CHAPTER II

CHINA BEFORE THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

Where the Chinese came from is a matter of conjecture. Their early history is known only from their own annals, which throw no light upon the question. The Shu-King, one of the Confucian classics (edited, not composed, by Confucius), begins, like Livy, with legendary accounts of princes whose virtues and vices are intended to supply edification or warning to subsequent rulers. Yao and Shun were two model Emperors, whose date (if any) was somewhere in the third millennium B.C. "The age of Yao and Shun," in Chinese literature, means what "the Golden Age" mean with us. It seems certain that, when Chinese history begins, the Chinese occupied only a small part of what is now China, along the banks of the Yellow River. They were agricultural, and had already reached a fairly high level of civilization--much higher than that of any other part of Eastern Asia. The Yellow River is a fierce and terrible stream, too swift for navigation, turgid, and full of mud, depositing silt upon its bed until it rises above the surrounding country, when it suddenly alters its course, sweeping away villages and towns in a destructive torrent. Among most early agricultural nations, such a river would have inspired superstitious awe, and floods would have been averted by human sacrifice; in the Shu-King, however, there is little trace of superstition. Yao and Shun, and Yü (the latter's successor), were all occupied in combating the inundations, but their methods were those of

the engineer, not of the miracle-worker. This shows, at least, the state of belief in the time of Confucius. The character ascribed to Yao shows what was expected of an Emperor:--

> He was reverential, intelligent, accomplished, and thoughtful--naturally and without effort. He was sincerely courteous, and capable of all complaisance. The display of these qualities reached to the four extremities of the empire, and extended from earth to heaven. He was able to make the able and virtuous distinguished, and thence proceeded to the love of the nine classes of his kindred, who all became harmonious. He also regulated and polished the people of his domain, who all became brightly intelligent. Finally, he united and harmonized the myriad States of the empire; and lo! the black-haired people were transformed. The result was universal concord.[1]

The first date which can be assigned with precision in Chinese history is that of an eclipse of the sun in 776 B.C.[2] There is no reason to doubt the general correctness of the records for considerably earlier times, but their exact chronology cannot be fixed. At this period, the Chou dynasty, which fell in 249 B.C. and is supposed to have begun in 1122 B.C., was already declining in power as compared with a number of nominally subordinate feudal States. The position of the Emperor at this time, and for the next 500 years, was similar to that of the King of France during those parts of the Middle Ages when his authority was at its lowest ebb. Chinese history consists of a series of dynasties, each

strong at first and weak afterwards, each gradually losing control over subordinates, each followed by a period of anarchy (sometimes lasting for centuries), and ultimately succeeded by a new dynasty which temporarily re-establishes a strong Central Government. Historians always attribute the fall of a dynasty to the excessive power of eunuchs, but perhaps this is, in part, a literary convention.

What distinguishes the Emperor is not so much his political power, which fluctuates with the strength of his personality, as certain religious prerogatives. The Emperor is the Son of Heaven; he sacrifices to Heaven at the winter solstice. The early Chinese used "Heaven" as synonymous with "The Supreme Ruler," a monotheistic God;[3] indeed Professor Giles maintains, by arguments which seem conclusive, that the correct translation of the Emperor's title would be "Son of God." The word "Tien," in Chinese, is used both for the sky and for God, though the latter sense has become rare. The expression "Shang Ti," which means "Supreme Ruler," belongs in the main to pre-Confucian times, but both terms originally represented a God as definitely anthropomorphic as the God of the Old Testament.[4]

As time went by the Supreme Ruler became more shadowy, while "Heaven" remained, on account of the Imperial rites connected with it. The Emperor alone had the privilege of worshipping "Heaven," and the rites continued practically unchanged until the fall of the Manchu dynasty in 1911. In modern times they were performed in the Temple of Heaven in Peking, one of the most beautiful places in the world. The annual

sacrifice in the Temple of Heaven represented almost the sole official survival of pre-Confucian religion, or indeed of anything that could be called religion in the strict sense; for Buddhism and Taoism have never had any connection with the State.

The history of China is known in some detail from the year 722 B.C., because with this year begins Confucius' Springs and Autumns, which is a chronicle of the State of Lu, in which Confucius was an official.

