separate itself from the intellect, but the intellect cannot embrace the whole of life."

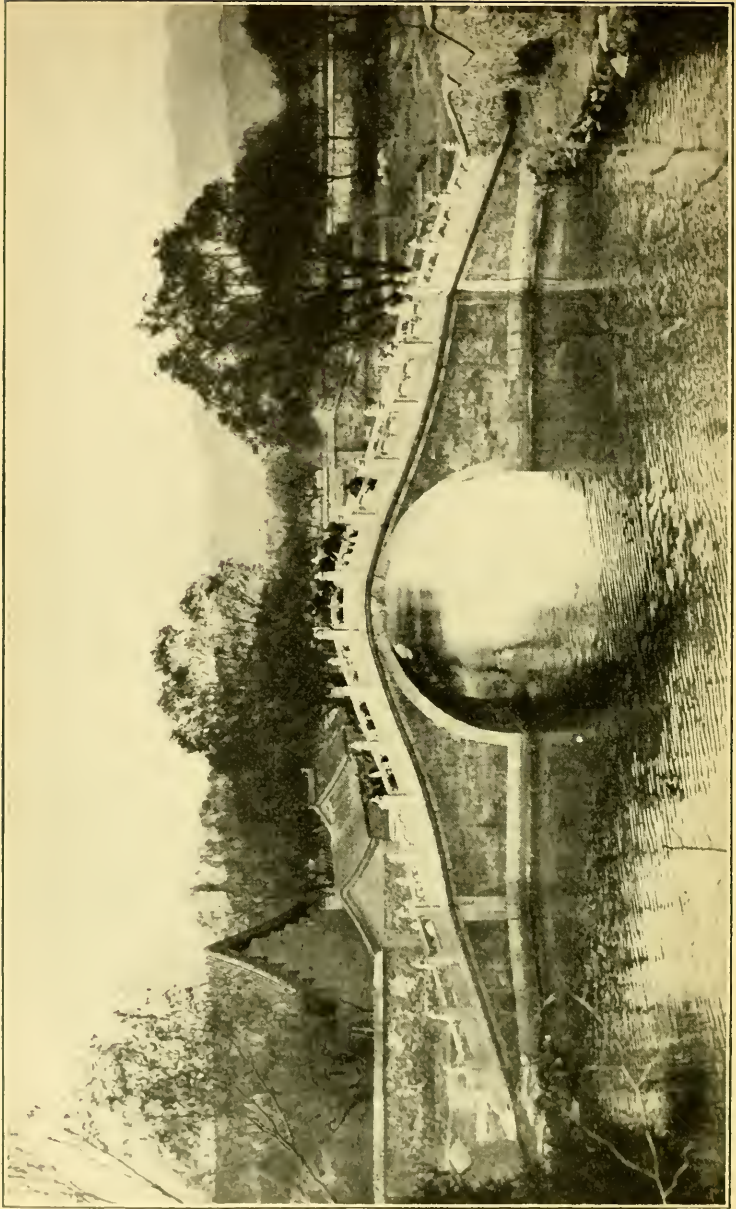
When these discussions were collected in one volume, Hu Shih was asked to write an introduction. As was to be expected of one who considered Huxley and Dewey his best teachers, he threw his weight on the side of the scientists and expounded his "naturalistic view of life." In the concluding paragraph he writes, "Living in the natural universe, in infinite space and eternal time, this human being, five to six feet tall, endowed with two hands, enjoying a life span of not more than a hundred years, seems a pitiable creature,



circumscribed and subject to nature's rigid laws. But it has its own place and value. With his two hands and a big brain, man has succeeded in making tools creating civilization, taming beasts, understanding nature's laws, and in making electricity to run his cars and ether to convey his messages. In increasing his knowledge, he not only increases his powers, but also elevates his mind. He casts away his fears and finds his own freedom. The very expanse of space which used to oppress him helps to develop his esthetic powers, and even the law of struggle for existence helps him to appreciate the value of cooperation and to strive to diminish nature's ruthlessness and wastefulness. In short, the naturalistic view of life is not without beauty and poetry, moral value, and creative wisdom."

