

# Chinese Philosophy And Politics: 1853-1905

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(This is the first of two parts of the epilogue of THE STORY OF CHINESE PHILOSOPHY completed recently by the same author, who is now working on Contemporary Chinese Philosophy.)

THE turning-point in the recent history of Chinese culture at large and philosophy in particular was marked by the life and work of Tsêng Kuo-fan (曾國藩 1811-1872), of which the first half was spent in solving Oriental issues and the second half devoted to the adjustment of China to the impact of Occidental religion and science. The first arduous task he accomplished as an intellectual leader and philosophic eclectic in the Hanlin Academy, and the second while a public administrator and army commander on the battlefield.

## Nestorianism Appears

The Christian religion in the form of Nestorianism, as described on the Nestorian Monument (1) in 781, appeared during the reign (627-649) of T'ang T'ai-tsung (唐太宗). (2) Largely because of the rise and spread of Mohammedanism, the activities of the Nestorians subsided. During the 15th Century, when the Mongols had established the Yüan (元) Dynasty on Chinese soil, missionaries of the leading religions of the world held debates in the Court, each system of worship struggling to be adopted as the state creed. In the end, for some reason or other, Lamaism—one of the most degenerate forms of Buddhism—was adopted. The Christian religion was then known as Arcoun—a remnant of Nestorianism. In Europe, the Roman Church had entertained vain hopes of converting the western branch of Genghai Khan's (1162-1227) descendants and followers then invading the Occident, but these Mongols accepted the Mohammedan faith instead and have remained Mohammedan. In China, Christianity lost its ground during the transitional period between the Yüan (元) and the Ming (明) Dynasties.

Towards the close of the Ming Dynasty an Italian Jesuit named Matteo Ricci reached China in 1582 and was followed by other Jesuits. (3) Before attempting to spread the Gospel, he took up Chinese cultural studies, eulogized Confucianism as an ally of Christianity (4), made good friends with prominent scholars and officials, introduced Western astronomy, mathematics, geography, etc., to the intellectual circles, and finally

wrote religious and scientific books in Chinese. (5) It looked as though he was going to shape the destiny of Christianity in China exactly as Kumarajiva had done for Buddhism. Possibly owing to the early Jesuits' influence in science, many of the eminent Chinese thinkers showed a keen enthusiasm for science and advocated an "instrumental" theory of knowledge.

In the meantime the Catholic missionaries began to disagree on their policy. The Jesuits allowed the inclusion of the cult of ancestors in the liturgy of their native converts while the Dominicans and the Franciscans forbade it. In 1704 Pope Clement XI decided against the Jesuits while the Emperor K'ang-hsi (康熙), who had patronized the Jesuits, condemned their internal dissension as harmful to the peace and order of the Celestial Empire, and formally banned the occidental religion in 1707. Thereafter the Catholic Church in China was obliged to continue its obscure existence in districts remote from political centers.

## Colonial Expansion

Meanwhile, the Protestant mission progressed with the Dutch and British commercial and colonial expansion. In 1807 Robert Morrison (1782-1834), an Englishman, arrived to preach the Gospel in the Macao and Canton regions. Before his death in 1834 he had converted some natives and accomplished such literary works as the Chinese version of the whole Bible and a voluminous Chinese-English dictionary. (6) On the other hand, the increasing contact and conflict of English merchants with local Chinese authorities precipitated the infamous Opium War between 1839 and 1842, when the Occidentals fought with rifles and cannons and the Celestials, mostly armed with swords and shields, played a losing game. In consequence, the Manchu Court had to fulfil such international agreements as territorial cession, treaty-conclusion, and port-opening. More than that, this event exposed the inability of the Manchus to get and keep a footing in "All-under-Heaven" (天下) which was beginning to mean to the Chinese "the family of nations around the globe." The sensitive Chinese perceived the urgent need of cultural reformation and political transformation which the degenerate but ar-

rogant Manchus entirely overlooked. With their hope for such improvements frustrated, those resentful Chinese who had neither forgotten nor forgiven the Manchus' usurpation of the Dragon Throne from the Mings attempted to challenge the moribund conquerors. The need of reformation thus became a seed of revolution.