One of the odd things about the history of China is that after the Emperors have been succeeding each other for more than 2,000 years, one comes to a ruler who is known as the "First Emperor," Shih Huang Ti. He acquired control over the whole Empire, after a series of wars, in 221 B.C., and died in 210 B.C. Apart from his conquests, he is remarkable for three achievements: the building of the Great Wall against the Huns, the destruction of feudalism, and the burning of the books. The destruction of feudalism, it must be confessed, had to be repeated by many subsequent rulers; for a long time, feudalism tended to grow up again whenever the Central Government was in weak hands. But Shih Huang Ti was the first ruler who made his authority really effective over all China in historical times. Although his dynasty came to an end with his son, the impression he made is shown by the fact that our word "China" is probably derived from his family name, Tsin or Chin[5]. (The Chinese put the family name first.) His Empire was roughly co-extensive with what is now China proper.

The destruction of the books was a curious incident. Shih Huang Ti, as appears from his calling himself "First Emperor," disliked being reminded of the fact that China had existed before his time; therefore history was anathema to him. Moreover the literati were already a strong force in the country, and were always (following Confucius) in favour of the preservation of ancient customs, whereas Shih Huang Ti was a vigorous innovator. Moreover, he appears to have been uneducated and not of pure Chinese race. Moved by the combined motives of vanity and radicalism, he issued an edict decreeing that--

> All official histories, except the memoirs of Tsin (his own family), shall be burned; except the persons who have the office of literati of the great learning, those who in the Empire permit themselves to hide the Shi-King, the Shu-King (Confucian classics), or the discourses of the hundred schools, must all go before the local civil and military authorities so that they may be burned. Those who shall dare to discuss among themselves the Shi-King and the Shu-King shall be put to death and their corpses exposed in a public place; those who shall make use of antiquity to belittle modern times shall be put to death with their relations.... Thirty days after the publication of this edict, those who have not burned their books shall be branded and sent to forced labour. The books which shall not be proscribed are those of medicine and pharmacy, of divination ..., of agriculture and of arboriculture. As for those who desire to study the laws and ordinances, let them take the officials as masters. (Cordier,

op. cit. i. p. 203.)

It will be seen that the First Emperor was something of a Bolshevik. The Chinese literati, naturally, have blackened his memory. On the other hand, modern Chinese reformers, who have experienced the opposition of old-fashioned scholars, have a certain sympathy with his attempt to destroy the innate conservatism of his subjects. Thus Li Ung Bing[6] says:--

> No radical change can take place in China without encountering the opposition of the literati. This was no less the case then than it is now. To abolish feudalism by one stroke was a radical change indeed. Whether the change was for the better or the worse, the men of letters took no time to inquire; whatever was good enough for their fathers was good enough for them and their children. They found numerous authorities in the classics to support their contention and these they freely quoted to show that Shih Huang Ti was wrong. They continued to criticize the government to such an extent that something had to be done to silence the voice of antiquity ... As to how far this decree (on the burning of the books) was enforced, it is hard to say. At any rate, it exempted all libraries of the government, or such as were in possession of a class of officials called Po Szu or Learned Men. If any real damage was done to Chinese literature under the decree in question, it is safe to say that it was not of such a nature as later writers would have us believe. Still,

> this extreme measure failed to secure the desired end, and a number of the men of letters in Han Yang, the capital, was subsequently buried alive.

This passage is written from the point of view of Young China, which is anxious to assimilate Western learning in place of the dead scholarship of the Chinese classics. China, like every other civilized country, has a tradition which stands in the way of progress. The Chinese have excelled in stability rather than in progress; therefore Young China, which perceives that the advent of industrial civilization has made progress essential to continued national existence, naturally looks with a favourable eye upon Shih Huang Ti's struggle with the reactionary pedants of his age. The very considerable literature which has come down to us from before his time shows, in any case, that his edict was somewhat ineffective; and in fact it was repealed after twenty-two years, in 191. B.C.

After a brief reign by the son of the First Emperor, who did not inherit his capacity, we come to the great Han dynasty, which reigned from 206 B.C. to A.D. 220. This was the great age of Chinese imperialism--exactly coeval with the great age of Rome. In the course of their campaigns in Northern India and Central Asia, the Chinese were brought into contact with India, with Persia, and even with the Roman Empire.[7] Their relations with India had a profound effect upon their religion, as well as upon that of Japan, since they led to the introduction of Buddhism. Relations with Rome were chiefly promoted by the Roman desire for silk,

and continued until the rise of Mohammedanism. They had little importance for China, though we learn, for example, that about A.D. 164 a treatise on astronomy was brought to China from the Roman Empire.[8] Marcus Aurelius appears in Chinese history under the name An Tun, which stands for Antoninus.