In this naturalistic scheme of life, with its doctrine of spontaneous evolution, religion as supernaturalism has no permanent place. At best it is a passing phase in man's arduous upward climb; at worst, it is a positive hindrance to progress. This does not mean that Chinese scholars find no interest in the study of religion as a phenomenon in social evolution; in fact, recent archaeological and ethnological studies have greatly increased our knowledge of the religious ideas and practices of past generations, as, for instance, the discovery of the oracle bones at An-yang left by the people of Yin. But as a factor in social progress, religion has outlived its usefulness to most Chinese thinkers, a view quite in keeping with the humanistic tendency in Confucianism.

T'sai Yüan-pei once proposed to substitute esthetics for religion as a means for the enrichment of life. He thought that esthetics had all the advantages of religion in adding to the zest, color, and sweetness of life, without any of the drawbacks, such as the deceptive notion of a deity and the spirit of intolerance which religion generally fosters. According to him "beauty is universal; it cannot be privately appropriated; it can be shared by all without being denied to any one. It brings people together instead of dividing them. Its influence is not only cultural, but also ethical; it cultivates tolerance and cures selfish acquisitiveness." This position is challenged by others who, granting that there is much in common between religion and art, maintain that there is a fundamental difference between the two in that religion deals with the ethical life and carries an imperative "Thou shalt," whereas art involves no ethical necessity and is a matter of individual taste which varies with



BRIDGE IN THE OLD SUMMER PALACE NEAR PEKING

the degree of intelligence. To put it briefly, art aims at expression, but religion aims at salvation.

In place of religious faith, there is among our people a sense of collective responsibility which almost amounts to a social religion. Its basis is to be found in the cult of ancestor worship. While religious creeds teach the immortality of the individual soul, ancestor worship emphasizes the immortality of the group. The individual perishes, but the group continues; and yet every individual leaves a permanent impress upon the collective life of the group, like drops of water merged in a vast stream flowing continuously onward. This is a popular idea among our people. Hu Shih, in connection with his naturalistic view of life, said, "The self, microcosm, is mortal, but humanity, the macrocosm or our larger self, is immortal. To live for the humanity of all ages is the highest religion." Liang Chih'ao in an essay, "My View of Life and Death," wrote in the same vein, "We all die and we do not die; what dies is our individual self; what does not die is our social or collective self." This social religion has driven scholars like Chen Tu-siu and others from the seclusion and detachment of the school-room to turn to the turbulent life of active politics and even radical agitation for social justice. Not a few despairing of the present social order have embraced more radical schemes such as offering a way of securing not only consistency in individual living, but also welfare for the masses. This social passion is a distinct note in modern Chinese literature. The name "proletarian literature" has been coined, not to indicate its origin, but to describe its championship of the cause of the socially oppressed. Hu Shih's poem, "The Autocrat" is a good illustration:

High on the hill-top sat the autocrat,  
 Sending his slaves in irons to the mines.  
 "Which of you can disobey my word?  
 I wish you to be slaves, and slaves you are."

Ten thousand years the slave gangs toiled,  
 Till bit by bit the iron chains wore out.  
 "When these old shackles snap, revolt!"  
 They cheered each other in the mines.

Hard did they toil beneath the hill  
 Spadeful by spadeful digging, till  
 The whole was hollowed out and fell,  
 And with it crashed the autocrat and died.

The best known writer in this field was Tsiang Kwang-se, whose impassioned outpourings, in verse and prose, in novel and short story, voicing the suffering of child-laborers and the wail of wronged women, speaking for peasants toiling in the fields and soldiers bleeding to death in battle, serve to awaken our social conscience. The following two pieces are taken from his volume *Chan ku* ("Battle Drum" 1929). One, "Last Night I dreamt of Heaven," pictures an ideal society, and the other, written on Christmas Day, bitterly assails the present economic order:

Last night I dreamt of the Kingdom of Heaven,  
 Away in the mountains of time to come.  
 It has given me a deep-graven lovely image,  
 Which though awake I can never forget.