## Tai-p'ing Revolutionaries

The first revolutionary movement consequent upon the Opium War—called the T'ai-p'ing Rebellion—was itself a product of cultural fusion—the revival of Chinese nationalism under the cloak of the expansion of Christianity. Its leader Hung Hsiu-ch'uan (洪秀全 1813-1864) who had risen from social substrata in the frontier Province of Kwangtung, was an eye-witness of the military and diplomatic defeat of the corrupt mandarins. In his early prime he came by chance under the influence of the Occidental religion, and sometime later with the collaboration of his close friends he organized a religious fraternity of God-Worshippers to agitate, under the pretext of religious propaganda, the masses of the people for rebellion against the alien rulers. In the summer of 1850 rebellion broke out in a Kwangsi village. Looking backward to the glorious past, all the participants untied their queues, grew their hair like the Mings, wore the Ming hats and costumes, and attempted to observe every possible rule of Ming ceremony and etiquette.

Yet by appealing to the Christian Gospel of the universal fatherhood of God and universal brotherhood of men, Hung Hsiu-ch'uan in every "Proclamation of the Anti-Manchu Campaign" called God, Heavenly Father, Jesus, Heavenly Elder Brother, himself, Heavenly King, and his dominion Grand Peace Kingdom of Heaven, namely, T'ai-p'ing T'ien-kuo (太平天國). "Our Heavenly Father and Heavenly Elder Brother ordered me, the True Holy Lord and Heavenly King," he would declare, "to be born to rule over the world.... All of you, whether officials or civilians, are sons and daughters of our Heavenly Father." The Ten Commandments were strictly enforced in the rank and file. And such precepts as faith, love, and hope were so profoundly inculcated in the followers that the most efficient Crusade seemed to spring up overnight. From Kwangsi they marched through Hunan and Hupeh, wherefrom they turned eastward along the Yangtze River. Nanking was occupied early in 1853, and was at once made their capital.

The basis of nationalism prevailing among the leading spirits of the

- (1) P. Y. Saeki, *The Nestorian Monument in China*.
- (2) John Foster, *Church of the T'ang Dynasty*.
- (3) C. W. Allen, *Jesuits at the Court of Peking*.
- (4) H. Bernard, *Matteo Ricci's Scientific Contribution to China*.

- (5) H. Bernafé, "Le Confucianisme du Père Matthieu Ricci" in his *Sagesse chinoise et philosophie chrétienne*, pp. 101-108.
- (6) Marshall Broomhall, *Robert Morrison, a Master-BUILDER*.



movement was egoism rather than patriotism. For as soon as they had knocked down their common enemy, but before they reached the outskirts of the enemy capital at Peking, they began to quarrel among themselves, which became the main cause of their subsequent failure and ruin. Besides, with a half-baked knowledge of the Occidental religion, they changed their tenets of faith at random. At first, they followed the Catholics in the main. Yet soon after they had started their campaign against idol-worship they destroyed the portrait of St. Mary amidst Buddhist and Taoist images, which eventually lost them the confidence of the Catholic nations. Likewise, while preaching the Ten Commandments in the open they countenanced their soldiers' brigandage and promiscuity, which lost them the sympathy of most of the Protestant visitors. In consequence, the Occident began to doubt their competency to modernize the Celestial Empire.

Worse than that, though they had been hailed as national heroes emancipating the Chinese from the Manchu yolk and re-establishing the beloved Ming régime, yet against the time-crowned affection of the people for ancestors, for the family, and for the land, they drastically suppressed the cult of ancestors and the custom of foot-binding, enforced the use of the solar calendar, and redistributed estates after the fashion of communism without persuading the people of the value and need of such changes. As a result, they estranged the people from their originally glorious cause and drove them once again back into the arms of the Manchu rulers.

### The Manchu Reformers

During such a crisis, Tsêng Kuo-fan felt duty-bound to rescue the country by readjusting the whole chaotic situation of political and religious turmoil. (7) In his eyes the Manchu rulers, though of foreign origin, had been enthusiastic patrons of Chinese culture like native emperors, whereas the Taipings were nothing but a gang of pseudo-patriots and superstitious fanatics. As early as the summer of 1853 he complied with the Manchu Government's request to train soldiers and sailors in the line of Occidental implements of war in his native province, Hunan. Inaugurating the rebel-suppression campaign at the opening of the following year, he issued a manifesto enumerating seven absurdities and 10 dangers of the rebels and condemning Christianity as bitterly as Han Yü's (韓愈) memorial had assaulted Buddhism. In the meantime, Occidental science came to help him suppress Oriental "Christians" under the auspices of such military adventurers as F. T. Ward (an American) and C. T. Gordon (a Britisher). Early in the following year, Gordon was appointed Commander of the Invincible Corps he had trained, and helped Tsêng Kuo-fan accomplish numerous services. In May, 1864, Hung Hsiu-

ch'uan, the Heavenly King, was forced to poison himself amidst enemies, two months before Nanking was reoccupied.