It was during this period that the Chinese acquired that immense prestige in the Far East which lasted until the arrival of European armies and navies in the nineteenth century. One is sometimes tempted to think that the irruption of the white man into China may prove almost as ephemeral as the raids of Huns and Tartars into Europe. The military superiority of Europe to Asia is not an eternal law of nature, as we are tempted to think; and our superiority in civilization is a mere delusion. Our histories, which treat the Mediterranean as the centre of the universe, give quite a wrong perspective. Cordier,[9] dealing with the campaigns and voyages of discovery which took place under the Han dynasty, says:--

> The Occidentals have singularly contracted the field of the history of the world when they have grouped around the people of Israel, Greece, and Rome the little that they knew of the expansion of the human race, being completely ignorant of these voyagers who ploughed the China Sea and the Indian Ocean, of these cavalcades across the immensities of Central Asia up to the Persian Gulf. The greatest part of the universe, and at the same time a civilization different but certainly as developed as that

> of the ancient Greeks and Romans, remained unknown to those who wrote the history of their little world while they believed that they, were setting forth the history of the world as a whole.

In our day, this provincialism, which impregnates all our culture, is liable to have disastrous consequences politically, as well as for the civilization of mankind. We must make room for Asia in our thoughts, if we are not to rouse Asia to a fury of self-assertion.

After the Han dynasty there are various short dynasties and periods of disorder, until we come to the Tang dynasty (A.D. 618-907). Under this dynasty, in its prosperous days, the Empire acquired its greatest extent, and art and poetry reached their highest point.[10] The Empire of Jenghis Khan (died 1227) was considerably greater, and contained a great part of China; but Jenghis Khan was a foreign conqueror. Jenghis and his generals, starting from Mongolia, appeared as conquerors in China, India, Persia, and Russia. Throughout Central Asia, Jenghis destroyed every man, woman, and child in the cities he captured. When Merv was captured, it was transformed into a desert and 700,000 people were killed. But it was said that many had escaped by lying among the corpses and pretending to be dead; therefore at the capture of Nishapur, shortly afterwards, it was ordered that all the inhabitants should have their heads cut off. Three pyramids of heads were made, one of men, one of women, and one of children. As it was feared that some might have escaped by hiding underground, a detachment of soldiers was left to kill any that might emerge.[11] Similar horrors were enacted at Moscow and

Kieff, in Hungary and Poland. Yet the man responsible for these massacres was sought in alliance by St. Louis and the Pope. The times of Jenghis Khan remind one of the present day, except that his methods of causing death were more merciful than those that have been employed since the Armistice.

Kublai Khan (died 1294), who is familiar, at least by name, through Marco Polo and Coleridge; was the grandson of Jenghis Khan, and the first Mongol who was acknowledged Emperor of China, where he ousted the Sung dynasty (960-1277). By this time, contact with China had somewhat abated the savagery of the first conquerors. Kublai removed his capital from Kara Korom in Mongolia to Peking. He built walls like those which still surround the city, and established on the walls an observatory which is preserved to this day. Until 1900, two of the astronomical instruments constructed by Kublai were still to be seen in this observatory, but the Germans removed them to Potsdam after the suppression of the Boxers.[12] I understand they have been restored in accordance with one of the provisions of the Treaty of Versailles. If so, this was probably the most important benefit which that treaty secured to the world.

Kublai plays the same part in Japanese history that Philip II plays in the history of England. He prepared an Invincible Armada, or rather two successive armadas, to conquer Japan, but they were defeated, partly by storms, and partly by Japanese valour.

After Kublai, the Mongol Emperors more and more adopted Chinese ways, and lost their tyrannical vigour. Their dynasty came to an end in 1370, and was succeeded by the pure Chinese Ming dynasty, which lasted until the Manchu conquest of 1644. The Manchus in turn adopted Chinese ways, and were overthrown by a patriotic revolution in 1911, having contributed nothing notable to the native culture of China except the pigtail, officially abandoned at the Revolution.