Men, women, young, old, neither high nor low;  
 You and I, we and they, all are one;  
 All sorrow, hatred, struggle. . . .  
 Not even a shadow of these is seen.

No cities, no hamlets, all is a garden:  
 Men dwell in the spaces of Nature's beautiful house.  
 For lovers of music, the concert hall stands by the workshop;  
 For those who dance, the dancing place neighbors the home.

Birds are singing in praise of the radiance of spring;  
 In me they awaken answering chords of joy.  
 These people truly enjoy a happy life;  
 They mingle their voices with the songs of birds.

The flowers are fragrant, the grass is green:  
 Men are alive to the poem and rhythm of life.  
 Joy is life, and life is joy;  
 Who remembers toil, misery, death any more!

Yes, that land is in heaven, not among men;  
 When will the Kingdom of Heaven come among men?  
 My soul is scarred by the wounds of pain;  
 Would I might stay in that land and never depart.

*Christmas!*

Resistance is sin;  
 The slave must obey his master;  
 The slave must have no divided heart;  
 The master can do no wrong.  
 Does this, Jesus, square with your law?

Poverty and wealth are foreordained ;  
 The poor must not hate the rich ;  
 The rich daily enjoy good meat ;  
 The poor starve unheeded.  
 Is this, Jesus, your boundless love ?

Patience is a virtue ;  
 After death you go to heaven ;  
 Joy in heaven is real ;  
 What matters suffering on earth ?  
 Is this, Jesus, your gift of peace ?

Blood-stains are everywhere ;  
 The powerful squander the lives of the weak ;  
 The world has become a slaughter-yard ;  
 Darkness has overcome light.  
 Is this, Jesus, your power divine ?

Having given a cross-section of how men think and feel about life and its problems, from which true philosophy and religion spring, it remains for us to review briefly the present status of the ethico-religious systems that have come down from the past under the title of "Three Religions of China."

#### CONFUCIANISM

With the passing of the monarchy in 1911, Confucianism as a state cult became a thing of the past. Its central tenet, the divine commission of kings, dramatized in the worship of Heaven conducted each spring and autumn by the sovereign on the altar of Heaven, became an anachronism in a republican regime. An attempt was made to revive Confucianism by legislation in 1915 and make it the established religion of the country, as Shinto is in Japan, but popular opinion was strongly opposed to it, and the proposed legislation was defeated. In those years, the Confucian Society, sometimes known as the Church of Confucius, was very active: funds were raised, and the foundations laid for the erection of a national Confucian cathedral in Peking. Local societies were organized for ethical culture, with membership initiation, Sunday services, and hours of meditation patterned after the usage of Christian churches, but the movement was short-lived. Its failure was attributed to the fact that Confucianism was not a religion in the true sense of the word, and the interest aroused by political considerations evaporated with the passing of the specific occasion.

Some Confucianists still look upon Confucianism as the manifestation of Chinese national culture, and bemoan the tendency of the younger generation to discredit it as an antiquated system. They attribute the political and social turmoil of the day to the break-up of the Confucian tradition with its central doctrines of filial piety and political loyalty. They fear that the nation is in danger of losing its soul, and believe that anarchy prevails because we are drifting away from the anchorage of our spiritual life. In a lecture on "Confucius, Confucianism, China, and the World Today" (1927), Professor Wu Mi said,

The world is now in a sea of trouble, and men suffer from spiritual rather than economic causes. Culture is in a process of extinction. Above all we suffer from the tyrannical excess of naturalism born of the power of science which has run wild and has been much abused; also from all kinds of emotional sophistry, of which Rousseau's romanticism is but one form of expression. Man is overruled by nature, and has listened to the voice of false prophets. Both right reasoning and experiences of past ages tell us that our hope lies in a humanistic movement, primarily in the field of education, and that the much-needed medicine for us in the essence of the truths of humanism that could be drawn from sources of the world's humanistic traditions. Here is obviously the value of Confucianism and its meaning for the world of today.