From the bitter experience in his struggles with the Taiping rebels Tsêng Kuo-fan learned the efficacy of Occidental weapons, guns and ships in particular. At first he purchased them through foreign agents, but in 1861 he built an arsenal and shipyard in Anking, where he had moved his headquarters. In 1864, when Nanking had fallen, he speeded up the establishment in Shanghai of a machine shop. For this special purpose he had enlisted the service of Yung Wing (容閔 1828-1912), the first American-educated Chinese and a Yale graduate of the Class of 1854. One year later, the machine shop, known as the Kiangnan Arsenal, appeared and in 1868 began to build ships. (8) The Arsenal also included a translation bureau engaging the services of Occidental and Chinese scholars, and in the period from 1870 to 1904, published 177 works, most of them being translations: 88 English, 19 American, 3 French, 5 Japanese and 2 German. Their subjects comprised chemistry, physics, astronomy, mathematics, telegraphy, navigation, ship-construction as well as law and government. (9) The increasing interest in Occidental science materialized in the inclusion of science, particularly mathematics, as an optional subject in the civil service examination in 1887.

### Send Students Abroad

In 1868, when Tsêng Kuo-fan was visiting the Arsenal, Yung Wing persuaded him to have a mechanical school annexed to it. Soon afterwards with the collaboration of Ting Jih-ch'ang (丁日昌) he presented to Tsêng a plan for sending students abroad for further studies, which Tsêng made jointly with Li Huang-chang (李鴻章 1823-1901) and which Ting Jih-ch'ang memorialized to the Throne a few months before Tsêng's death, the proposals were sanctioned by the Emperor Tung-chih (同治) and carried out accordingly. Thereby Yung Wing and Ch'ên Lan-pin (陳蘭彬) were authorized to select annually from the coastal provinces 30 promising boys about 15 years old to be sent to the United States to study for 15 years each. In the meantime students were similarly sent to England and France.

Though the experiment was originally designed to last for 20 years, it was cut short through the ludicrous disappointment of the Chinese Educational Commissioner Wu Tze-tung at the "Westernized" students in Washington, D. C. It is said that when the students were ushered into the presence of the dignitary the first morning, instead of kneeling

down to kowtow to the superior, they walked forward and stretched out their arms to shake hands with the gravely seated mandarin; that they spoke mandarin after a fashion to him but very fluent English between themselves; and that in the afternoon before giving prudent reports on their school work they kept playing tennis and baseball. Disgusted with their "bad" manners, the envoy prepared his memorial that evening, anticipating the uselessness of the youngsters in public service and deploring the complete failure of the experiment. Upon reading the memorial, the perverse Empress Dowager Tz'u-hsi (慈禧太后) immediately decided to recall the students. Actually, in 1881, the students were recalled. Some of them realizing the hopelessness of the situation at home remained in America, while their superintendent Yung Wing, appointed through the imperial recognition of the need of modernization and disappointed by the imperial ignorance of the same need, after his return to China for a short visit stayed on in America till his death in 1912 when his fatherland became a republic. (10)

### Foreign-Educated Scholars

For two decades following the recall of the 120 students the Manchu Court under the dictatorship of the Empress Dowager never thought of sending students abroad. Nevertheless, the increasing number of missionary institutions, both Protestant and Catholic, throughout the Empire continued giving Western education in China (11) to Chinese youths, who became either leaders or supporters of the modernization movement outside the Manchu Court. Of all attempts ever made by foreign-educated scholars to modernize the country the best examples were those of Yen Fu (嚴復 1853-1921), through his introduction of Western scientific ideas by virtue of classical Chinese, and Sun Yat-sen (孫逸仙 1866-1925) through his assimilation of Western statecraft into Chinese political philosophy.