The persistence of the Chinese Empire down to our own day is not to be attributed to any military skill; on the contrary, considering its extent and resources, it has at most times shown itself weak and incompetent in war. Its southern neighbours were even less warlike, and were less in extent. Its northern and western neighbours inhabited a barren country, largely desert, which was only capable of supporting a very sparse population. The Huns were defeated by the Chinese after centuries of warfare; the Tartars and Manchus, on the contrary, conquered China. But they were too few and too uncivilized to impose their ideas or their way of life upon China, which absorbed them and went on its way as if they had never existed. Rome could have survived the Goths, if they had come alone, but the successive waves of barbarians came too quickly to be all civilized in turn. China was saved from this fate by the Gobi Desert and the Tibetan uplands. Since the white men have taken to coming by sea, the old geographical immunity is lost, and greater energy will be required to preserve the national independence.

In spite of geographical advantages, however, the persistence of Chinese civilization, fundamentally unchanged since the introduction of Buddhism, is a remarkable phenomenon. Egypt and Babylonia persisted as long, but since they fell there has been nothing comparable in the world. Perhaps the main cause is the immense population of China, with an almost complete identity of culture throughout. In the middle of the eighth century, the population of China is estimated at over 50 millions, though ten years later, as a result of devastating wars, it is said to have sunk to about 17 millions.[13] A census has been taken at various times in Chinese history, but usually a census of houses, not of individuals. From the number of houses the population is computed by a more or less doubtful calculation. It is probable, also, that different methods were adopted on different occasions, and that comparisons between different enumerations are therefore rather unsafe. Putnam Weale[14] says:--

> The first census taken by the Manchus in 1651, after the restoration of order, returned China's population at 55 million persons, which is less than the number given in the first census of the Han dynasty, A.D. 1, and about the same as when Kublai Khan established the Mongal dynasty in 1295. (This is presumably a misprint, as Kublai died in 1294.) Thus we are faced by the amazing fact that, from the beginning of the Christian era, the toll of life taken by internecine and frontier wars in China was so great that in spite of all territorial expansion the population for upwards of sixteen centuries remained more or less

> stationary. There is in all history no similar record. Now, however, came a vast change. Thus three years after the death of the celebrated Manchu Emperor Kang Hsi, in 1720, the population had risen to 125 millions. At the beginning of the reign of the no less illustrious Ch'ien Lung (1743) it was returned at 145 millions; towards the end of his reign, in 1783, it had doubled, and was given as 283 millions. In the reign of Chia Ch'ing (1812) it had risen to 360 millions; before the Taiping rebellion (1842) it had grown to 413 millions; after that terrible rising it sunk to 261 millions.

I do not think such definite statements are warranted. The China Year Book for 1919 (the latest I have seen) says (p. 1):--

> The taking of a census by the methods adopted in Western nations has never yet been attempted in China, and consequently estimates of the total population have varied to an extraordinary degree. The nearest approach to a reliable estimate is, probably, the census taken by the Minchengpu (Ministry of Interior) in 1910, the results of which are embodied in a report submitted to the Department of State at Washington by Mr. Raymond P. Tenney, a Student Interpreter at the U.S. Legation, Peking.... It is pointed out that even this census can only be regarded as approximate, as, with few exceptions, households and not individuals were counted.

The estimated population of the Chinese Empire (exclusive of Tibet) is given, on the basis of this census, as 329,542,000, while the population of Tibet is estimated at 1,500,000. Estimates which have been made at various other dates are given as follows (p. 2):

A.D.		A.D.	
1381	59,850,000		/ 143,125,225
1412	66,377,000	1760--	203,916,477
1580	60,692,000	1761	205,293,053
1662	21,068,000	1762	198,214,553
1668	25,386,209	1790	155,249,897
	/ 23,312,200		/ 307,467,200
1710 --	27,241,129	1792-	333,000,000
1711	28,241,129		/ 362,467,183
1736	125,046,245	1812--	360,440,000
	/ 157,343,975	1842	413,021,000
1743	149,332,730	1868	404,946,514
	\ 150,265,475	1881	380,000,000
1753	103,050,600	1882	381,309,000
		1885	377,636,000

These figures suffice to show how little is known about the population of China. Not only are widely divergent estimates made in the same year (e.g. 1760), but in other respects the figures are incredible. Mr. Putnam Weale might contend that the drop from 60 millions in 1580 to 21 millions in 1662 was due to the wars leading to the Manchu conquest. But

no one can believe that between 1711 and 1736 the population increased from 28 millions to 125 millions, or that it doubled between 1790 and 1792. No one knows whether the population of China is increasing or diminishing, whether people in general have large or small families, or any of the other facts that vital statistics are designed to elucidate. What is said on these subjects, however dogmatic, is no more than guess-work. Even the population of Peking is unknown. It is said to be about 900,000, but it may be anywhere between 800,000 and a million. As for the population of the Chinese Empire, it is probably safe to assume that it is between three and four hundred millions, and somewhat likely that it is below three hundred and fifty millions. Very little indeed can be said with confidence as to the population of China in former times; so little that, on the whole, authors who give statistics are to be distrusted.

