

# Confucius

## “Sage” of the Reactionary Classes

YANG JUNG-KUO

A decorative border at the bottom of the page, consisting of a grid of six rectangular panels. Each panel contains intricate, stylized Chinese calligraphy in a traditional seal script style, rendered in a light blue or grey color against a textured background.

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**CONFUCIUS**

**“SAGE” OF THE  
REACTIONARY CLASSES**

*Yang Jung-kuo*

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## I. THE AGE IN WHICH CONFUCIUS LIVED

### The Tribal Slave-holding State

Confucius lived at the end of the Spring and Autumn Period,<sup>1</sup> at a time when the tribal slave-holding state of the Chou Dynasty was collapsing.

What was the tribal slave-holding state, and how did it come into existence?

In the very early primitive society there were no classes. Later, as the productive forces gradually developed, there was a surplus of products. This surplus was appropriated by the tribal heads, making their condition of life increasingly different from that of the ordinary tribal members, so that a privileged tribal aristocracy arose.

Towards the end of primitive society, wars often broke out among the various tribes. At first, the captives taken in the fighting were killed. Later, as the productive forces grew, the tribal chiefs got the idea of using their captives from enemy tribes as slaves for production. In case a whole tribe was defeated, all of its members became slaves of the

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<sup>1</sup>The name "Spring and Autumn Period" comes from the *Spring and Autumn Annals*, a historical record (722-481 B.C.) of the state of Lu. However, historians generally take the year 770 B.C., the first year of the Eastern Chou Dynasty, as the beginning of the Spring and Autumn Period and 476 B.C. (when the Warring States Period began) as its end.

conquering tribe. In this way the classless primitive society in time became a slave society in which the slaves and the slave-owners formed two big classes opposed to each other.

This was the tribal slave-holding state—a state in which the conquering tribe ruled many defeated tribes, making all the captives their slaves. This type of slave-holding state system prevailed in China's Yin (16th-11th centuries B.C., known in history as Yin-Shang, first called Shang and later Yin) and Western Chou (11th century-770 B.C.) dynasties. For example, in Yin times, a tribe named Tzu was the sole ruler, and this ruling clique headed by the king of Yin formed the tribal aristocracy, the slave-owning class of the tribal slave-holding state.

Yin Dynasty slaves were classified as slaves for production and household slaves. The former engaged in productive labour and are referred to in oracle-bone inscriptions as *chung* or *chung jen*. The latter were divided into *chen*, *pu*, *hsi*, *nu*, *chieh* and so forth. According to bone inscriptions, the raiding Yin tribe made slaves of their captives taken from the Chiang tribe and ordered them to hunt, their bags to be given over to the Yin tribe.

Under tribal slavery, the slaves not only lived worse than beasts of burden, but their very lives were in the hands of the slave-owners, who could put them to death at will. When a slave-owner died, many slaves were killed as human sacrifice, the number sometimes reaching several hundred at one time.<sup>2</sup>

Whenever the king of Yin sacrificed to the gods and his ancestors, he used slaves as sacrificial objects. For instance,

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<sup>2</sup>Archaeological excavations at Houchiachuang in Anyang, Honan Province, have revealed large Yin tombs each containing the remains of nearly 400 slaves.

when sacrifices were offered to a certain Futing, three hundred slaves of the Chiang tribe were killed as though they were cattle, sheep or swine.

There was no basic change in the nature of the political power in the Chou Dynasty; it remained a tribal slave-holding state, only Chi replaced Tzu as the ruling tribe.

Having overthrown the Yin Dynasty, the slave-owners headed by the king of Chou made slaves of the various tribes they captured. For instance, at the beginning of Chou, 71 vassal states were set up one after another, slave-owning princes being assigned by the royal house to rule over the enslaved tribes in the various states.

Among the principal vassal states of the time, Wei, which was given to King Wu's younger brother Kang Shu, took the "seven Yin tribes" to be slaves; Lu, which was given to Po Chin, the eldest son of Duke Chou, made slaves of the "people of the state of Yen under the Yin Dynasty" and the "six Yin tribes"; Tsin, which was given to King Cheng's younger brother Tang Shu, continued to rule the "nine clans named Huai," originally slaves of the Yin tribe.<sup>3</sup> The remaining states likewise used slaves within their own borders.

In Chou times, as in Yin, slaves were forced to do farm labour, so that thousands of slaves were seen in the fields toiling under the surveillance of the slave-owners.<sup>4</sup> Besides those in agriculture, slaves used in handicrafts and commerce also supported the luxury of the slave-owners. From generation to generation the slaves were cruelly oppressed and exploited by the slave-owning class.

In the Chou Dynasty there were also *kuo jen* (inhabitants of the capital), freemen in the tribal slave-holding state.

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<sup>3</sup>*Tso Chuan*, Prince Ting, 4th year.

<sup>4</sup>*Discourses of the States*, "Discourses of Chou."

Belonging to the ruling tribe by blood, they enjoyed a higher political and social status than the slaves. They were ordinary members of the ruling tribe, without authority or the privileges accorded to the slave-owning aristocracy. The relationship between the aristocracy and the freemen was that of the leaders and the led within the ruling class:

### Slave Revolts

Where there is oppression there is bound to be resistance. Whether in the Yin or the Chou Dynasty, under the ruthless rule of the tribal slave-owners the slaves continuously put up resistance.

Oracle-bone inscriptions of Yin record that many slaves ran away — also a kind of resistance — obviously because of unbearable oppression. Others, forced by the slave-owners to labour in the fields or perform various services, refused to work, or even rose up in revolt.

Whenever the chance came, the slaves staged large-scale uprisings. One instance occurred at the end of the Yin Dynasty, when the Chou people attacked King Tsou of Yin. The king's slaves turned their weapons against him and other tribal slave-owners of Yin. Likewise, as the Chou slave-owners were extremely brutal in their oppression of the slaves, the latter rebelled continually.

The decline of the slave-holding Chou Dynasty set in after the middle of Western Chou, and at the time of King Yi the dynasty was already tottering. After him, King Li not only ruthlessly oppressed and exploited the slaves, but also sternly suppressed the ordinary members of his own tribe, the freemen, executing any found talking behind his

back. The result was that freeman and slave made common cause and expelled King Li.<sup>5</sup>

Runaways and revolts gradually diminished the number of the slaves, and a census attempted in the time of King Hsuan failed.<sup>6</sup>

King Hsuan's son, King Yu, was a dull-witted and brutal ruler who was later killed by a tribe named Chuan Jung at the foot of Mt. Lishan near the Chou capital. After that the royal house of Chou could not maintain itself in and around present-day Shensi and King Ping, who succeeded King Yu, moved to Loyang in Honan Province where he set up what is recorded in history as the Eastern Chou Dynasty (770-249 B.C.). From that time on, the rule of the king of Chou existed only in name, as the slave system was on the decline and giving way to the rising feudal system.

### The Spring and Autumn Period — a Time of Change

By the time of the Spring and Autumn Period, not only had the Chou kings become rulers in name only as a result of the slaves' continual escapes and revolts, but the rule in the various vassal states was also quite unstable.

For example, in 550 B.C., slaves in the state of Chen were ordered to build a city wall under overseers who killed them at will. Angered by the atrocities, the slaves rose in revolt and killed the slave-owners Ching Hu and Ching Yin.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> *Historical Records*, "Annals of Chou Dynasty"; also *Discourses of the States*, "Discourses of Chou."

<sup>6</sup> *Discourses of the States*, "Discourses of Chou."

<sup>7</sup> *Tso Chuan*, Prince Hsiang, 23rd year.

In 478 B.C., Shih Pu of the state of Wei took the opportunity of an uprising of handicraft slaves to besiege the chief slave-owner Prince Chuang. The prince fled, to be killed by the Chi people from Jungchow within his domain.<sup>8</sup>

In 470 B.C., handicraft slaves in the state of Wei rose in revolt again. Without arms, they took up their tools as weapons to attack the slave-owners, putting the chief slave-owner Prince Cheh to flight.<sup>9</sup>

In the state of Cheng, the slaves assembled in a reed marsh and attacked the slave-owners.<sup>10</sup> And when slaves in the state of Tsin were given an order to work, they ran away as if from a pursuing enemy.<sup>11</sup>

At the same time, as the new rising feudal landlord forces were developing, divisions were occurring within the ruling class. The house of Chi of Lu state, for example, changed its governing methods under conditions of the new social changes.

In 562 B.C., the three houses of Chi Sun, Shu Sun and Meng Sun, who were senior officials of the state of Lu, began dividing the prince's estates, i.e., the land and slaves of the biggest slave-owner of the state.

In dealing with the holdings he received, Chi Sun acted according to the new situation and freed the slaves allotted to him, renting land to them to till as tenants. Shu Sun, however, maintained the original relationship under the slave system, while Meng Sun used a combination of the old and new systems. Twenty-five years after, the three houses again divided the prince's remaining estates into four parts (the

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., Prince Ai, 17th year.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., Prince Ai, 25th year.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., Prince Chao, 20th year.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., Prince Chao, 3rd year.

Chi house got two parts), and all followed the method adopted by Chi Sun.<sup>12</sup> That is to say, the three houses were gradually changing over to the feudal landlord class.

Another example illustrating this trend is furnished by Tien Cheng-tzu of the state of Chi. In the struggle against the decadent slave-owning aristocracy of Chi, he used a small measure in collecting grain for land rent and a large measure when lending grain to the peasants. Though the method was an expedient one used by the new rising feudal landlord class to wrest power from the slave-owning aristocracy, Tien won the support of the masses and was welcomed by them.<sup>13</sup> In 485 B.C., he finally killed the chief slave-owning aristocrat Prince Chien and seized the power of Chi.

It may be seen from the above events that the Spring and Autumn Period was a time of radical change.

### Decline of the Slave-owning Aristocracy

Society was changing, time was marching on.

The slaves were rebelling, and the new rising feudal landlord forces were taking the offensive. Pounded by the tide of history in the stream of great social change, the slave-owning aristocrats were in desperate straits and on their way out.

Let us look for a moment at what happened to so-called ancient sage-kings such as Shun of the Yu times, Yu of the Hsia times and Tang of the Yin Dynasty. The descendants of their tribes had long become slaves themselves.<sup>14</sup> The

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., Prince Chao, 5th year.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., Prince Chao, 26th year, and 3rd year.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., Prince Chao, 32nd year.

descendants of the eight aristocratic families of the state of Tsin — Luan, Hsi, Hsu, Yuan, Hu, Su, Ching and Po — also became slaves during the Spring and Autumn Period.<sup>15</sup> That is to say, the social change was effecting a reciprocal transformation in the relationships between the higher and the lower, between the ruler and the ruled.

This transformation is like geographical changes in the natural world. As an ancient poet put it: “Cliffs sink into valleys; ravines heave up into peaks.” Everything in society undergoes constant change, and the verses precisely express the type of change in social relationships that was going on in the Spring and Autumn Period.