Modern Confucianists, or Neo-Confucianists as they call themselves, would like to go a step farther and build around the time-honored reverence for Confucius a popular religion for the edification of the masses. For this purpose they would develop a ritual of worship and even erect an altar to the deity. They recall the concept of "God" or "Supreme Being" (Shang Ti) of the ancients, and although they themselves cannot accept it as meaning more than the personification of moral law or "first cause," they would revive it for the benefit of the people who still need religion as a prop to the moral life. Rather than let Buddhists and Taoists monopolize the business of catering to the spiritual needs of the people, Neo-Confucianists propose to erect upon the humanistic foundation of Confucianism a religious superstructure and with the help of art, liturgy, and ritual to build up a new modern faith.

Few, however, entertain such a fantastic dream, while with the majority of scholars the question as to whether Confucianism is to maintain its dominant position in Chinese life or not is not one

of policy or artificial manipulation, but one of inherent merit and historical evolution. This detached view was well stated by Feng Yü-lan in his essay "The Place of Confucius in Chinese History,"

Historically Confucius was primarily a teacher; but soon after his death, in the fourth and the third centuries B.C., he was gradually considered the Teacher. In the second century B.C., he was considered even more than the Teacher. According to many Confucianists of that time, Confucius was actually appointed by Heaven to start ideally a new dynasty to succeed that of Chou. Ideally, though without a crown, he was a king; ideally, though without a government, he ruled the empire. In the first century B.C. he was considered greater than a king. According to many people of that time, Confucius was a god among men; but this did not last very long. Confucianists of the more rationalistic type soon got the upper hand. After the first century A.D. Confucius was again considered the Teacher. Only at the end of the nineteenth century, a little over three decades ago, the theory that Confucius was actually appointed by Heaven to be a king was revived. But soon after he was considered less than that, even less than the Teacher. At present we say that historically he was primarily a teacher.

#### TAOISM

In the religious history of the world, no religion can probably exhibit a record as rich as that of Taoism in ecclesiastical fabrication, political manipulation, fictitious creation of deities, and wholesale borrowing, whereby a religious system was erected upon slender and fortuitous foundations. Taoism arose as a rival to Buddhism, a home product against an importation from abroad. Buddhism had a pantheon, and Taoism created one of its own and a richer one to match. It appropriated the then current Lao-tse myth and elevated him to the highest place in the pantheon with the title of Ta Shang Lao Chün ("the Most High Old Ruler"). Buddhism had a great library of sacred scriptures, and so Taoism proceeded to manufacture one equally voluminous, starting with the little understood essay, the *Tao te ching*, supposed to have been left by Lao-tse before he disappeared from the public eye. The evolution of ecclesiastical Taoism took five centuries to complete. In time a Taoist papacy was established, tracing an unbroken apostolic succession through eighteen hundred years. The so-called popes resided on their hereditary domain in the province of Kiang-si, enjoyed extraterritorial privileges, collected taxes, married, and raised families; thus they

handed down their office from generation to generation as a family heritage. The papacy came to an ignominious end in 1927 when as a part of an agrarian movement dissatisfied peasants in the papal domain rose in revolt and expelled the pope.

This history of Taoism as an ecclesiastical institution has nothing to do with Taoism as a philosophical school which began in the fourth century B.C. and with which the writings of Lao-tse, Chuang-tse, Lieh-tse, and others are identified. The alliance of philosophical Taoism and its ecclesiastical name-sake is more or less accidental. Philosophical Taoism has exerted a great influence upon Chinese thought and culture, especially in painting and poetry, where its romantic naturalism is far more stimulating than the unimaginative, disciplinarian orthodoxy of Confucianism. The Taoist philosophy of life with its protest against the artificiality of our social and ethical standards and its plea for the natural as against the conventional and for individual freedom as against group authority has much to justify itself. In all ages, men weary of the strife and turmoil of life have found refuge and solace in its doctrine of *wu wei* (*laissez-faireism*). Confucianism has always stood for the opposite principle of *yu wei*, human effort, for law and order in government as contrasted with the anarchistic tendency of Taoism. Whatever the merits of Taoism, it seems unsuited to the temper of the modern age with its doctrine of strenuosity and its requirement of a highly disciplined habit of collective effort.