There are certain broad features of the traditional Chinese civilization which give it its distinctive character. I should be inclined to select as the most important: (1) The use of ideograms instead of an alphabet in writing; (2) The substitution of the Confucian ethic for religion among the educated classes; (3) government by literati chosen by examination instead of by a hereditary aristocracy. The family system distinguishes traditional China from modern Europe, but represents a stage which most other civilizations have passed through, and which is therefore not distinctively Chinese; the three characteristics which I have enumerated, on the other hand, distinguish China from all other countries of past times. Something must be said at this stage about each

of the three.

1. As everyone knows, the Chinese do not have letters, as we do, but symbols for whole words. This has, of course, many inconveniences: it means that, in learning to write, there are an immense number of different signs to be learnt, not only 26 as with us; that there is no such thing as alphabetical order, so that dictionaries, files, catalogues, etc., are difficult to arrange and linotype is impossible; that foreign words, such as proper names and scientific terms, cannot be written down by sound, as in European languages, but have to be represented by some elaborate device.[15] For these reasons, there is a movement for phonetic writing among the more advanced Chinese reformers; and I think the success of this movement is essential if China is to take her place among the bustling hustling nations which consider that they have a monopoly of all excellence. Even if there were no other argument for the change, the difficulty of elementary education, where reading and writing take so long to learn, would be alone sufficient to decide any believer in democracy. For practical purposes, therefore, the movement for phonetic writing deserves support.

There are, however, many considerations, less obvious to a European, which can be adduced in favour of the ideographic system, to which something of the solid stability of the Chinese civilization is probably traceable. To us, it seems obvious that a written word must represent a sound, whereas to the Chinese it represents an idea. We have adopted the Chinese system ourselves as regards numerals; "1922," for example, can

be read in English, French, or any other language, with quite different sounds, but with the same meaning. Similarly what is written in Chinese characters can be read throughout China, in spite of the difference of dialects which are mutually unintelligible when spoken. Even a Japanese, without knowing a word of spoken Chinese, can read out Chinese script in Japanese, just as he could read a row of numerals written by an Englishman. And the Chinese can still read their classics, although the spoken language must have changed as much as French has changed from Latin.

The advantage of writing over speech is its greater permanence, which enables it to be a means of communication between different places and different times. But since the spoken language changes from place to place and from time to time, the characteristic advantage of writing is more fully attained by a script which does not aim at representing spoken sounds than by one which does.

Speaking historically, there is nothing peculiar in the Chinese method of writing, which represents a stage through which all writing probably passed. Writing everywhere seems to have begun as pictures, not as a symbolic representation of sounds. I understand that in Egyptian hieroglyphics the course of development from ideograms to phonetic writing can be studied. What is peculiar in China is the preservation of the ideographic system throughout thousands of years of advanced civilization--a preservation probably due, at least in part, to the fact that the spoken language is monosyllabic, uninflected and full of

homonyms.

As to the way in which the Chinese system of writing has affected the mentality of those who employ it, I find some suggestive reflections in an article published in the Chinese Students' Monthly (Baltimore), for February 1922, by Mr. Chi Li, in an article on "Some Anthropological Problems of China." He says (p. 327):--

> Language has been traditionally treated by European scientists as a collection of sounds instead of an expression of something inner and deeper than the vocal apparatus as it should be. The accumulative effect of language-symbols upon one's mental formulation is still an unexploited field. Dividing the world culture of the living races on this basis, one perceives a fundamental difference of its types between the alphabetical users and the hieroglyphic users, each of which has its own virtues and vices. Now, with all respects to alphabetical civilization, it must be frankly stated that it has a grave and inherent defect in its lack of solidity. The most civilized portion under the alphabetical culture is also inhabited by the most fickled people. The history of the Western land repeats the same story over and over again. Thus up and down with the Greeks; up and down with Rome; up and down with the Arabs. The ancient Semitic and Hametic peoples are essentially alphabetic users, and their civilizations show the same lack of solidity as the Greeks and the Romans. Certainly this phenomenon can be partially