Yen Fu, after having distinguished himself as a most brilliant naval cadet, was sent by the Government in 1875 to study naval science in England, where he studied mathematics, biology, and different branches of social science. Upon his return in 1880, as he found himself held in contempt by native degree-holders for his inability to command the "eight-legged" (八股) style of writing, he began to concentrate on Chinese studies and cultivate his literary skill. In 1894, following the crushing defeat of the Chinese navy by the Japanese who had hastily but successfully absorbed Western culture, he felt the more urgent need of studying Occidental science on the part of the Chinese, and, accordingly, turned to the translation of scientific books into

(7) W. J. Hail, *Tsêng Kuo-fan and the Taiping Rebellion*.

(8) Gideon Chen, *Tsêng Kuo-fan, Pioneer Promoter of the Steamship in China*, pp. 43-52.

(9) Cyrus H. Peake, "Some Aspects of the Introduction of Modern Science into China," *Isis*, No. 63, Vol. XXII (Dec., 1934), p. 184.

(10) In 1909 he published his interesting book, *My Life in China and America*.

(11) C. Stanley Smith, *The Development of Protestant Theological Education in China*.



Chinese. By 1897 he had completed the translations of Thomas Huxley's *Evolution and Ethics*, Adam Smith's *Enquiry into the Nature of Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, Herbert Spencer's *Study of Sociology*. Then in reaction to the Empress Dowager's coup d'état of 1898 he translated J. S. Mill's essay *On Liberty*. After running away from the Boxer Uprising in 1900, he began his translation of Mill's *System of Logic*. In 1902 he translated E. Jenks' *History of Politics*. Between 1904 and 1907 he rendered into Chinese Montesquieu's *Spirit of the Laws* and W. S. Jevons' *Primer of Logic*. Needless to say these Western books have had considerable influence on Chinese thought. Besides, throughout his translations he attempted to follow his three principles of Faithfulness (信), Proficiency (達), and Elegance (雅), and thereby set a high standard for subsequent Chinese translators of foreign books. The urgent need he felt of reformation, however, did not become an efficient cause for revolution in his case.

### Sun Yat-sen's Role

The role was reserved for Sun Yat-sen, who began as a private student. He received his early training in Chinese Classics at his home village in Hsiang-shan County in Kwangtung, where Hung Hsiu-ch'uan, leader of the T'ai-p'ing Rebellion, was still a living legend, and as such became the national hero of his early dreams. From 1879 to 1883 he studied in Honolulu, Hawaii, where his elder brother was successful in business. Upon completing his high school education he returned to the East to attend Queen's College and the Medical College in Hongkong. Consequently, he acquired a sound Occidental education in medical and biological sciences besides avowing the Christian faith. While a student, he evidently applied the methodology of medical science to political research comparing China with the Occident, tracing the causes of the former's weakness and the latter's strength, and agitating for a thorough "medical treatment" of his country and his people. For, as soon as he had finished his medical training in 1892, he visited Peking and Tientsin, and bravely submitted to Li Hung-chang, the then strong man of the Celestial Empire, his *Tract of Ten-thousand Characters* (萬言書) proposing measures for political reformation.

As a whole, Sun Yat-sen analyzed in the tract the structure of the State on the traditional quadruple basis of the Chinese, namely, gentry, farmers, craftsmen, and tradesmen, and affirmed that the supreme task of the Government is to coordinate the harmonious development of all different walks of life. Then he equated the governments of the Occident with the security and prosperity of their peoples for which he summed up the reason in a well-known compound sentence: "Talents are fully exerted; land is fully cultivated; raw materials are fully utilized; and commodities are smoothly transported." Concluding, he ex-

pressed his highest hope and China's only hope that the Government would act upon such a supreme principle. Concisely expounding the general condition of a healthy State, this was, indeed, the root of his whole system of politico-medical science and the bud of the Three Principles of the People that he systematically developed several years later after the establishment of the Republic of China. Both a political diagnosis and a political prescription, it was entirely ignored and apparent-

ly thrown into the wastebasket. For he waited half a year without avail for an audience with the viceroy. But who could foretell that the need of reformation which Li Hung-chang ignored was going to become the cause of destruction to the dynasty he was serving and that by throwing the tract into the waste basket, he overthrew the throne he was supporting? Two decades later (in 1912) Sun Yat-sen became founder and first President of the Republic of China.

(To Be Continued)

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