#### BUDDHISM

In a recent article on Buddhism in Asia I wrote, "The response of a religion to the impact of a new age usually takes the course of internal reformation, the development of a new apologetic, and the formulation of a social creed, in the order given. Self-preservation requires that it first spend its energy in adjusting its own organized life to the new social environment in which it finds itself and from which it derives its sustenance. Then comes the intellectual task of restating or justifying its doctrines (or else modifying them) in the light of new ideas that sway the thinking of the age, and finally it develops a social gospel; that is to say, it becomes conscious of its social mission." Buddhism in Japan has made considerable headway along these lines in adjusting itself to modern conditions. Buddhism in China, while alive to the necessity of modernization, is severely handicapped by lack of leadership and inertia of conservatism.



The first wave of reform was almost entirely political in motivation. The principle of religious freedom in the new republican constitution of 1912 acted like a stimulant upon the traditional religions which had until then led a moribund existence. There ensued a period of missionary enthusiasm and propagation. A National Buddhist Federation was created at that time for promoting the common interest of Buddhists throughout the country and for better representation in public affairs. The real awakening of Buddhism came about ten years later as a consequence of the Renaissance Movement of 1917. The latter was subjecting everything—historical facts, traditions, customs, ethical standards, religious beliefs—to a rigid examination in the light of modern scientific method and social needs, a sort of cultural house-cleaning with a strong iconoclastic tendency. In the face of this, internal reformation was absolutely necessary if Buddhism was to survive. Tai Hsü, then a young monk from the famous sacred island of P'u-t'ò, and his colleagues sensed the signs of the time and began organizing lay groups for a revival. They started the Bodhi Society (Chüeh Shê), the object of which was "to propagate the essence of Mahāyāna Buddhism, so that the wicked might be led into loving kindness, the selfish into righteousness, the wise to rejoice in truth, the strong to love of virtue; and to transform this war-torn, suffering world into a place of peace and happiness."

In the course of time membership grew, and to meet the need for a literary organ both to propagate their ideals and to consolidate their movement, Tai Hsü was asked to organize and edit the journal *Hai Chao Yin* ("Voice of the Sea-waves"). In the first number of this monthly, in 1918, he published his now famous essay on "The Reformation of the Sangha," which pointed out the necessity of internal reform and the abuses in the monastic order, such as its commercialism and illiteracy, and outlined a plan of reform. It was the first voice lifted publicly in the Buddhist ranks. As was to be expected, there was opposition from vested interests; that is, the powerful monasteries with great establishments and vast estates which had lived on the fat of the land and did not want any change. But liberal forces gathered around Tai Hsü; they were generally lay people who saw with him that an illiterate priesthood sunk deep in monastic indolence might continue to cater to the credulity of equally ignorant women-folk, but would surely discredit the religion in the eyes of a generation imbued with modern ideas. Besides rais-

ing the educational standard of the monks and requiring them to be engaged in physical labor, Tai Hsü advocated simplifying temple worship, making the temples what they should be, houses of prayer, or meditation and study. He would erect in the capital city a National Center of Buddhist Learning and throughout the country a net-work of Buddhist institutes. At the National Center, there would be a museum for the preservation of Buddhist objects of art and a library of Buddhist literary treasures. This grandiose project exists for the present on paper only, and its realization seems far off.

The new apologetic which Buddhists are attempting to develop has two sides—intellectual and ethical. Intellectually, it is to reconcile Buddhism with science. The argument is advanced that not only is Buddhism essentially scientific, but that it has gone ahead of science. In a volume of essays entitled *Lu shan hsüeh*, Tai Hsü writes on "Buddhism and Science" thus:

Those who criticize science say that science is responsible for the weapons of warfare and therefore is harmful. Those who praise science point to the great material achievements of modern civilization which benefit mankind. We need not join the controversy, although those who have gone through the World War cannot be blind to some truth underlying this criticism. We should note, however, that the criticism refers to the fruits of science. Science itself is a method which is beyond criticism. Science is always open-minded, ready to discard what is disproved and to adopt what is verified, in order to reach the truth of reality. However, there is one obstinate superstition among scientists, and that is, they believe this scientific method is the only road for arriving at truth, and fail to realize that the ultimate reality of this universe cannot be penetrated by it.