> explained by the extra-fluidity of the alphabetical language which cannot be depended upon as a suitable organ to conserve any solid idea. Intellectual contents of these people may be likened to waterfalls and cataracts, rather than seas and oceans. No other people is richer in ideas than they; but no people would give up their valuable ideas as quickly as they do....
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> The Chinese language is by all means the counterpart of the alphabetic stock. It lacks most of the virtues that are found in the alphabetic language; but as an embodiment of simple and final truth, it is invulnerable to storm and stress. It has already protected the Chinese civilization for more than forty centuries. It is solid, square, and beautiful, exactly as the spirit of it represents. Whether it is the spirit that has produced this language or whether this language has in turn accentuated the spirit remains to be determined.

Without committing ourselves wholly to the theory here set forth, which is impregnated with Chinese patriotism, we must nevertheless admit that the Westerner is unaccustomed to the idea of "alphabetical civilization" as merely one kind, to which he happens to belong. I am not competent to judge as to the importance of the ideographic script in producing the distinctive characteristics of Chinese civilization, but I have no doubt that this importance is very great, and is more or less of the kind indicated in the above quotation.

2. Confucius (B.C. 551-479) must be reckoned, as regards his social influence, with the founders of religions. His effect on institutions and on men's thoughts has been of the same kind of magnitude as that of Buddha, Christ, or Mahomet, but curiously different in its nature. Unlike Buddha and Christ, he is a completely historical character, about whose life a great deal is known, and with whom legend and myth have been less busy than with most men of his kind. What most distinguishes him from other founders is that he inculcated a strict code of ethics, which has been respected ever since, but associated it with very little religious dogma, which gave place to complete theological scepticism in the countless generations of Chinese literati who revered his memory and administered the Empire.

Confucius himself belongs rather to the type of Lycurgus and Solon than to that of the great founders of religions. He was a practical statesman, concerned with the administration of the State; the virtues he sought to inculcate were not those of personal holiness, or designed to secure salvation in a future life, but rather those which lead to a peaceful and prosperous community here on earth. His outlook was essentially conservative, and aimed at preserving the virtues of former ages. He accepted the existing religion--a rather unemphatic monotheism, combined with belief that the spirits of the dead preserved a shadowy existence, which it was the duty of their descendants to render as comfortable as possible. He did not, however, lay any stress upon supernatural matters. In answer to a question, he gave the following definition of wisdom: "To cultivate earnestly our duty towards

our neighbour, and to reverence spiritual beings while maintaining always a due reserve."[16] But reverence for spiritual beings was not an active part of Confucianism, except in the form of ancestor-worship, which was part of filial piety, and thus merged in duty towards one's neighbour. Filial piety included obedience to the Emperor, except when he was so wicked as to forfeit his divine right--for the Chinese, unlike the Japanese, have always held that resistance to the Emperor was justified if he governed very badly. The following passage from Professor Giles[17] illustrates this point:--

> The Emperor has been uniformly regarded as the son of God by adoption only, and liable to be displaced from that position as a punishment for the offence of misrule.... If the ruler failed in his duties, the obligation of the people was at an end, and his divine right disappeared simultaneously. Of this we have an example in a portion of the Canon to be examined by and by. Under the year 558 B.C. we find the following narrative. One of the feudal princes asked an official, saying, "Have not the people of the Wei State done very wrong in expelling their ruler?" "Perhaps the ruler himself," was the reply, "may have done very wrong.... If the life of the people is impoverished, and if the spirits are deprived of their sacrifices, of what use is the ruler, and what can the people do but get rid of him?"

This very sensible doctrine has been accepted at all times throughout Chinese history, and has made rebellions only too frequent.

Filial piety, and the strength of the family generally, are perhaps the weakest point in Confucian ethics, the only point where the system departs seriously from common sense. Family feeling has militated against public spirit, and the authority of the old has increased the tyranny of ancient custom. In the present day, when China is confronted with problems requiring a radically new outlook, these features of the Confucian system have made it a barrier to necessary reconstruction, and accordingly we find all those foreigners who wish to exploit China praising the old tradition and deriding the efforts of Young China to construct something more suited to modern needs. The way in which Confucian emphasis on filial piety prevented the growth of public spirit is illustrated by the following story:[18]

> One of the feudal princes was boasting to Confucius of the high level of morality which prevailed in his own State. "Among us here," he said, "you will find upright men. If a father has stolen a sheep, his son will give evidence against him." "In my part of the country," replied Confucius, "there is a different standard from this. A father will shield his son, a son will shield his father. It is thus that uprightness will be found."