### Which Side Was Confucius On?

At a time of such epochal change — when the slaves were struggling for emancipation, the rising forces were continually gaining victories in their resistance fight, and some aristocratic slave-owners decayed and became slaves — the whole slave system was on the verge of collapse. This was an objective law of historical development independent of man’s will.

Where did Confucius stand at this critical time of social change? Did his standpoint, political attitude and thinking proceed with the development of society? Did he side with the new rising forces, oil the wheels of change over to the feudal system? Or did he go against the tide of the times, side with the decaying slave-owning aristocracy and stubbornly uphold the moribund slave system? In other words, did Confucius seek to effect social reform, or did he try hard to stand pat? Was he progressive or reactionary?

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., Prince Chao, 3rd year.

This involved a struggle between two classes, two roads and two lines at that time. A look at Confucius’ words and actions throughout his lifetime will show clearly where he stood in this struggle.



## II. WHAT CONFUCIUS DID

### A Glance at His Life

Confucius lived between 551 and 479 B.C. His family name was Kung and his personal name Chiu. The second son of Kung, he was also called by his polite name Chung-ni. Reactionary rulers through the ages have acclaimed him as "Kung the Sage." In the May Fourth Movement of 1919 against imperialism and feudalism, the revolutionaries who raised the slogan "Down with Confucius' Shop!" exposed him as a reactionary.

His ancestors had been aristocrats in the state of Sung, who, as Confucius himself boasted, were descended from Yin Dynasty royalty.<sup>1</sup> Only when his father, Shu-ho, became an official of the state of Lu did his family settle down in that state.

The family had degenerated by Confucius' time so that in his youth he had to do jobs that were generally looked down upon. He worked as a bookkeeper and as a store-keeper, and tended cattle and sheep.<sup>2</sup>

Later, Confucius entered officialdom in the state of Lu, not however becoming a senior official until he was 52, when he

<sup>1</sup>*The Book of Rites*, "Tan Kung."

<sup>2</sup>*Mencius*, "Wan Chang," Part II.

presided over justice and acted in the capacity of prime minister. But Confucius' ecstasy in his official career was short-lived, for he held the position only three months.<sup>3</sup>

### Execution of Reformer Shaocheng Mao and Razing Three Cities

As justice official for the state of Lu, Confucius modelled himself in every action after Duke Chou,<sup>4</sup> who was a harsh and vicious official. After only seven days in office as acting prime minister he had Shaocheng Mao, a reformer in the state, executed.

How did Confucius justify his verdict against Shaocheng Mao? According to him, anyone guilty of any of the following five "crimes" should be put to death:

1. Understanding the changes of things and launching out on venturesome acts;
2. Not following the orthodox ways prescribed by the slave system, but stubbornly taking the path of so-called reform;
3. Talking glibly about the reasons for such reform;
4. Knowing too much about the decadent and unstable phenomena occurring under the rule of the slave-owners;
5. Using stern, just words to describe why the slave system should be opposed.

<sup>3</sup>*Historical Records*, "The Hereditary House of Confucius."

<sup>4</sup>Duke Chou (surname Chi, personal name Tan) once held office under King Cheng of the Chou Dynasty. From *The Book of Documents* it can be seen that Duke Chou's methods in dealing with the Yin tribe were extremely harsh and cruel. Besides using them as slaves, he ordered them to Loyi under surveillance and cruelly punished those who disobeyed.

Confucius claimed that since Shaocheng Mao had committed all five of these offences, he had to be executed. Thereupon he put Shaocheng Mao to death on the following charges:

1. Gathering a crowd to form an association;
2. Propagating heretical views;
3. Confusing right and wrong.<sup>5</sup>

This event shows how merciless Confucius was in his treatment of progressive personages of the time.

Not long after being removed from office, Confucius managed to do another thing which he smugly prided himself on.

The new rising forces of Lu at that time, e.g., the senior officials Meng Sun, Shu Sun and Chi Sun, not only actually wielded power in the state but also built their own respective cities.

Meng Sun built the city of Cheng, Shu Sun the city of Hou, and Chi Sun the city of Pi.

In slave society in China, as in ancient Europe with the Greek city states (like Athens) as example, a city could not be founded just by anyone at will, for founding a city amounted to founding a state. Now that Meng Sun, Shu Sun and Chi Sun had their own cities, thought Confucius, didn't that mean they had their own states in opposition to his state of Lu?

Confucius felt quite uncomfortable about this and was biding his time to settle the question. Consequently he instigated his disciple Tzu Lu to destroy the cities of Shu Sun and Chi Sun. Only the city of Cheng built by Meng Sun

<sup>5</sup> *Hsun Tzu*, "Yu Tso."

was left unscathed, perhaps because it was very well defended.<sup>6</sup>

### Hated by the New Rising Forces

After that Confucius went to the state of Wei where he stayed for five years, repeatedly inveigling people to say a good word for him to the prince of Wei. But in the five years he never got anywhere.

Then he decided to try the state of Chen. As he was passing through the state of Sung, he happened to stop under a big tree to perform the rites together with his pupils. The war minister of Sung, Huan Tui, who was opposed to Confucius' preachings, ordered the tree chopped down, at which Confucius took to his heels in alarm.<sup>7</sup>

Upon arrival in Chen he met further disappointment, for not only was he slighted at every turn, but no one even offered the hospitality of meals for him and his pupils, so that they went hungry for several days.<sup>8</sup>

There was nothing for it but to return to Lu. On the way past Wei his ambition grew again, and he attempted to govern that state by carrying out what he called the "rectification of names" in the social relationships.<sup>9</sup> But he failed again, due most likely to the disfavour in which the progressive forces of Wei held him.

<sup>6</sup> *Tso Chuan*, Prince Ting, 12th year.

<sup>7</sup> *Historical Records*, "The Hereditary House of Confucius."

<sup>8</sup> *Analects*, "Wei Ling Kung"; also *Hsun Tzu*, "Yu Tso."

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, "Tzu Lu."

## Lost Attempt

Though Confucius hit snags politically wherever he went in his travels to the various states, he would never admit that the slave system was on its way out, and tried in a thousand and one ways to prop up the old social order.

His policy was to strive every day to "rectify names," every day to perform the rites. He tried in this way to restore and perpetuate the ranks as stipulated by the slave system of the Western Chou Dynasty, so that a slave-owner would always be a slave-owner and a slave always a slave.

Confucius' reactionary thinking and behaviour were already being criticized by the people of the time. For example, Chang Chu, Chieh Ni, and a doorkeeper and a carrier all cursed him for not knowing the times, saying that though the trend could not be stemmed, Confucius persisted in knocking his head against the wall.<sup>10</sup>

An old ploughman also hit the nail on the head when he said that Confucius' four limbs knew no labour and he could not distinguish the five grains.<sup>11</sup> He spoke of Confucius as a parasite who lived off others' toil.

Once, in a slave uprising in the state of Cheng, the rebels attacked a forbidden area, Huanfu, but were suppressed by the reactionary slave-owners' armed might. When Confucius heard this, he exclaimed with joy: Fine! If you show the slaves any leniency they'll become disobedient. This stern punishment meted out to them is indeed excellent!<sup>12</sup>

After Confucius returned to Lu and suddenly heard that Tien Cheng-tzu of the state of Chi had killed Prince Chien,

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., "Wei Tzu" and "Hsien Wen."

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., "Wei Tzu."

<sup>12</sup> *Tso Chuan*, Prince Chao, 20th year.

he went at once to see Prince Ai of Lu, saying: What "offence and rebellion against superiors" is this! You'd better hurry up and call out the troops. Launch a punitive expedition!

No matter how Confucius appealed to him, Prince Ai did not send his troops,<sup>13</sup> probably thinking he was no match for Chi.

Confucius was of course displeased at meeting this rebuff and resorted to other methods. With his reactionary stand of clinging to the old, he not only edited classics left over from history, but also compiled a book called the *Spring and Autumn Annals* for the "rectification of names." He thought this would prevent many of what he considered "rebellious subjects and villainous sons" (actually the new rising forces of the time) from daring to get unruly, would make everybody know his place and behave himself.<sup>14</sup>

He enlisted many pupils, preaching his reactionary views to them and asking them to follow him and strive to carry out his instructions.

Such were Confucius' main activities in his lifetime.

<sup>13</sup> *Analecets*, "Hsien Wen"; also *Tso Chuan*, Prince Ai, 10th year.

<sup>14</sup> *Mencius*, "Teng Wen Kung," Part II.

### III. STUBBORN OPPOSITION TO SOCIAL CHANGE

#### Confucius' So-called Way

In China's slave society the slave-owning aristocrats and their spokesmen were referred to as "superior men," while the slaves were called "mean men."

Confucius knew that these "superior men" were mostly well-off. Even the poorest among them were no worse off than his favoured disciple Yen Yuan, who still had a roof over his head, food to eat and water to drink, and could manage to get along.<sup>1</sup> Hsi Chueh, a "superior man" of the state of Ts'in, though living in fairly straitened circumstances, had his plot of land to till and could live on.<sup>2</sup>

Confucius concluded, therefore, that "superior men" were broad-minded<sup>3</sup> and need not concern themselves with the necessities of life. Their sole concern was the so-called *tao* or Way.<sup>4</sup>

The reason for this relates to the aspect of the "mean men," their direct opposites.

"Mean men" led an animal existence, miserable to the core

<sup>1</sup> *Analects*, "Yung Yeh."

<sup>2</sup> *Tso Chuan*, Prince Hsi, 33rd year.

<sup>3</sup> *Analects*, "Shu Erh."

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, "Wei Ling Kung."

and burdened with cares;<sup>5</sup> the leisure and contentment of the "superior men" was unknown to them. They worried all day long over their livelihood,<sup>6</sup> and when they were pushed to the wall they could not but complain about the inequalities and speak ill of the slave-owners.<sup>7</sup>

And this was not all. When pressed too hard, exploited and oppressed so that they could not live on, the slaves became less docile,<sup>8</sup> going so far as to group together and rise up against the slave-owners.<sup>9</sup> This really frightened the "superior men" so that they were looking for a way to hold down the slaves. Now, Confucius' method of dealing with this problem was to invoke the so-called Way, and with this the "superior men" concerned themselves.

#### When the Way Prevails and When the Way Declines

Confucius was afraid the ordinary people would not understand what the Way meant, so he gave a definition: When the Way prevails, all government and military decrees will be issued by the king; when it declines, they will be issued by the various princes.<sup>10</sup>

The definition was quite clear. But it appears that the situation got out of hand afterwards, and it became impossible for the king to issue government and military decrees. Then Confucius had to make another definition of the Way: When the Way prevails in a state, political power will not

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, "Shu Erh."

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, "Li Jen."

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, "Yen Yuan."

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, "Wei Cheng."

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, "Wei Ling Kung" and "Tzu Lu."