In general, what is a gain to science is a loss to religion. Those religions with doctrines of gods and souls fundamentally lack the stability of truth and are easily shaken. But Buddhism benefits by the discoveries of science. The more science progresses, the clearer Buddhism becomes, for Buddhism explains the truth concerning the universe. Take an illustration from the development of astronomy. In ancient times, men thought of heaven as above and earth below; then came Copernicus who taught that the sun was the center of our system. Now we have arrived at the idea that there is no one center anywhere in the astral universe. This supports the Buddhist conception of the great unlimited void, embracing numberless worlds, all interwoven like a spider web. Science helps us to understand Buddhism by offering suitable

analogies. But the core of Buddhism science cannot reach, for it has to do with inward illumination, the direct insight into the reality of the universe, an intuitive experience only acquired by oneself, where all logic, analogy, or scientific hypothesis are of no avail. When scientists insist that theirs is the only method of arriving at truth, they remind one of blind men trying to understand an elephant by the sense of touch. They will get partial impressions of the different parts of the animal and what strange impressions as compared with a living elephant as seen by a man with normal eyesight.

The ethical argument in favor of Buddhism is more convincing. Buddhists claim that their religion alone is adequate to satisfy the spiritual and moral needs of the people. According to them, "at the bottom of the stress and storm, the discontent and unhappiness of this restless modern world as of all ages is a mistaken view of the nature of life." Buddhists call it the delusion of self and the delusion of things. Out of this double delusion have sprung all greed and quarrelsomeness of man. The cruelty of the competitive economic system on the one hand and the brutality of international warfare and interracial conflict on the other are but the inevitable consequences of a mistaken philosophy of living. Buddhism alone consistently teaches and practises the doctrine of human brotherhood and universal peace by pointing to the truth that all share the Buddha-nature, which is in all of us waiting to be realized and which therefore makes us one. It preaches the doctrine of collective karma; that is to say, we live interdependently, what is the accumulated result of the interaction of countless lives and generations, and only by cooperative effort may we realize a better world order.

Research in Buddhism is going on both within and without Buddhist circles in China. The Nanking Buddhist Institute (*Nei Hsiieh Yüan*) is engaged in the editing and publishing of Buddhist texts in polyglot. A Shanghai publishing house recently brought out a "Library of Studies in Buddhism," which included such volumes as *A Guide to the Study of Buddhism* by Lü Chen (1926) and *A History of Buddhism in China* by Tsiang Wei-chiao (1929).

Some people feel that there is but little prospect of success for a revival of Buddhism in China, for not only have times changed, but also Buddhism is essentially uncongenial to the mentality and social philosophy of the Chinese people. The Chinese are a practical-minded people and have never really assimilated the Indian metaphysics and mysticism of Buddhism. Further they are firm believers

in the type of social organization which has the family as its center, while the Buddhist practice of celibacy and the renunciation of the life of a householder have never been popular. When the Taoists were imitating the Buddhists in a wholesale manner, they were wise enough not to require celibacy of their priests, though they adopted the Buddhist monastic institution. In Japan where the Confucian doctrine of the family as the foundation of society has exerted a strong influence, the law of celibacy was not rigidly adhered to, and some Buddhist sects permit their priests to marry. In China no such compromise was ever made. In the past, Buddhism contributed largely to the intellectual and cultural life of the nation and was a powerful factor in the inculcation of the spirit of philanthropy. Is its day of social benefaction ended? In every Buddhist temple, the light in front of the central image may burn low, but never goes out. Is this symbolic? And will the religion of the Enlightened One that now flickers behind the walls of lonely cloisters and monkish cells flame forth again as the Light of Asia? Not only Buddhists are anxiously asking this question, but also those who are keenly alive to the spiritual needs of our time.