It is interesting to contrast this story with that of the elder Brutus and his sons, upon which we in the West were all brought up.

Chao Ki, expounding the Confucian doctrine, says it is contrary to

filial piety to refuse a lucrative post by which to relieve the indigence of one's aged parents.[19] This form of sin, however, is rare in China as in other countries.

The worst failure of filial piety, however, is to remain without children, since ancestors are supposed to suffer if they have no descendants to keep up their cult. It is probable that this doctrine has made the Chinese more prolific, in which case it has had great biological importance. Filial piety is, of course, in no way peculiar to China, but has been universal at a certain stage of culture. In this respect, as in certain others, what is peculiar to China is the preservation of the old custom after a very high level of civilization had been attained. The early Greeks and Romans did not differ from the Chinese in this respect, but as their civilization advanced the family became less and less important. In China, this did not begin to happen until our own day.

Whatever may be said against filial piety carried to excess, it is certainly less harmful than its Western counterpart, patriotism. Both, of course, err in inculcating duties to a certain portion of mankind to the practical exclusion of the rest. But patriotism directs one's loyalty to a fighting unit, which filial piety does not (except in a very primitive society). Therefore patriotism leads much more easily to militarism and imperialism. The principal method of advancing the interests of one's nation is homicide; the principal method of advancing the interest of one's family is corruption and intrigue. Therefore

family feeling is less harmful than patriotism. This view is borne out by the history and present condition of China as compared to Europe.

Apart from filial piety, Confucianism was, in practice, mainly a code of civilized behaviour, degenerating at times into an etiquette book. It taught self-restraint, moderation, and above all courtesy. Its moral code was not, like those of Buddhism and Christianity, so severe that only a few saints could hope to live up to it, or so much concerned with personal salvation as to be incompatible with political institutions. It was not difficult for a man of the world to live up to the more imperative parts of the Confucian teaching. But in order to do this he must exercise at all times a certain kind of self-control--an extension of the kind which children learn when they are taught to "behave." He must not break into violent passions; he must not be arrogant; he must "save face," and never inflict humiliations upon defeated adversaries; he must be moderate in all things, never carried away by excessive love or hate; in a word, he must keep calm reason always in control of all his actions. This attitude existed in Europe in the eighteenth century, but perished in the French Revolution: romanticism, Rousseau, and the guillotine put an end to it. In China, though wars and revolutions have occurred constantly, Confucian calm has survived them all, making them less terrible for the participants, and making all who were not immediately involved hold aloof. It is bad manners in China to attack your adversary in wet weather. Wu-Pei-Fu, I am told, once did it, and won a victory; the beaten general complained of the breach of etiquette; so Wu-Pei-Fu went back to the position he held before the battle, and

fought all over again on a fine day. (It should be said that battles in China are seldom bloody.) In such a country, militarism is not the scourge it is with us; and the difference is due to the Confucian ethics.[20]

Confucianism did not assume its present form until the twelfth century A.D., when the personal God in whom Confucius had believed was thrust aside by the philosopher Chu Fu Tze,[21] whose interpretation of Confucianism has ever since been recognized as orthodox. Since the fall of the Mongols (1370), the Government has uniformly favoured Confucianism as the teaching of the State; before that, there were struggles with Buddhism and Taoism, which were connected with magic, and appealed to superstitious Emperors, quite a number of whom died of drinking the Taoist elixir of life. The Mongol Emperors were Buddhists of the Lama religion, which still prevails in Tibet and Mongolia; but the Manchu Emperors, though also northern conquerors, were ultra-orthodox Confucians. It has been customary in China, for many centuries, for the literati to be pure Confucians, sceptical in religion but not in morals, while the rest of the population believed and practised all three religions simultaneously. The Chinese have not the belief, which we owe to the Jews, that if one religion is true, all others must be false. At the present day, however, there appears to be very little in the way of religion in China, though the belief in magic lingers on among the uneducated. At all times, even when there was religion, its intensity was far less than in Europe. It is remarkable that religious scepticism has not led, in China, to any corresponding

ethical scepticism, as it has done repeatedly in Europe.