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, "Chi Shih."

pass down into the hands of officials, and the people will not discuss and criticize state affairs as they please.<sup>11</sup>

The first part of this definition was rather ambiguous, whether it applied to the king or the princes in the various states; for in either case it could mean that state power must not pass into the hands of officials. However, considering the time in which this was said, it probably applied to the princes, for the state power of Lu was already not in the hands of the prince but had fallen into those of certain progressive senior officials.

The significance of the second part of the definition was quite clear. With the moribund state power of the slave-owning princes already wobbling, would the added weight of the people's criticism not lead to its fall? Confucius therefore considered this part of his definition very important.

He said that the working people should be enslaved and directed to do things but not allowed to understand things.<sup>12</sup> If allowed to have knowledge, they would criticize, and the state power of the slave-owning princes would collapse.<sup>13</sup> This was what Confucius most dreaded.

### "Rectification of Names" to Prop Up Slavery

But Confucius did not stop at his definitions of what he meant by "when the Way prevails" and "when the Way declines." He outlined a specific, positive method, mentioned above, for the "rectification of names."<sup>14</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., "Chi Shih."

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., "Tai Po."

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., "Yang Huo."

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., "Tzu Lu."

Sovereigns being killed by subjects and fathers by sons was of frequent occurrence. For example, Chou Hsu of the state of Wei assassinated Prince Wan; Shang Chen, heir-apparent of the state of Chu, assassinated his father Prince Chun, an instance involving not only subject and sovereign, but also son and father.<sup>15</sup>

With things like this occurring, Confucius could no longer just look on, but decided to cope with the political upheaval by "rectifying names." This specified that a prince should behave like a prince, a subject like a subject, a father like a father, and a son like a son. Individuals in these various categories must fulfil their duties accordingly. In other words, the titles in social relationships must be kept in order.

Subjects killing sovereigns and sons fathers—this meant confusion of names and was a very dangerous thing. The grain stored up in the slave-owners' granaries would not be safe; the slave-owners would starve because the so-called "rebellious subjects and villainous sons" would rise up in revolt.<sup>16</sup>

Confucius grew more and more fearful of the political turmoil. When Tien Cheng-tzu of Chi killed Prince Chien, Confucius looked upon the act as a heinous offence, not considering who was right or wrong. How could a subject kill a sovereign? Wasn't that getting out of place? For the sake of keeping the so-called "names" in order, Confucius urged that Tien Cheng-tzu be brought to justice by all means<sup>17</sup>—an instance of Confucius' stubborn defence of slavery.

In compiling the *Spring and Autumn Annals*, Confucius particularly stressed the "rectification of names." He preached

<sup>15</sup> *Tso Chuan*, Prince Yin, 4th year; also *Spring and Autumn Annals*, Prince Wen, 1st year.

<sup>16</sup> *Analects*, "Yen Yuan."

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., "Hsien Wen."

this to all of his pupils and many other personages of the time as well.

He thought that if the names in slave society, which had been thrown into confusion, were rectified, then the changed social situation could be reversed and the old order restored.

But this was an idle dream, because the abolition of slavery had already become the irresistible historical trend.

Therefore, in preaching the "rectification of names" Confucius meant to use the subjective concept of "names" adopted by the slave-owners of Yin-Chou times to resist objective social change and avert the doom of the slave-owners' aristocratic rule. This is another manifestation of Confucius' stubborn standpoint.

Viewed philosophically, Confucius' advocacy of the subjective concept of "rectifying names," a departure from the objective reality of contemporary social development, is an utter exposure of his subjective, idealistic world outlook.

#### IV. POLICY OF RESTORING THE DECAYING SLAVE-OWNERS TO POWER

##### Why Confucius Advocated "Benevolence"

In China's ancient slave society, slaves and land all belonged to one blood-related tribe, the ruler of the state.<sup>1</sup>

In this type of tribal slave-holding state, most of the slaves, as previously stated, were captives from other tribes, while the freemen and aristocrats all belonged to one tribe. So, in appointing officials, consideration was not taken of whether they were good or bad, capable or not, but relatives within the tribe were invariably used. And this policy scarcely changed, even in the situation of the daily decline of the slave-holding state power.

For example, in the state of Sung, after the death of Prince Kung, Hua Yuan, Hua Hsi and Kungsun Shih were promoted, the first two being descendants of Prince Tai and the latter of Prince Chuang, nobles all.<sup>2</sup>

Only rarely were non-relatives used. One example is the case of Prince Hsien of the state of Shan who once used members of other tribes in his ruling body, but with the re-

<sup>1</sup>"Under the whole heaven, every spot is the sovereign's ground; to the borders of the land, every individual is the sovereign's subject." (*The Book of Odes.*)

<sup>2</sup>*Tso Chuan*, Prince Cheng, 15th year.

sult that he was killed by Prince Hsiang's descendants.<sup>3</sup> So it was impossible to use anyone other than one's own relatives.

However, even relying on one's own family members, placing one's own relatives in positions of authority, many ruling slave-owning aristocrats finally succumbed in the surging tide of the time. In the state of Tsin, for instance, the eight noble clans that were once in power — Luan, Hsi, Hsu, Yuan, Hu, Su, Ching and Po — became slaves. Confucius himself came from a declined noble family of Sung state.

On the other hand, there were also slaves who freed themselves in the upsurge of the time and took positions of power. Pao Wen-tzu of Chi, Ying Chi of Lu, Chou Cho and Shutou Hsu of Tsin had all been slaves and rose to power.<sup>4</sup>

Confucius considered that this trend must not continue. With the aristocrats in decline and the slaves on the rise, what would become of the world? He would have to think of a way to restore the old order!

But how? He thought now the best way would be to unite all of the same tribe, from nobles to freemen. Thus he raised the slogan of *jen* or "benevolence."

Confucius' benevolence was an ideological concept of the slave-owning class. The Chinese character "仁" (*jen*), in its original meaning, implied that two or more people thought alike, and loved one another. From this it followed that benevolence meant "human being"<sup>5</sup> All should treat each other in a "humanitarian" way. It was a watchword that sounded fine, and if everyone acted in this way, how splendid

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., Prince Chao, 7th year.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., Prince Ting, 9th year; Prince Cheng, 16th year; Prince Hsiang, 21st year; Prince Hsi, 24th year.

<sup>5</sup> *The Doctrine of the Mean*, Ch. 20.

that would be! Actually, Confucius' benevolence was nothing of the kind.

Confucius preached a lot about benevolence indeed, but he carefully excluded slaves and all other enslaved working people. For example, he said that among slave-owners there might be a few without benevolence (referring to Chi Sun of Lu and others who had changed the mode of production), while among slaves and enslaved working people not one could be found who practised benevolence.<sup>6</sup>

Again he said that slaves on occasion appeared to need benevolence more than they needed water and fire; he had seen slaves who gave their lives for water and fire, but not one who died for benevolence,<sup>7</sup> so it was clear that slaves were born without this attribute.

And people without benevolence were liable to commit misdeeds.<sup>8</sup> Was this not a threat to the slave-owners' rule? The aristocracy had to be on its guard!

It can be seen from the above that Confucius considered the demarcation between "superior men" (the slave-owners) and "mean men" (the slaves) as always watertight. The benevolence he preached by no means applied to all people, but only to princes, ministers, officials and gentlemen. Confucius' saying that "benevolence means to love others" was an outright fraud.

As a matter of fact, in advocating benevolence Confucius sought to unite the slave-owners and freemen of the ruling tribes, thinking that if these whole tribes were united they could stand against the slaves' rebellion.

<sup>6</sup> *Analects*, "Hsien Wen."

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., "Wei Ling Kung."

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., "Li Jen."

When Confucius' pupils Chung Kung and Tzu Kung asked how benevolence was to be practised, he replied: For an official to the sovereign of a state or in the house of a minister, the principle is that one should not do to others what he does not wish himself, and should not ask others to do things that he does not want to do himself; in this way no one will hate him and he can unite the state or house well.<sup>9</sup> He said further: In living in a state, one should first unite the benevolent "superior men."<sup>10</sup>

He thought that if inner-tribe unity was accomplished and even relatives and old friends scattered in other places were not left out of the unity, the slaves would not dare to rise up. If the "superior men" were closely united and displayed special benevolence and love, the slaves would not dare to commit misdeeds. More, they would be won over and stay in their place.<sup>11</sup>

Would the old order of slave society not be preserved and all under heaven be serene if the so-called "superior men" related by blood, from the slave-owning aristocrats to the freemen, were all united, and the slaves stayed in their place? This was precisely Confucius' reactionary aim in preaching benevolence:

### The Essence of Benevolence

But how was the entire society to practise benevolence? What did benevolence mean? One essential meaning is implicit in Confucius' reply to Yen Yuan: Benevolence means to restrain oneself and return to the rites. Once self-restraint

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., "Yen Yuan."

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., "Wei Ling Kung."

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., "Tai Po."

and return to the rites are achieved, all under heaven will submit to the benevolent rule.<sup>12</sup> Another is contained in a saying of Confucius' pupil Yu Tzu: Filial piety and fraternal duty — are they not the root of benevolence!<sup>13</sup>

The first, in modern terms, means to curb your desires, set limits on your actions and return to the system of rites of Yin and Chou slave society.

Confucius said for example that wealth and high position were desired by all, but in seeking these each should stay in his own place and not reach beyond his limits. To reach beyond one's limits was irrational, said Confucius, and therefore one should restrain oneself.

Conversely, poverty and humbleness were abhorred by all, Confucius went on, but in abhorring them everyone should also stay in his place and not make attempts beyond the pale to gain wealth and high position. In other words, gaining by "getting out of place" was unreasonable, worse than accepting one's fated poverty and humbleness.<sup>14</sup> Such was the "self-restraint" that Confucius preached. But he had a definite purpose in inducing people to restrain themselves.

Were there not many new rising forces at that time, like the three houses of Lu, the six ministers of Tsin, and the house of Tien of Chi, who attacked the decayed princes' houses of the slave-owners? Were there not slaves who would not resign themselves to oppression and who ran away? There were, and Confucius considered these actions all wrong, not fulfilling one's duties and being unable to curb one's desires. If everyone fulfilled his duty and curbed his desires, how could officials attack sovereigns, and slaves run

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., "Yen Yuan."

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., "Hsueh Erh."

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., "Li Jen."



away? So, Confucius said, the tribal aristocrats should first restrain themselves and stay in their place, then the slaves would naturally behave themselves and not run away. No matter what difficulties people met, even deprivation of house and home, they should restrain themselves and not “do evil,” not attempt to go beyond the limits set for them. They must not infringe “benevolence” for the sake of livelihood, but must practise this virtue even though it cost them their lives.<sup>15</sup>

Let us take a look at Confucius’ so-called “return to the rites.” This does not mean being polite or observing etiquette, but was intended by Confucius to call for restoring the old social class distinctions under the slave system. In the slave society of the Western Chou Dynasty there had been the so-called “rule by rites.” This, in the context of the slave system, in fact stipulated the relationship of “superior and mean” applied to the slave-owners and the slaves. The slave-owners ruled over the slaves; the will of the slave-owners was law. They could at will oppress and exploit the slaves, and even put them to death. The slaves were permitted only to obey absolutely and not to resist. Such was “rule by rites.”

How did things stand in Confucius’ time? In Chiang, a city in the state of Tsin, former slaves had become merchants and were prospering, wearing fine clothes, riding in ornate chariots and mixing with government officials and aristocrats like upper-class people.<sup>16</sup> Confucius’ pupil Fan Chih, of the upper class, requested to be taught farming and gardening<sup>17</sup> — work reserved for the lower classes. There were people who tended towards progress and who, in view of the slave revolts that

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., “Li Jen” and “Wei Ling Kung.”

<sup>16</sup> *Discourses of the States*, “Discourses of Tsin.”

<sup>17</sup> *Analects*, “Tzu Lu.”

were erupting everywhere, realized the necessity of changing the old methods of rule. Some articles of law, they maintained, must be drawn up to govern the relationship between the slave-owners and the slaves, and they drafted a “penal code” placing some restrictions on the slave-owners.

The state of Tsin had this “penal code” cast on vessels for all to see, and this event was called “casting the penal tripods.” These advocates of “rule by law” were the predecessors of the Legalists who represented the new rising feudal forces.

But Confucius was adamant against all this. On hearing of the tripod event, he remarked in dismay: If you mix up the aristocracy and the slaves, how can the aristocrats display their prestige and greatness? With such goings on there would be no distinction between the high and the low, and what would become of the slave-holding state?<sup>18</sup> Confucius strongly opposed the casting of the tripods, and insisted that the regulations favouring the slave system of the period of Duke Chou must be carried out. He urged that the original class distinctions must be immediately restored. In his words, “return to the rites.”

Confucius considered many jobs, such as tilling fields and growing vegetables, as the duties of slaves, i.e., the “mean men.” The “superior men” in the upper echelons of society never needed to lift a finger; they only needed to attend to the rites, fidelity and righteousness, and the “mean men” would meekly perform duties for them.

Confucius also considered politeness and rites as befitting “superior men,” while none of these were required in dealing with “mean men.” If the latter did wrong, they should be

<sup>18</sup> *Tso Chuan*, Prince Chao, 29th year.

punished without further ado. And that was the way of slave society.<sup>19</sup>

As for the reforms carried out by the contemporary officials who tended towards progress, such as the reform by Chi Sun of Lu, who freed all the slaves he had seized from the prince's house and allowed them to carry on production as tenants, Confucius considered this as disrupting the system of rites established by Duke Chou. Therefore, when his pupil Jan Chiu helped Chi Sun carry out his reform, Confucius heaped abuse on Jan Chiu in front of his other pupils: Jan Chiu is no longer my pupil; you must beat the drums and attack him!<sup>20</sup>

Chi Sun, in Confucius' eyes, was an upstart senior official who, forgetting himself, wilfully changed the existing mode of production. This was undermining the "system of rites" and was downright "non-benevolence."

Confucius would have people curb their desires, set limits on their actions, follow the rules of slave society, and so bring back the former class distinctions. In this way the entire society would submit to the "benevolent rule" of the slave-owning aristocracy and the world would become tranquil.

This was the essence of Confucius' "benevolence" which was to be attained by "restraining oneself and returning to the rites."

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<sup>19</sup> "The rites do not extend to the common people; punishment does not apply to the officials." (*The Book of Rites*.)

<sup>20</sup> *Analects*, "Hsien Chin."

## V. METHODS FOR MAINTAINING ORDER UNDER THE SLAVE SYSTEM

### Why Advocate Filial Piety and Fraternal Duty?

For people in the ruling tribe to "restrain themselves and return to the rites" would require a great deal of effort. Filial piety and fraternal duty were prerequisites to the achievement of benevolence, and therefore these were said to be its root.

Confucius reasoned that to preserve the Chou tribal rule the Chou tribe must first be united and consolidated. How was this to be done? Only by promoting "love for one's kindred" and filial piety within the tribe. All members of the Chou tribe, whether in power, declined or falling into obscurity, should show affection and love for their relatives, devotion to their tribe, and filial respect for the tribal ancestors. If this was the case, would not the Chou tribe be united and consolidated?

Filial piety concerned the relationship with one's parents and ancestors and was used to link the tribe vertically; fraternal duty referred to the relationship within the generation, of younger brothers respecting older brothers, and was used to link the tribe horizontally. In this way the ruling tribe would be well united both through the generations and within the

generation, and the rule of the slave-owning aristocracy could be solidified.

Confucius counted on the preaching of filial piety and fraternal duty also to make the slaves more docile. His pupil Tseng Shen once said: At funerals deep mourning should be expressed for the dead, sacrificing to the ancestors should be most reverent; if the "superior men" do this, the slaves will become docile and behave themselves.<sup>1</sup>

Clan and paternal authority in the subsequent feudal society were for a long time spiritual fetters on the working people, a poison from Confucian ideology.

The reason why Confucius looked on filial piety and fraternal duty as the root of benevolence was not only that they were used to maintain the unity of the tribe and family, but more important still that they were associated with loyalty to the sovereign.

For example, Yu Tzu explained Confucius' ideas thus: If one can practise filial piety and fraternal duty at home he is not likely to offend his superiors; if he does not offend his superiors, if he does not do anything against the rulers, he is least likely to stir up trouble, i.e., rebel against the slave-owning aristocracy.<sup>2</sup>

That is to say, one who practised filial piety at home would surely be loyal to the slave-holding state and to the supreme sovereign of that state. It means placing loyalty on the basis of filial piety and fraternal duty. Or in other words, filial piety and fraternal duty were the prerequisites of loyalty and took loyalty as their aim.

In a reply to Chi Kang-tzu, Confucius said: A person who is filial to his parents and kind to his children will certainly be loyal to the sovereign.<sup>3</sup> "Loyal officials come from

<sup>1,2</sup> *Analects*, "Hsueh Erh."

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, "Wei Cheng."

families of filial sons"—hasn't this nonsense of Confucius been followed for thousands of years?

Nor was Confucius' preaching of filial piety merely a matter of morality and ethics, but related directly to politics.

For example, when explaining why he didn't enter government, he said: *The Book of Documents* says, "You must practise filial piety and fraternal duty, explain the meaning and importance of these to the authorities and ask them to practise these virtues." Does this not amount to exercising government oneself? Why, it may be asked, need one be in the government personally?<sup>4</sup>

Confucius' linking of filial piety with loyalty and with politics shows that the filial piety he championed was precisely practising loyalty to the sovereign and serving politics. He considered this necessary to attain his aim of saving the tribal slave-holding state, which was faced with imminent doom.

If this aim could be attained, Confucius figured that this would be "all under heaven submitting to the benevolent rule."

### Purpose of Advocating Loyalty and Altruism

Promoting loyalty to the sovereign was the aim of Confucius' preaching filial piety and fraternal duty, but, with the slave system already on its last legs, what could still be done?

Bygone things cannot be brought back; what is withered away cannot be restored. But Confucius made up his mind to make a final, desperate attempt to save the slave system.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

He therefore warned the ruling slave-owners, the sovereigns, to be careful: Subjects murdering sovereigns and sons killing fathers is not something that started today. It has been going on for a long time. Precautions must be taken!<sup>5</sup>

Naturally he showed special concern for the state of Lu, saying in particular reference to the instability of the Lu rule: The authority of the Lu princes has been wobbly for a long time. Their economic power has been lost for five generations, and their political power has passed down into the hands of the officials for four generations. This is a most dangerous development!<sup>6</sup>

How was this danger to be averted? Confucius came up with loyalty as the answer. He believed that the king's power passing into the hands of the princes and the princes' power passing into the hands of the officials was due to the officials' disloyalty to the princes and the princes' disloyalty to the king. The best remedy was for the people to look to the government, the officials to the princes, and the princes to the king. In other words, the people, officials and princes should all be loyal to the king. Therefore, Confucius called upon all "alienated hearts" to return to obedience and loyalty, hoping thus to restore the old order that had been disturbed.

In order to encourage the officials to practise loyalty, Confucius also linked loyalty with benevolence. For example, Kuan Chung and Shao Hu had been officials under Prince Chiu, heir-apparent of Chi, who was later murdered by Prince Huan. Shao Hu followed him to his death, but not Kuan Chung. Tzu Lu felt that Kuan Chung was disloyal, and asked Confucius if he was in fact not "benevolent." Confucius had not considered Kuan Chung "benevolent," but because Kuan

<sup>5</sup> *The Book of Changes*, "Wen Yen."

<sup>6</sup> *Analects*, "Chi Shih."

Chung later helped Prince Huan to perform some meritorious deeds and was loyal to the latter, he answered that Kuan Chung could likewise be considered benevolent.<sup>7</sup>

Confucius thought at the same time that, to win people over, it was necessary to bestow a few favours, so he also preached altruism, which was conducive to loyalty.

He said, for example, that if a man wanted to keep his position he must help others to keep theirs; and if a man wanted to get on well he should help others to do the same.<sup>8</sup>

This sounded all very fine; but was the slave-owner to help the slave to live as well as himself? The idea was a fraud pure and simple. Proceeding from the interest of the slave-owners, Confucius actually warned the sovereigns that in order to bolster their own power they had better grant the slaves petty favours.

Loyalty and altruism, as preached by Confucius, can be said to be the two sides of a coin: altruism for the sake of loyalty and loyalty through altruism. It was also as he prescribed: If a sovereign treats his subjects with politeness, the subjects will work most loyally for the sovereign.<sup>9</sup>

The two concepts therefore were part and parcel of Confucius' philosophy for saving slavery from its doom. They were contained in, and gave expression to, benevolence. As Confucius said to his pupil Tseng Shen: There is one fundamental principle that runs through my teachings. Tseng Shen knew well that this fundamental principle was loyalty and altruism.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, "Hsien Wen."

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, "Yung Yeh."

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, "Pa Yi."

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, "Li Jen."

### So-called Loyalty and Trust

Confucius also preached loyalty and trust. That is to say, if the lord granted petty favours to the slaves, the slaves would be loyal to the lord. He said for example: If you show a little generosity towards the slaves, the slaves will trust you, and then no matter how heavy a burden you put on them they will bend their backs to it for you without showing any sign of unwillingness.<sup>11</sup>

Or, conversely, if you do not gain the slaves' trust, you will get nothing out of them. When you work them they will become impatient and complain that you treat them too harshly, and they will run away.<sup>12</sup>

When Huang Kuo-fu of the state of Sung ordered slaves to build terraces for Prince Ping the slaves refused.<sup>13</sup> And when Liang Po commanded the slaves to build a city wall all found an excuse and absented themselves.<sup>14</sup> Such occurrences, said Confucius, were the result of not gaining the slaves' trust.

A little mercy shown, a sop thrown—these were most effective in making people work, said Confucius.<sup>15</sup> In the first place he insisted that slaves should only be directed to work, and never allowed to have knowledge.<sup>16</sup> But, now that the slaves trusted the lord and were loyal to him, he could burden them at will and should at the same time give them a little education.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., "Yao Yueh."

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., "Tzu Chang."

<sup>13</sup> *Tso Chuan*, Prince Hsiang, 17th year.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., Prince Hsi, 19th year.

<sup>15</sup> *Analects*, "Yao Yueh."

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., "Tai Po."

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., "Hsien Wen."

Of course, education by no means meant the slaves were to be allowed any real learning, but meant training them in loyalty to the lord so that they would not do anything against him. What this education meant was training the slaves to meekly accept exploitation and enslavement.<sup>18</sup>

The loyalty and trust that Confucius preached was in essence one of his tricks of rule, a sugar-coated bullet directed at the slaves, an invisible knife that killed without leaving a trace of blood.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., "Yang Huo."

## VI. PREACHING THE "WILL OF HEAVEN" AND BELIEF IN SPIRITS

### Harping on the Immortality of the Soul

When a person died, was there or was there not a soul that survived? Were there such things in the world as spirits? Confucius appeared to have doubts. On one occasion he said that he never talked about supernatural and weird things.<sup>1</sup> When Tzu Lu asked him about worshipping spirits, he tried to dismiss the question with the answer: We don't know how to serve the living; how can we think of worshipping spirits. When Tzu Lu further asked what happened to a person after death, Confucius only said: We don't know about life; how can we know what happens after death.<sup>2</sup>

Was it that Confucius really had no definite view on this question? If he had not, why did he stand for elaborate funerals for parents, laying the corpse out in grand style, observing so-called "burial and sacrifices according to the rites,"<sup>3</sup> and three years of mourning, eating coarse food and wearing sackcloth as prescribed by filial piety?

<sup>1</sup> *Analects*, "Shu Erh."

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, "Hsien Chin."

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, "Wei Cheng."

Tsai Yu, pupil of Confucius, thought the three-year mourning period too long, and for this Confucius blamed him as unfilial, or in his own words, "wanting in benevolence."<sup>4</sup> All this proves that Confucius believed in a soul that was immortal.

Confucius praised King Yu of the Hsia times for being able to "display the utmost filial piety towards the spirits."<sup>5</sup> Is this not admitting belief that after a person died a spirit was left behind?

There was also a belief at the time that the spirits would not accept sacrifices offered by people not of the same tribe or rank.<sup>6</sup> This meant not only that there were distinctions between relatives and non-relatives, the high and the low, but that the spirits belonged only to the ruling aristocracy. In other words, only aristocrats could become spirits after death and therefore the spirits would not accept sacrifices offered by "alien tribes and lowly people."

Confucius preached along the same line, but in slightly different terms. He said that spirits would not accept sacrifices from "alien tribes and lowly people" because if such people were to sacrifice, it would be flattery to the spirits for the purpose of seeking benefits for themselves.<sup>7</sup> What this boils down to is this: Since the aristocrats alone became spirits after death, everything would be all right as long as their descendants could "pay careful attention to performing the funeral rites to parents and following up long after with the sacrificial ceremonies," so to induce the slaves to submit meekly to their lot.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, "Yang Huo."

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, "Tai Po."

<sup>6</sup> *Tso Chuan*, Prince Hsi, 31st year.

<sup>7</sup> *Analects*, "Wei Cheng."

This idea of Confucius' was elaborated by his pupil Tseng Shen, who stated it like this: The solemn sacrifices offered by the aristocrats and freemen to their ancestors would strike the slaves with a kind of awe for their superiors; they would become docile and not protest against the slave-owners' rule.<sup>8</sup> Or to put it more bluntly, the nobility displayed their superiority and wealth through their sacrifices to the souls of their ancestors. Confucius thought that the awe inspired in the slaves by this would make them take the aristocrats seriously and meekly accept their own enslavement.

From the above, it may be seen that though Confucius claimed not to speak much of spirits, he as much as said that the aristocrats had souls that survived their mortal selves.

As for the broad masses of the slaves, however, the slave-owner never considered them as human beings from their birth; the only difference between them and cattle or horses was that they could speak. Enjoying no human rights whatsoever in life, they were deprived of the right to "become spirits" after death. It was precisely as Hsun Tzu said of conditions in slave society: Those agricultural and handicraft slaves who live by their own labour have no right to a temple after death.<sup>9</sup>

### Preaching Fate as Deciding All

Another preaching of Confucius was the "will of Heaven," that fate decided everything.

As has been related above, when Confucius reached the state of Sung in his travels, the war minister, Huan Tui,

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., "Hsueh Erh."

<sup>9</sup> *Hsun Tzu*, "On Rites."

disliked his performing rites beneath a big tree and would have killed him had he not fled. Having made good his escape, Confucius told his pupils: Heaven has endowed me with virtue; Huan Tui didn't understand even that when he sought to kill me. But what could he do to me?<sup>10</sup>

Confucius went next to the Kuang area in the state of Wei. There the people had apparently heard of Confucius and knew that he spoke for the slave-owning aristocracy, so they not only gave this traveller the cold shoulder, but surrounded him with force. Confucius was frightened and scarcely got away. Still he boasted to his pupils that Heaven did not will that he should die. Though the people of Kuang had surrounded him, he bragged, what could they do to him?<sup>11</sup>

Another incident. Chi Sun of Lu bore a grudge against Tzu Lu who had helped the prince to destroy his city of Pi. Afterwards, another pupil of Confucius, Kungpo Liao, slandered Tzu Lu to Chi Sun, making Chi Sun more angry with Tzu Lu and especially trustful of Kungpo Liao.

Tzufu Ching-po, also Confucius' pupil, reported this to his master in high dudgeon. He said that if Confucius wanted to punish Kungpo Liao he would be willing to act as executioner and display the head in public.

Confucius' answer was: If my principles in defending the old social order flourish, that's fate; if they fail, that's also fate. However, I believe that my principles are destined to flourish, and since this is so, of what use is Kungpo Liao's attempt to seek favour with Chi Sun? Is his slander a match for fate?<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup> *Analects*, "Shu Erh."

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., "Tzu Han."

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., "Hsien Wen."

In short, Confucius believed that mankind was controlled by the hand of fate and that fate was Heaven's will, arrangement by a supreme god. This is seen even more vividly in the following:

In answering a question put by Wangsun Chia, Confucius said: He who offends Heaven has none to whom he can pray.<sup>13</sup> When Tzu Lu was displeased at Confucius' visit to Princess Nan Tzu of Wei, Confucius swore: If I meant to curry favour with her, may Heaven by all means forsake me!<sup>14</sup>

Once when Confucius was very ill, Tzu Lu, in view of Confucius' being a senior official of Lu, asked some of his disciples to act as retainers to him. Confucius felt that since he had no retainers the pretence was improper and he said worriedly: Whom am I cheating? Am I imposing on Heaven?<sup>15</sup>

When Confucius' favourite pupil Yen Yuan died, he sighed and said: Alas! Heaven is destroying me! Heaven is destroying me!<sup>16</sup>

Another time, Confucius sat silent, not wanting to speak, and Tzu Kung asked him why. Confucius' sulky answer was: Heaven doesn't speak and yet the whole world conducts its affairs according to Heaven's will; the four seasons pursue their courses, a hundred things are produced and grow each according to its own law. Does Heaven have to speak?<sup>17</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., "Pa Yi."

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., "Yung Yeh."

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., "Tzu Han."

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., "Hsien Chin."

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., "Yang Huo."

From the above it can be seen that Confucius considered Heaven as deciding all things, that he took a spiritualistic, idealist world outlook.

While shouting his theory of the will of Heaven, he preached that "there are three things of which superior men stand in awe":

1) They "stand in awe of the will of Heaven." In the Yin-Chou slave society, the supreme ruler, the king, of the slave-holding state professed that his power was bestowed on him by Heaven. So, in order to induce the people to accept the power of the ruler as sacred and inviolable, he must first of all make the people stand in awe of Heaven.

2) They "stand in awe of great men." Since the king and the princes in various states were all ordained by Heaven, if one feared Heaven he would also fear the king and the princes; he could only support and love them and was not allowed to entertain the slightest feeling of disrespect towards them.

3) They "stand in awe of the words of sages." Sages were appointed by Heaven to speak on behalf of the king and the princes, and so the words of the sages must also be held in awe and not disregarded in the least.

But the lowly slaves had nothing to do with all this. They had none of these three "awes" and knew nothing about the "will of Heaven." As for the "great men" of the slave-owning aristocracy, the slaves had nothing but hatred for them, considered the so-called sages' words utter nonsense and held them all in contempt.<sup>18</sup> Confucius did not explain why this was so.

To us now, however, it is very clear. Where there is oppression there is resistance. Of course the slaves would not

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., "Chi Shih."



accept Confucius' preaching of "Heaven's will" which was in the interest of the slave-owning class.

Confucius had no way of dealing with the slaves, and could only say that those who did not know their own fate could not be considered as "superior men" of the upper class.<sup>19</sup> By this he meant to give a warning to persons like Chi Sun of Lu and Tien Cheng-tzu of Chi, who were officials under the princes of their respective states and could be considered "superior men." But these people had become the new rising forces at that time, and Confucius was afraid they would not stay in their place and accept the existing order of things, afraid they might take advantage of the dissatisfaction of the slaves to oppose the princes and encroach on their property and power. He therefore asked these officials to know their own positions as dictated by fate and gave them to understand that a person's life and death and his position, whether high or low, were all arranged by Heaven.<sup>20</sup> However fate ordained, so be it. He asked them not to indulge in "idle dreams," for that would be going against the "will of Heaven," behaving out of place, so that one could no longer be considered a "superior man" of the upper class.

Such was the nub of Confucius' theory of Heaven's will which he took such great pains to cook up and peddle.

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., "Yao Yueh."

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., "Yen Yuan."

## VII. REACTIONARY THEORY OF HUMAN NATURE AND IDEAS ON EDUCATION

### Claiming That Only Slave-owning Aristocrats Are Born Good

Confucius' pupil Tzu Kung said that he had heard his teacher talk about literature but he had never heard him talk about men's nature and the way of Heaven.<sup>1</sup>

Actually, Confucius said quite a lot about the "will of Heaven," as we have seen above. He also talked about "human nature," though he did this in an obscure way so that it did not attract people's notice. In this he was unlike Mencius (c. 390-305 B.C.) later, who spoke outright of "human nature." Confucius said that men were alike in nature, but in practice they drew apart.<sup>2</sup> This statement seems equivocal at first reading. Does this mean that men were born good alike, or that they were born evil alike? And did men draw apart from goodness or badness?

Though Confucius' words are rather smooth, if we look closely we'll get at his real meaning, i.e., he believed that men were born with a tendency to be good and not evil, but that in practice this "inborn nature" departed from the good,

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<sup>1</sup> *Analects*, "Kungyeh Chang."

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., "Yang Huo."

but not from evil. This is tantamount to accepting the existence of a certain *a priori* idea in the minds of men. What is this *a priori* idea? It is so-called goodness.

According to Confucius, however, such "goodness" differed from man to man. Some people had more goodness, some less; while still others could be said to have none at all. For example, those on the upper rungs of society, such as princes and aristocrats, had been endowed with the most goodness and intelligence. They were therefore the ruling class, dominating the whole society. Next were the declined aristocrats and overseers of the slaves who were promoted from the lower social stratum. They belonged to the middle social stratum and had less goodness and intelligence. In speaking about men with a tendency to goodness, Confucius probably referred to this kind of people. They could not stand on their own feet but only helped the princes and aristocrats to dominate and rule over the states. On the lowest rung were the slaves, who could be said to possess no goodness whatsoever, but only to harbour malicious intent. The slaves therefore had to be placed under the strict control of the ruling class.

From this line of reasoning, Confucius drew the following conclusions: The "superior men" of genius were endowed with "innate knowledge" and the "inferior men," the slaves, were born with "innate stupidity"; the former were absolutely good and the latter absolutely bad; the former constituted the ruling class and the latter the class to be ruled over. And neither of these two kinds of people could ever change.<sup>3</sup>

This is outright preaching of idealist apriorism, claiming that heroes and not slaves are the makers of history. The so-called "theory of genius" is also based on such fallacy.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., "Yang Huo."

As for those in the middle social stratum, they might be said to be "good," but not so good as those in the upper stratum. If you said they were not good, well, they were not so "bad" as slaves. Confucius said, therefore, that these people in the middle only tended to be good. At the same time, such people wavered, and if contaminated with the habits of the lower depths of society they would become bad. But, if they rubbed up against the upper social stratum they would quite naturally become "good."

### The Essence of "Teaching Regardless of Classes"

Confucius made another high-sounding statement: In teaching, there should be no distinction of classes.<sup>4</sup>

This may sound on the face of it as though Confucius stood for education regardless of classes, that he would teach anyone who wanted to learn. And with these words, Confucius easily deceived and defrauded people, making some think of him as a progressive teacher.

Some persons in our own time with ulterior motives, for example the anti-Communist Chen Po-ta, have lavished praise on this formulation of Confucius, raving that it "has epochal merit in the development of China's cultural history . . . deserving to be recorded in letters of gold."<sup>5</sup> And there are some who, seeking historical basis in support of the revisionist line in education, extol Confucius as a teacher of the "whole people." But does this correspond with the facts?

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., "Wei Ling Kung."

<sup>5</sup> Chen Po-ta, "The Philosophy of Confucius."

Let us first look at how Confucius charged tuition fees. He said: I have never refused to teach any who can send in a gift of ten strips of good, cured meat as tuition.<sup>6</sup>

For the slaves, however, who were at the beck and call of their masters, the same as cattle and horses, the chances of going to school were nil. Where were the slaves to get any ten strips of good, cured meat to present to the teacher as a gift? So, even if Confucius' assertion was interpreted as that all people without class distinctions could get an education, it was only an empty phrase mouthed to deceive people.

Confucius' class standpoint on the question of education was most clear. He would on no account break down the class barriers and was by no means a teacher of the "whole people." As quoted before from Confucius: People of the lower class can only be directed to do things and must not be allowed to have knowledge.<sup>7</sup> He embellished this with such remarks: Slaves are mean and lowly because they obstinately refuse to learn.<sup>8</sup>

Confucius also especially looked down on women, the same as he did slaves — difficult to handle and keep, and not to be treated with familiarity. They of course belonged in the category of people who were not worth educating.<sup>9</sup>

But all reactionary ruling classes in history considered it necessary for the enslaved to gain a modicum of general technical knowledge for the purpose of making them more effective in carrying on agricultural and handicrafts work, performing various services, and producing more material

<sup>6</sup> *Analects*, "Shu Erh."

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, "Tai Po."

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, "Chi Shih."

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, "Yang Huo."

wealth for the enjoyment of their oppressors. Confucius said: Slaves can at most be allowed a little technical knowledge, but they must not be allowed to have profound education.<sup>10</sup>

To sum up, what Confucius meant was that slaves were born to slavery, and should only be allowed enough general knowledge to till the fields, do handicrafts work and be soldiers and to serve the master loyally.<sup>11</sup>

In Confucius' eyes, the so-called "sages" and "men of virtue" of the slave-owning aristocracy were "born with knowledge," and were the most intelligent of people and therefore needed no education.<sup>12</sup>

Thus the "sages" and "men of virtue" stood at the opposite pole from the slaves. The former were born gifted, needing no education, while the latter were born stupid, had no money for the tuition and were therefore not worth teaching, not to say being Confucius' pupils.

As for those in the middle ranks, it was believed, although they had a tendency towards goodness and had a certain amount of wisdom, they could not compare with the "sages" and "men of virtue" of the upper class. The slave-owners' greatest fear was that people of the middle ranks should associate with the lower social stratum and become corrupted by the "bad habits" of the lowly. That would be terrible. It might lead to patricides and regicides and to revolts and seizure of power!

Confucius concluded that the middle social stratum must be educated.<sup>13</sup> It was therefore clear that most of his pupils

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, "Wei Ling Kung."

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, "Tzu Lu."

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, "Chi Shih."

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, "Yen Yuan."

were in this stratum. At the same time, they could afford the tuition fee of good, cured meat. The slaves certainly could not.

The above facts and analyses show up Confucius' high-sounding "teaching regardless of classes" as only a smoke-screen to deceive people, for he never meant to break through class bounds, which were extremely rigid. And so in the bourgeois so-called democracies today. Though this democracy sounds fine, it has its limits. Democracy is only for the propertied class; the destitute find that it does not apply to them.

### Aim and Content of Education

The subjects that Confucius taught were said to be arranged in four courses: 1) principles and practice of virtue; 2) speech; 3) administrative affairs, and 4) literature.<sup>14</sup> It was also said that Confucius educated his pupils in four things: letters, deportment, loyalty and fidelity.<sup>15</sup>

But, no matter what his courses were called, Confucius' one aim in running the school was to cultivate people who would serve the politics of the slave-owning class. He placed "principles and practice of virtue" first in the curriculum in order to test whether his pupils met the political standard and requirements of the slave-owning class. Knowledge and ability were relegated to second place.

For example, Tsai Yu and Tzu Kung were excellent in the speech course and mentioned in the *Analects*. But, when Tsai Yu opposed the three-year mourning period for parents,

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., "Hsien Chin."

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., "Shu Erh."

Confucius castigated him as "unbenevolent."<sup>16</sup> Tzu Kung took to trading and, though he made some money, was accused by his teacher of "not accepting his fate" and not acting according to the "will of Heaven,"<sup>17</sup> probably because Confucius considered trading as outside the scope of a slave-owner's affairs.

There was also Jan Chiu, a bright pupil in the administrative affairs course, with an aptitude for politics. But instead of upholding the slave system, he helped Chi Sun to effect certain reforms of a feudal nature, provoking Confucius to shower abuse on him, refusing to consider him his pupil, and instigating the other pupils to attack him.<sup>18</sup>

It is clear from these instances how Confucius censured and denounced those pupils who did not come up to the moral standard of the slave-owning class but violated its political requirements, even though they stood high in knowledge and ability.

Yen Yuan, the most favoured pupil of Confucius, did not show much accomplishment either in knowledge or in ability; still, because his political thinking came nearest to what Confucius required, he was praised constantly by his teacher, who never found a single flaw in him. At Yen Yuan's death Confucius made a big to-do of weeping and wailing, as though the light of his life had gone out.<sup>19</sup>

There was also Tseng Shen, whom Confucius said was dull-witted.<sup>20</sup> Yet, among all of Confucius' pupils, Tseng Shen was placed second only to Yen Yuan, as he was known to be a good successor to Confucius.<sup>21</sup> Tseng Shen said of him-

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., "Yang Huo."

<sup>17,18,19,20</sup> Ibid., "Hsien Chin."

<sup>21</sup> *Chu Hsi's Notes to "Analects."*

self that he constantly bore in mind the whole content of Confucius' teachings—loyalty, fidelity, etc.<sup>22</sup> That is to say, politically he was well able to follow in the footsteps of Confucius.

Thus, placing "virtue" first, Confucius crammed his pupils with reactionary ideas to bring their thinking into conformity with the political and moral standards laid down by the slave-owning class, every word and every deed in accordance with the rules of the slave system. Such ideas were, as mentioned before, "restraining oneself and returning to the rites," filial piety, fraternal duty, loyalty and fidelity, love for one's kindred, benevolence, etc., etc. Intellectual subjects were placed second.<sup>23</sup>

What Confucius taught—poetry, history, rites and music—also aimed at serving the politics of the slave-owning class.

For example, Confucius advocated "extensive study of all learning," and asked his pupils to study *The Book of Odes* and *The Book of Documents*.

He maintained that from *The Book of Documents*—a record of the exploits of ancient emperors and kings and a compilation of decrees issued by them—people could learn how to abide by the rules and not make trouble and, moreover, benefit by the experience of slave-owners in power through the ages and be adept at governing the state.

Confucius taught *The Book of Odes* also because he wanted his pupils to learn how to serve their fathers and the sovereigns.<sup>24</sup> He said in praise of *The Book of Odes*: The three hundred poems can be summed up in one sentence—

<sup>22,23</sup> *Analects*, "Hsueh Erh."

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, "Yang Huo."

they contain no depraved thoughts.<sup>25</sup> That is to say, the ideas presented therein were all "pure." Through the study of poetry, people's thinking would be "purified," and then it would not be difficult to restrain their conduct. If only people observed the rites faithfully their conduct would very naturally keep within bounds; they would very naturally be content with the existing social order and there would be no "offence and rebellion against superiors." The world would be at peace.

Confucius was very eager to enroll pupils, and he energetically lectured them on these subjects. His one aim was to use education to rescue slavery from its doom.

As for the slaves themselves, who were not qualified to be his pupils, Confucius thought he should still exert a measure of ideological influence on them in society and gave them to understand that they ought to obey the slave-owners. It can be said that if Confucius had any idea at all of teaching the people, it was the line of obscurantism that he pursued.

### Line and Methods in Running the School

It goes without saying that Confucius was energetic in his educational activity. He said of himself: In regard to study I am insatiable, in teaching tireless. In my eager pursuit of knowledge I sometimes forget to eat, and even grow old without being aware of it.<sup>26</sup>

Was this spirit not to be prized? But we should ask what it was that Confucius studied and taught. What were his line and methods in running the school?

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, "Wei Cheng."

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, "Shu Erh."

As we already know, he was very much in love with the ancients,<sup>27</sup> and what he studied and taught were all old things. His poetry, history, rites, music, etc., were all from the slave system of the Yin and Chou times.<sup>28</sup> His aim was to drag his pupils back and teach them not to look ahead, in order to serve the reactionary politics of the slave-owning class.

His line and methods in running the school therefore stressed book-learning and self-cultivation and were separated from practice. Confucius was dead set against his pupils doing productive labour, and when Fan Chih asked to learn farming, Confucius replied: I'm not so good at that as an old farmer. And when Fan Chih requested to learn to grow vegetables, Confucius answered: I can't compare with an old gardener in that.

Was Confucius being modest? Did he really consider himself not the equal of the working people? No. He was by no means ashamed of his ignorance of productive labour. On the contrary he looked down on labour, considering it to be exclusively the concern of the lower orders of "mean men." So when Fan Chih was rebuffed and withdrew, Confucius abused him as a "mean man" who was so disgraceful as to want to learn farming and gardening.<sup>29</sup>

What, then, were these pupils of Confucius supposed to do? Tzu Hsia understood his teacher's intention very clearly when he said: Having studied well, one should apply himself to be an official.<sup>30</sup>

Confucius knew that the life of these "mean men" who engaged in productive labour was bitter, even to the point of hunger. Only with good book-learning could one rise to of-

<sup>27,28</sup> Ibid., "Shu Erh."

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., "Tzu Lu."

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., "Tzu Chang."

ficialdom and get rich.<sup>31</sup> This reactionary theory also defended the slave system.

Study to become an official! Is this not the line in running schools adopted by the exploiting class for more than two thousand years since the time of Confucius? This line has been followed right up to Liu Shao-chi and Lin Piao, only in different historical conditions it has been phrased somewhat differently.

With the aim of study being to become an official, of course there was no need to engage in productive labour or to have any contact at all with social reality. One needed only to learn from those so-called sages and ancient kings, those ruling slave-owners, to fill one's head with the experience of ruling over and exploiting the people, needed only to strive to fulfil the political and moral requirements stipulated by them. It was enough just to bury oneself in books and cultivate oneself behind closed doors.

Confucius said, for example: The practice of benevolence relies only on subjective cultivation of oneself. Is it possible by relying on anyone else, or accepting any outside influence?<sup>32</sup>

Confucius' pupil Tseng Shen was probably the ablest in complying with this rigmarole spun by his teacher. He examined himself three times a day, pondering over his shortcomings in solitude.<sup>33</sup> Liu Shao-chi's sinister "self-cultivation" and Lin Piao's advocacy of "making revolution in the depths of one's soul," though couched in different words, are in essence both wares from Confucius' Shop.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., "Wei Ling Kung."

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., "Yen Yuan."

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., "Hsueh Erh."

## VIII. REACTIONARY INFLUENCE OF CONFUCIAN THOUGHT

### From Confucian Thought to the "Doctrines of Confucius and Mencius"

From the above we can see clearly how stubbornly in the class struggle of that time Confucius defended the rule of the slave-owners. He was an apologist of slavery, an ideological exponent of the declining slave-owning class.

What is worthy of notice is that Confucius' ideas and statements not only exerted an evil influence in his time but poisoned society for over two thousand years. And this influence has not been completely eliminated up to the present. Why? Because the reactionary ideas of Confucius, known later as Confucianism, served well to safeguard the interests of the reactionary class. In order to deceive and fool the masses of the people and fortify their rule, all reactionary rulers and thinkers through the ages have advocated and developed Confucius' thinking, and at the same time lauded Confucius as a sage.

A hundred years after his death, Mencius inherited his reactionary mantle. By that time the Chinese society had made further headway, and the slave system was sinking fast. But Mencius was never resigned to this. Like Confucius, he travelled to many states trumpeting benevolence, right-

eousness and the rites and peddling "benevolent government" in a vain attempt to restore the slave system.

Mencius carried the idealism of Confucius even further, saying that benevolence, righteousness, propriety and wisdom — all were innate,<sup>1</sup> and every man ought therefore to cultivate these virtues. Just like Confucius who had preached benevolence and "rectification of names," Mencius hoped to restore the superstructure of the slave system by propagating such idealist rubbish.

In order to propagate "benevolent government," Mencius poured forth a lot of moving words, in essence utterly reactionary. He said: The first thing towards a benevolent government is to restore the "nine-square land system."<sup>2,3</sup> His desire to restore this old system of landownership when it was being irrevocably superseded by feudal landownership was a part of his desire to restore the entire slave system.

Mencius strained every nerve to set up the image of Confucius as a "sage." He vigorously extolled the words of Confucius' disciple who said: There has never been one to compare with Confucius since the beginning of mankind.<sup>4</sup> Of course, in glorifying Confucius, Mencius also meant to propagate his reactionary ideas in the interest of restoring

<sup>1</sup> Mencius, "Kao Tzu," Part I.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., "Teng Wen Kung," Part I.

<sup>3</sup> The nine-square land (*ching tien*) system was the system of landownership of slave society. Under this system all land belonged to the king and was divided into plots each of nine squares in the shape of the Chinese character "井" (*ching*) to be conferred on the slave-owning aristocrats of different ranks, who forced the slaves to till them. The number of plots of land bestowed on the aristocrats corresponded to their ranks, and the slaves' work was also measured by the number of plots they tilled.

<sup>4</sup> Mencius, "Kungsun Chou," Part I.

slavery. And, like Confucius, Mencius failed to achieve his reactionary aim. But the thinking of both, the so-called "doctrines of Confucius and Mencius," were later taken over by the reactionary feudal rulers and placed at the service of the feudal ruling class.

### How Confucius' Reactionary Ideas Served the Feudal Ruling Class

Lenin once said that "**Machism, as a species of idealism, is objectively a weapon in the hands of the reactionaries, a vehicle of reaction.**"<sup>5</sup>

Confucius' idealism and idealistic apriorism were the "weapon" and "vehicle" used by every reactionary ruling class in Chinese history.

As we have stated above, Confucius was an apologist of the slave system, opposing the change from slavery to feudalism. Why, then, did the feudal landlord class since the Han Dynasty (206 B.C.-A.D. 220) so energetically extol Confucius? The following is the answer:

1) The historical position of the landlord class had changed. At the end of slave society the landlord class was the new rising force, a vigorous revolutionary class which called for the overthrow of the slave-owning class and for social reforms. It remained progressive within a certain period after it had come to power. But once it considered its power consolidated it began to oppose changes, seeking to perpetuate the feudal power. The ideas of Confucius now began to fit its need.

<sup>5</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Those Who Would Liquidate Us," 1911.

2) Feudal power needed Confucianism to control the people. When the landlord class was on the rise it adopted the thinking of the Legalist school which championed reforms. But after its power had become firmly established it opposed any further change, and considered the Legalists' open use of criminal law in governing people too glaring and no longer best able to serve its political end. The Confucians were subtler; Confucianism was more useful in the deceitful propaganda of the landlord class for safeguarding its feudal rule. So the feudal monarchs from the Han Dynasty began waving the flag of Confucius-worship and opposing the Legalists, began preaching Confucius' moral concepts of benevolence, righteousness, etc.

The founder of the Han Dynasty, Liu Pang, did not at first have any liking for Confucian ideas, but later the needs of his rule gradually made him change his attitude. After Emperor Wu Ti ended the early Han division created by the principedoms, he all the more needed to fortify his rule ideologically.

During the Warring States Period (475-221 B.C.) there were many ideological trends representing the interest of different classes and strata, bringing about a situation in which "a hundred schools of thought contended." Emperor Wu Ti of Han accepted the proposal of his minister Tung Chung-shu (179-104 B.C.) to "honour only the doctrine of Confucius and ban all other schools." Thereupon Confucianism was made the official orthodox thought.

Tung Chung-shu, responding to the need of Emperor Wu Ti, took the concepts of Confucius as interpreted by Tzu Ssu (c. 483-402 B.C.) and Mencius and worked them over into more mystic form.

First, he brought Confucius' concept of "Heaven's will" to its acme, envisioning a Heaven with not only a will but



also unlimited power to reward the good and punish the evil. All on earth, including the feudal authority of the king, was arranged by Heaven for a purpose. In other words, for the emperor to control the people was by order of the lord of Heaven. If the people did not obey, that would be offending Heaven, and they should be punished with a thousand deaths.<sup>6</sup> In philosophy this is called teleology, theoretical basis for the "divine right of kings." It served the centralized feudal regime of the Han Dynasty.

Secondly, following the thinking of Confucius, Tung Chung-shu put forward men's "three kinds of nature."<sup>7</sup> The first was the "nature of the sage," which he said characterized the supreme feudal rulers. These persons were born with *a priori* knowledge and morality, and so could act on behalf of Heaven.

The second was the "nature of the intermediate men." This referred to the ordinary members of the landlord class, who could act according to the will of Heaven if given an education.

The third was the "nature of the labourers." This referred to the oppressed and exploited peasants and handicraftsmen who had no *a priori* knowledge and moral virtue whatsoever and should only submit to their enslavement and exploitation.

Thirdly, Tung Chung-shu developed Confucius' concept of "rectification of names," specifically stipulating "three cardinal guides," to wit, "sovereign guides subject," "father guides son" and "husband guides wife."

The subjects must obey the sovereign, that is, the labouring people must obey the chief of the landlord class, the emperor. A son must obey his father and a wife must obey her husband.

<sup>6,7</sup> *Luxuriant Dew from the "Spring and Autumn Annals."*

These "three guides," said Tung Chung-shu, were also ordained by Heaven.<sup>8</sup>

Thus, in order to perpetuate the feudal order, Tung Chung-shu, proceeding from idealist apriorism, confirmed feudal authority and linked it up with divine right. This constituted the spiritual fetters by which the Chinese landlord class cheated and enslaved the working people for many centuries. As Chairman Mao pointed out, **"These four authorities — political, clan, religious and masculine — are the embodiment of the whole feudal-patriarchal system and ideology, and are the four thick ropes binding the Chinese people, particularly the peasants."**<sup>9</sup> Tung Chung-shu conceived these spiritual fetters as ordered by Heaven. Heaven did not change, he said, neither would the Way of the landlord-class rule over the people.<sup>10</sup>

As this line of metaphysical thinking spread by Tung Chung-shu was embraced by the decadent feudal ruling class through the ages, Confucius' reactionary ideas came to serve the feudal ruling class. It was through the work of Tung Chung-shu that this reactionary apologist of the slave system was suddenly metamorphosed into the "sage" of the feudal society. The Han emperor conferred on Confucius the title "Venerable Duke of Enlightenment," and in the Tang Dynasty (618-907) he was elevated in title to "King of Culture."

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> Mao Tsetung, "Report on an Investigation of the Peasant Movement in Hunan," *Selected Works*, Eng. ed., Foreign Languages Press, Peking, 1967, Vol. I, p. 44.

<sup>10</sup> "The greatness of the Way is derived from Heaven. Heaven changeth not, likewise the Way changeth not." (*Han Dynasty History*, "Biography of Tung Chung-shu.")

Lu Hsun said, “. . . it was those in authority who raised Confucius up in China. . . .”<sup>11</sup> Why did all the emperors of the Han and Tang dynasties, those mighty feudal rulers, adore Confucius? Is it not clear whom Confucius’ reactionary thinking served?

### Sung and Ming Dynasty “School of Principles,” A Continuation of Confucius’ Reactionary Thinking

In the Sung Dynasty (960-1279) there arose the *li hsueh*, or School of Principles. This was by no means anything new, but Confucian fallacies elaborated on the basis of the ideas of Tzu Ssu, Mencius and Tung Chung-shu.

A school of principles may sound all right, as if it favoured presenting facts and debating a case. But this school was nothing of the kind. The School of Principles preached “heavenly principles,” elucidating the Way of the “supreme god,” which was actually a variation of Confucius’ theory of the “will of Heaven.” For example, subjects must be loyal to the sovereign, sons and daughters must be filial to their parents, wives must obey their husbands. These principles had been explained from Confucius down through Tung Chung-shu. Of course the School of Principles added a few nuances. Let us see what was said by the Sung Dynasty scholar Chu Hsi (1130-1200), a representative of this school.

Chu Hsi considered these principles as not only ordered by Heaven but as existing long before human society. They constituted a kind of absolute spirit, existing independently

<sup>11</sup> Lu Hsun, “Confucius in Modern China,” *Selected Works*, Eng. ed., FLP, Peking, 1964, Vol. IV, p. 179.

of matter. In other words, the “three cardinal guides and five constant virtues”<sup>12</sup> existed even before there were sovereigns, subjects, fathers and sons, and were embodied in these relationships when they arose.<sup>13</sup>

Since it was believed that the “three cardinal guides and five constant virtues” existed before man, Cheng Hao (1032-85), Cheng Yi (1033-1107), Chu Hsi and others from the School of Principles of the Sung Dynasty came up with a lot of rules and formulations such as the following:

If the sovereign wills the subject’s death, the subject must die!

Starving to death doesn’t matter much; the important thing is integrity!

There are no parents in the world who could be wrong; etc., etc.

All these “heavenly principles,” according to the School of Principles, were absolute truths which none must violate. Any violation of these principles would be grave crimes,<sup>14</sup> because they were the will of the supreme god.

Concerning human nature, the school divided it into “rational nature” and “temperamental nature.” “Rational nature” was also called the “nature endowed by Heaven,” and therefore “good.” This was an exposition of Confucius’ and Mencius’ standpoint of “innate goodness.” As they interpreted “heavenly principles” as the “three cardinal guides and five constant virtues,” they claimed that feudal morality

<sup>12</sup> The “five constant virtues” refer to the so-called immutable principles of “benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom and fidelity.” These were reactionary moral precepts as preached by the Confucian school to safeguard and adjust the relations embodied in the “three cardinal guides.”

<sup>13</sup> *Classified Discourses of Chu Hsi*.

<sup>14</sup> *Posthumous Writings of the Two Cheng Brothers*.

was in everyone's nature, and so everyone should observe the existing order of feudal rule.<sup>15</sup>

But why did some people not observe these principles? Chu Hsi and others attributed this to their "temperamental nature." Although born with goodness, men were said to be subject to the influence of their "temperamental nature." If they were endowed with a "pure temperament" and avoided the pull of "worldly lust," they could preserve their innate goodness and become sages. Another type of persons were said to be born with an "impure temperament" and "worldly lust" and therefore lost their innate goodness. These were the stupid, evil people.<sup>16</sup>

This rubbish preached by Chu Hsi meant in plain words that those of the feudal ruling class were born good; Heaven gave them a good "temperamental nature" as well as *a priori* knowledge and morality, making them born sages. But how about the labouring people? They had no "rational nature," and even if they did have they were endowed with a bad "temperamental nature" and possessed by "worldly lust" so that they were naturally stupid, fit to be enslaved and exploited. That was what they deserved!

What was this "being possessed by worldly lust"? Simply rubbish!

The working people were exploited and oppressed by the landlord class so that they had neither food nor clothing; they would certainly rise up in rebellion. For example, Wang Hsiao-po and Li Shun, leaders of a peasant uprising in the Northern Sung Dynasty, issued the slogan, "Equalize the high and the low! Even up the rich and the poor!" The first part meant opposing the feudal hierarchy and feudal

<sup>15</sup> *Lectures of Yushan.*

<sup>16</sup> *Classified Discourses of Chu Hsi.*

oppression; the second meant opposing feudal exploitation and slavery.

Naturally, for the class of faithful Confucian disciples such as Cheng Yi and Chu Hsi, this was unthinkable! Weren't the oppressed and exploited obsessed by "worldly lust"? So they raved madly: Preserve "heavenly principles"! Negate "human lust"!<sup>17</sup> You must close the door and meticulously cultivate yourself! And so on and so forth.

This is simply to say that to rebel is unjustified, that revolution is a crime. The feudal landlords' exploitation and oppression of the people and their shameless life of debauchery were described as a matter of course, conforming with the "heavenly principles," while the labouring people's demand for the barest necessities of life was slandered as "human lust," as the grossest crime.

Did not Confucius, ancestor of the School of Principles, also prate, "Don't seek to eat your fill," "Don't seek to live comfortably," as though he wouldn't mind going hungry? But was that so? By no means. What he required was "well polished cereal and finely minced meat."<sup>18</sup>

The School of Principles of the Sung and Ming (1368-1644) dynasties not only practised exactly this string of Confucian maxims, but raised them even higher onto a philosophical plane in order to defend the interest of their own class.

Because Chu Hsi spread the "doctrines of Confucius and Mencius" and performed a great service to the feudal rulers, his tablet was later set up in Confucian temples and he was called Master Chu. All this was by no means fortuitous.

With the reactionary rulers more and more warming up to the reactionary ideas of Confucius, his image was raised

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> *Analects*, "Hsiang Tang."

on ever higher pedestals. In the Sung Dynasty, to his official title of "King of Culture" was added "the Most Sage." And in the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368) he was extolled as "the Most Perfect, Most Sage King of Culture." In the Ming Dynasty he was called "the Most Sage Ancient Teacher," and in the Ching Dynasty (1644-1911) "the Most Perfect, Most Sage Ancient Teacher." Just as Lu Hsun said, this powerful band carried Confucius "till he was raised to awe-inspiring heights."<sup>19</sup>

### Carry to Conclusion the Struggle of Criticizing Confucius

The reactionary ideas of Confucius continued right down to modern times to be a life-saving straw grasped by the feudal rulers. In the Revolution of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom,<sup>20</sup> Hung Hsiu-chuan destroyed tablets to Confucius everywhere he went. But the traitor and executioner Tseng Kuo-fan, assuming the role of apologist for Confucian doctrine, together with his master Emperor Hsien Feng, invoked the ghost of Confucius to oppose the Taiping Revolution.

Not long before the Revolution of 1911 the feudal bureaucrat Chang Chih-tung and followers proposed an educational programme consisting of five points, the first two being

<sup>19</sup> Lu Hsun, *op. cit.*, p. 178.

<sup>20</sup> A peasant revolutionary movement led by Hung Hsiu-chuan (1814-64) in the mid-19th century against the feudal rule of the Ching Dynasty. In 1851, Hung led the masses in an uprising in Chintien Village of Kueiping County, Kwangsi Province, and proclaimed the founding of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom, which stood for 14 years in opposition to the Ching Court. The revolution failed in 1864.

"loyalty to the emperor" and "worship of Confucius." Moreover, these feudalists sought to rely on propagating the reactionary ideas of Confucius to oppose so-called "heretical theories," and thus to forestall the revolution and save the Ching Dynasty, already in its death throes.

The shadow of Confucius still hung on after the Revolution of 1911. Did not the arch traitor Yuan Shih-kai, in his attempt to ascend the emperor's throne, also invoke the ghost of Confucius, calling for "worship of Confucius" and "study of the Confucian classics"?

In the May Fourth Movement of 1919 the slogan was raised, "Down with Confucius' Shop!" Then Chiang Kai-shek trumpeted Confucius-worship to serve his purpose of attacking the Chinese Soviet areas.

The feudal comprador fascist chief Chiang Kai-shek shouted from the housetops that Confucius was "Master of Benevolence and Righteousness for All Ages" and "Paragon for Mankind for All Time." He revealed what was on his mind when he went on a pilgrimage to Chufu, Confucius' birthplace, saying that his purpose was to "destroy communism root and branch." Touting "worship of Confucius," he meant to exterminate the Communist Party.

Not only that. Even after the liberation, the renegade Liu Shao-chi also made a pilgrimage to Confucius' birthplace and shouted, "Confucius is great" and "Confucius is a sage." He called on everyone to indulge in self-cultivation behind closed doors, try hard to "be watchful over himself when alone," and ponder over his mistakes in solitude. What he was peddling was exactly Confucian wares.

There was also that renegade and traitor Lin Piao who followed Confucius' example of "restraining oneself and returning to the rites" in a vain effort to restore capitalism in China. He spread the theory of "Heaven-bestowed

genius," asserting that some were "born with knowledge." In fact, his intention was to use the propagation of idealist apriorism and the idealist conception of history as a counterpoise to the materialist theory of reflection and historical materialism. Lin Piao was an out-and-out faithful disciple of Confucius, using the doctrines of Confucius and Mencius as reactionary ideological weapons to usurp the Party leadership and state power, to prepare public opinion for a capitalist restoration and the establishment of a fascist dictatorship.

From the above we may draw the conclusion that those who want to turn back the wheel of history will in a thousand and one ways invoke the ghost of Confucius. And so it was with Liu Shao-chi, Lin Piao and their sort, who tried to restore capitalism and subvert the proletarian dictatorship in China.

Chairman Mao points out: **"Socialist society covers a considerably long historical period. In the historical period of socialism, there are still classes, class contradictions and class struggle, there is the struggle between the socialist road and the capitalist road, and there is the danger of capitalist restoration."**<sup>21</sup>

Therefore, to **"grasp class struggle in the ideological sphere"** is imperative.

We must use Marxism-Leninism-Mao Tsetung Thought as weapon to thoroughly repudiate the crimes of Lin Piao and company and at the same time make a penetrating criticism of Confucius' reactionary ideas and eliminate their pernicious influence, so that people will not be poisoned by the ghost of Confucius again.

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<sup>21</sup> Quoted from "A Theoretical Weapon in Carrying on the Revolution Under the Dictatorship of the Proletariat," editorial of *Hongqi*, No. 10, 1967.

反动阶级的“圣人”——孔子  
杨荣国 著

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