3. I come now to the system of selecting officials by competitive examination, without which it is hardly likely that so literary and unsuperstitious a system as that of Confucius could have maintained its hold. The view of the modern Chinese on this subject is set forth by the present President of the Republic of China, Hsu Shi-chang, in his book on China after the War, pp. 59-60.[22] After considering the educational system under the Chou dynasty, he continues:

> In later periods, in spite of minor changes, the importance of moral virtues continued to be stressed upon. For instance, during the most flourishing period of Tang Dynasty (627-650 A.D.), the Imperial Academy of Learning, known as Kuo-tzu-chien, was composed of four collegiate departments, in which ethics was considered as the most important of all studies. It was said that in the Academy there were more than three thousand students who were able and virtuous in nearly all respects, while the total enrolment, including aspirants from Korea and Japan, was as high as eight thousand. At the same time, there was a system of "elections" through which able and virtuous men were recommended by different districts to the Emperor for appointment to public offices. College training and local elections supplemented each other, but in both moral virtues were given the greatest emphasis.

> Although the Imperial Academy exists till this day, it has never been as nourishing as during that period. For this change the introduction of the competitive examination or Ko-chü system, must be held responsible. The "election" system furnished no fixed standard for the recommendation of public service candidates, and, as a result, tended to create an aristocratic class from which alone were to be found eligible men. Consequently, the Sung Emperors (960-1277 A.D.) abolished the elections, set aside the Imperial Academy, and inaugurated the competitive examination system in their place. The examinations were to supply both scholars and practical statesmen, and they were periodically held throughout the later dynasties until the introduction of the modern educational regime. Useless and stereotyped as they were in later days, they once served some useful purpose. Besides, the ethical background of Chinese education had already been so firmly established, that, in spite of the emphasis laid by these examinations on pure literary attainments, moral teachings have survived till this day in family education and in private schools.

Although the system of awarding Government posts for proficiency in examinations is much better than most other systems that have prevailed, such as nepotism, bribery, threats of insurrection, etc., yet the Chinese system, at any rate after it assumed its final form, was harmful through the fact that it was based solely on the classics, that it was purely literary, and that it allowed no scope whatever for originality.

The system was established in its final form by the Emperor Hung Wu (1368-1398), and remained unchanged until 1905. One of the first objects of modern Chinese reformers was to get it swept away. Li Ung Bing[23] says:

> In spite of the many good things that may be said to the credit of Hung Wu, he will ever be remembered in connection with a form of evil which has eaten into the very heart of the nation. This was the system of triennial examinations, or rather the form of Chinese composition, called the "Essay," or the "Eight Legs," which, for the first time in the history of Chinese literature, was made the basis of all literary contests. It was so-named, because after the introduction of the theme the writer was required to treat it in four paragraphs, each consisting of two members, made up of an equal number of sentences and words. The theme was always chosen from either the Four Books, or the Five Classics. The writer could not express any opinion of his own, or any views at variance with those expressed by Chu Hsi and his school. All he was required to do was to put the few words of Confucius, or whomsoever it might be, into an essay in conformity with the prescribed rules. Degrees, which were to serve as passports to Government positions, were awarded the best writers. To say that the training afforded by the time required to make a man efficient in the art of such writing, would at the same time qualify him to hold the various offices under the Government, was absurd. But absurd as the whole system was, it was handed down to

> recent times from the third year of the reign of Hung Wu, and was not abolished until a few years ago. No system was more perfect or effective in retarding the intellectual and literary development of a nation. With her "Eight Legs," China long ago reached the lowest point on her downhill journey. It is largely on account of the long lease of life that was granted to this rotten system that the teachings of the Sung philosophers have been so long venerated.

These are the words of a Chinese patriot of the present day, and no doubt, as a modern system, the "Eight Legs" deserve all the hard things that he says about them. But in the fourteenth century, when one considers the practicable alternatives, one can see that there was probably much to be said for such a plan. At any rate, for good or evil, the examination system profoundly affected the civilization of China. Among its good effects were: A widely-diffused respect for learning; the possibility of doing without a hereditary aristocracy; the selection of administrators who must at least have been capable of industry; and the preservation of Chinese civilization in spite of barbarian conquest. But, like so much else in traditional China, it has had to be swept away to meet modern needs. I hope nothing of greater value will have to perish in the struggle to repel the foreign exploiters and the fierce and cruel system which they miscall civilization.

FOOTNOTES: