THE IMPACT OF CONFUCIANISM ON SEVENTEENTH CENTURY EUROPE

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IT WAS from the Jesuits that the intelligentsia of Europe learned of the philosophy of Confucius. Many years before their sinophile propaganda had begun to affect the thinking of European scholars the members of the Society of Jesus had determined their attitude towards Chinese thought. It was, in fact, the simplification, to suit their own needs, of an ancient, complex and effective system of religion, ethics, and social philosophy. Faced with the coalescence of religious and moral teachings represented by the *san chiao* or three cults (of Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism) the Jesuit missionaries found it expedient to oppose the social philosophy of Confucianism to the esoteric teachings of Buddhism and the mystico-magical thought of Taoism—creating a purely imaginary dualism in which the two latter were labelled heathen cults and the former was exalted to the position of a noble philosophic system, rivalling, if not surpassing, that of Greece and Rome.

With this interpretation as a starting point the Jesuits developed an ardent and widely disseminated panegyric of Confucian thought. No fifteenth century humanist, brought for the first time face to face with Greek thought, glowed with more enthusiasm than did the Jesuit missionary as he studied the beauties of the Confucian canon and realized its practical application to Chinese thought and Chinese institutions. This enthusiasm was the fulcrum of the Jesuits' missionary propaganda in Europe. They made Chinese culture synonymous with the teachings of her greatest sage.

From the very first the Jesuit missionaries had keenly appreciated the role of Confucius in the development of Chinese thought and institutions. Trigault, the author of the first really important work on China since Marco Polo, and the mouthpiece of the great Jesuit pioneer Ricci, says:

> The greatest philosopher of all the Chinese is called Confucius. He incited (the people) to the study of virtue, not less by his example than by his writings and conferences, and through his manner of living he acquired such a reputation with the Chinese that they believed he excelled in sanctity of living all other mortals. It is true that, if one regards his words and the actions reported of him, one must con-

fess that he yields little to the pagan philosophers and that he is even superior to them. . . .[1]

He goes on to describe the reverence paid to the sage and to his teachings, as he summarizes the wisdom of the canonical books of Confucianism. Following the tradition established by Matteo Ricci he interprets the system in such a way that the philosophical opinions of the Confucian scholar of China seem to coincide—or at least not to oppose themselves to—the monotheistic theology and the eschatology of Christianity. He describes the religion of the scholar-official as a monotheism without priesthood or dogma—a cult whereby the emperor is the only vital point of contact between Heaven and the people. According to this interpretation Confucianism is made to appear a kind of deism functioning through a form of benevolent despotism. This, as we shall see later, was the sum total of Europe's conception of the religion of the Middle Kingdom up to the nineteenth century.

Trigault's work furnished for European thinkers the first introduction to Chinese religious thought. Published in 1615 it was re-published and translated a number of times and was widely read. It was followed, in 1641, by Father Semedo's *Imperio de la China*. Semedo repeated Trigault's praise of Confucianism. After establishing the normal Jesuit distinction between Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism the author speaks of the sect of the scholars as having a knowledge of the true God but no temple to His name, except the altars of Heaven and Earth and he continues:

> It seems by this that their design is to imprint in the souls of the people sentiments of religion, so that, seeing the honor rendered to Heaven and Earth as Common Father they come to respect their parents and they are excited to a noble desire to imitate the Ancients, considering the veneration that they have for them; and that seeing the services rendered to the dead, they learn the true way of serving the living; that is to say they have the laudable custom of connecting all things with the government of the State, with the rest and peace of the Family and with the practice of virtue.[2]

This comment on the essential unity of the Chinese system made a profound impression on the minds of many European thinkers.

After the middle of the century general works on China, similar (though not superior) to those of Trigault and Semedo, accumulated rapidly. To

[1] Nicolas Trigault, S.J. *De Christiana expeditione suscepta ab societate Jesu. . . .* Amsterdam, 1615, chap. V.

[2] Alvarez Semedo, S.J. *Imperio de la China y Cultura Evangelica en el por les Religiosos de la Compania de Jésus. . . .* Madrid, 1641. Eng. ed. London, 1755, chap. xviii.

these were added—though much more slowly—a number of volumes giving the direct testimony of the Chinese canonical texts.

About the middle of the century a small group of missionaries gathered around Father Prosper Intorcetta at Hangchow (Marco Polo's Kinsay) for the purpose of revealing the wisdom of Confucius to the West, through translations of the Sacred Books. The first result of their efforts was a small volume in multigraphed form containing translations of the *Ta Hsüeh* and the *Lun Yü*. This was issued at Chien Chang Fu in Kiangsi with the title *Sapientia Sinica*. The *Chung Yung* (Doctrine of the Mean) was then translated and the three were published at Goa in 1669 with the title *Sinarum scientia politico-moralis*. The little book contained also a summary of the life of Confucius. Every effort seems to have been made to produce a work which was scholarly and exact. Seventeen missionary fathers reviewed it and appended their signatures of approval. The original purpose was evidently to prepare a sort of textbook of Chinese philosophy to put into the hands of new missionaries but, as the work continued, the idea seems to have grown in the minds of the Jesuit scholars that their work might be a real contribution to European thought. They believed that this little volume—to use the words of Father Faure, one of the committee of critics—"would be enthusiastically sought after by all councillors of kings and princes,"[3] that is to say, that it would be a handbook of good government, a kind of anti-Machiavelli.

The Goa text was revised by the sinologue Philippe Couplet and others with a view (says Father Rougemont, one of the editors) of making it more attractive to Europeans, "clerics and laymen, catholics and heretics"! Finally it appeared in 1687, in Paris with the title: *Confucius sinarum philosophus sive Scientia sinensis latine exposita studio Prosperi Intorcetta* etc. and preceded by a grandiose dedication to Louis XIV. This volume of some five hundred pages contained, in addition to the three classics already mentioned, a chronological table of Chinese history, a subject which was to arouse the intense interest of European scholars in the years to come. The work had been preceded by a French translation of Intorcetta's version of the *Chung Yung*, published in Paris with the title *La Science des Chinois* (1673). At the beginning of the next century Father Noel published, at Prague, his *Sinensis libri classici sex* . . . (1711) which added to the three works already published the *Book of Mencius*, the *Hsiao Ching* and the *San Tzu Ching*, thus gave in one volume

[3] Cited by Henri Bernard. *Sagesse chinoise et philosophie chrétienne, Essai sur leurs relations historiques*. Tientsin, 1935, p. 131.

all the Chinese classics which were known to Europe by the end of the period we are discussing.

The *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus* received immediate attention from scholars and remained for nearly a century the chief source book of Confucian wisdom. The *Journal des Savants* published a notice of the book, the reviewer praising it and making the significant commentary: "Apart from motive I do not see that the charity of the Chinese is different from that of Christians, so true it is that God has put even into the minds of Infidels enlightenment (*lumières*) leading them to virtues which, as far as exterior acts are concerned, are in no wise different from Christian virtues."[4]

An important attempt at interpretation of the Confucian translation appeared in the next year (1688) with the title *La Morale de Confucius, Philosophe de la Chine*. In his preface the author says: "One might say that the moral system of this philosopher is infinitely sublime, but that it is at the same time simple, sensible and drawn from the purest sources of natural reason. . . . Never has Reason, deprived of divine Revelation, appeared so well developed nor with so much power."[5] The writer contrasts the sanity of Confucian thought with that of "certain pagan writers" and even with that of "certain Christian writers who abound with so many false or oversubtle thoughts." Though it contains summaries of the Five Books and the Four Classics, as well as numerous Chinese maxims and remarks on later Confucianist commentators, the work does not seem to have been as well known as the *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus* though Pierre Bayle, in his *Nouvelles de la République des Lettres* (March, 1688), praises it, saying: "There will be few readers who will not find much pleasure in reading it."

About the same time appeared a *Lettre sur la Morale de Confucius*[6] by Simon Foucher in which the teachings of the Chinese sage are interpreted in the light of the views held by the Figurist group of Jesuit missionaries. Foucher compares Confucius not only to Plato and Socrates but also to Saint Paul. Discovering in the teachings of Confucius the doctrine of the Fall of Man he asserts that the rôle of the philosopher was to bring back the people to a knowledge of the truth. This point of view was predominant in Jesuit propaganda: that the Chinese philosopher was the head of a religious system; a teacher who had attempted to revive the Ancient Law as did the

[4] Pere Régis in the *Journal des Savants*, 5 Jan. 1868.

[5] *La Morale de Confucius, Philosophe de la Chine*. Amsterdam, 1687, avertissement.

[6] *Lettre sur la Morale de Confucius, Philosophe de la Chine*. Paris, 1688, reprinted in 1844 (Paris, Legrand).

Hebrew prophets of old. It gained support from the prevalent theory of the identity of religion and morals, which was only just beginning to be seriously attacked in Europe.

Another significant contribution to this effort at popularization of the Confucian classics is to be found in an unpublished manuscript, now in the Bibliothèque Nationale, which bears the title: *Confucius ou la Science des Princes contenant les Principes de la Religion de la Morale du Gouvernement Politique des Anciens Empereurs et Magistrats de la Chine abrégé et mise en français par M. Bernier . . .* (1688).[7] The work is an exposition of the contents of the *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus*. It was never published, probably on account of the death of the author the same year.

Bernier was not alone in feeling the need of further enlightenment regarding Chinese life and thought. Before the end of the century Magaillans, Kircher, Spezelius, Greslon, Martini, Baudier, Navarrete, Le Gobien, LeTellier and others had published volumes on the subject and soon a considerable literature was in the hands of the European intelligentsia—a literature rich in variety and extent, if not in depth.

This literature came at an auspicious moment in European thought. At this time, though the first wave of wonder and admiration inspired by the Greek and Roman classics had passed, classical thought still remained the sole rival of Christian learning in the Western world. It is not to be wondered at, then, that the enthusiasts of the new sinophile cult should strive to find a comparison between Confucian thought and that of the great classic writers. In the new books on China Confucius is compared to Seneca, to Plutarch, to Socrates. The editor of the *Sinarum scientia politico-moralis* suggests that the example of the Chinese sage might be used by Christian moralists as Saint Paul made use of the Greek philosophers. Jesuit and non-Jesuit apologists vied with each other in stressing the comparison between the two great "pagan" systems. In his introduction to his *Works of Plato* (1689) the scholar André Dacier says:

> The philosophy of Plato was regarded in two ways, which gave rise to two opposing judgments. Christian philosophers looked upon it as a doctrine which by its principles led to the Christian religion, and pagan philosophers considered it as a doctrine which contained a moral system as perfect as that of the Christian religion and which might even take the place of this holy religion.[8]

Substitute for the phrase "Christian philosophers" the term "Jesuit" and for "pagan philosophers" the term *libertin*, deist or *philosophe* and Dacier's com-

[7] Bibliothèque nationale, fonds français, MS. 2331.

[8] *Les Oeuvres de Platon traduites. . . .* Paris, 1699, tome I. Intro. "Discours sur Platon."

ment would be equally applicable to the sinophile movement of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Significant, though negative, evidence of the prevailing tendency to compare classic and Chinese cultures is to be found in Fénelon's dialogue between Socrates and Confucius in his *Dialogues des Morts*. The hostile attitude of the great Christian hellenophile towards the Oriental philosopher shows clearly that Fénelon was jealous of the reputation of his beloved Greeks and indignant that the Chinese should be compared to them.

INFLUENCE IN FRANCE

In France the cult of Confucius was, from the first, a part of that anti-Christian movement which was to reach its climax in the propaganda of Voltaire and his compeers. The center of the movement is to be found in the little group of *libertins* who, in the second quarter of the century, studied under Gassendi and admired his epicurean philosophy. They were, for the most part, rabid readers of the travel literature of the time. Typical of the group were Cyrano de Bergerac, François Bernier and LaMothe le Vayer. Cyrano, apart from the spirit of cosmopolitanism which pervades his *Voyage to the moon*, shows no direct evidence of sinophilism but the other two played an important part in the dissemination of the new knowledge. Mention has already been made of Bernier's attempt at interpretation of the Confucian classics. At the beginning of 1688 he wrote to his friend Mme. de la Sablière: "For three or four months I have been furiously working on Confucius. . . . Within my knowledge never has man appeared to have so much wisdom, so much prudence, so much sincerity, so much piety, so much charity." The same enthusiasm pervades the whole letter, which was reproduced the same year as part of an article entitled: "Introduction à la lecture de Confucius," in the *Journal des Savants*,[9] and later included as an introduction to the larger work already mentioned. Between the lines can be read the profound admiration of the author for the austere humanism of Confucian morality. "Ah!" he exlaims in one place, "how well he (Confucius) understood the inner mind of Man!"

Bernier was particularly impressed with Confucian ideas regarding government. It is an interesting fact that, at the moment when Fénelon was preparing for his royal pupil a textbook on righteous government in *Télémaque*, Bernier should be writing: "I have even gone so far as to imagine, as I love my king and my country tenderly, that this work might serve those great

[9] *Extraits de Divers pièces envoyées pour étrennes par Mr. Bernier à Madame de la Sablière:* "Introduction à la lecture de Confucius." *Journal des Savants*, 7 June, 1688, p. 17 *et seq.*

men who are to become tutors and governors of our young princes."[10] Bernier wished to use the wisdom of China, as Fénelon tried to use the wisdom of Greece, to guide the young princes along the path of political wisdom and virtue.

Bernier was the most enthusiastic of the devotees of cosmopolitanism of his time. It is possible that he and his friends may have met Jesuit missionaries from China at the court of France for it was at this period that Colbert was interesting himself in the possible development of French commerce in the Far East. That they read the books on China we have ample proof. Bernier's interest in Confucius was shared by his friend LaMothe le Vayer. The former, writing to his friend Mme. de la Sablière, says that he remembered Le Vayer exclaim on one occasion: "I can scarcely refrain from saying: 'Sancte Confuci, ora pro nobis'."[11] To this story might be added the tradition which claims that the last words addressed by the dying Le Vayer to his friend were: "What news of the Great Mogul?"

LaMothe le Vayer's chief contribution to the spread of the knowledge of Confucius is to be found in *La Vertu des Payens*,[12] a little book published in 1642. The work was apparently written to aid Richelieu in his attack on the Jansenists and their doctrine of the *grace efficace*. The well worn subject of the eternal salvation of the noble pagans here receives the treatment which is to be expected of a Christian sceptic. Le Vayer discusses in turn the probable destiny of a score of great classical thinkers, finally despairing of the chances of Diogenes, Zeno, Epicurus, Pyrrho and Julian the Apostate but favoring those of Plato, Socrates, Pythagoras and Seneca. There is nothing new up to this point but when to these noble pagans he adds the name of Confucius, LaMothe le Vayer becomes the first outstanding European thinker to introduce the great Oriental sage into the company of the elect.

In the chapter entitled "Confucius, Socrate de la Chine" the author warmly praises the Chinese philosopher. Confucius, he asserts, brought down philosophy from Heaven to Earth. He extols a system of thought which brings into close union wisdom, knowledge and government. "Certainly," he says, "it is no small glory for Confucius to have placed the sceptre in the hands of philosophy and to have brought it about that Power peacefully obeys Reason."[13] When he compares Chinese thought with that of Greece he finds that the former loses nothing by the comparison. "Of all the nations," he

[10] B.N. MS 2331, f. 9.

[11] *Journal des Savants*, op. cit., p. 19.

[12] *De la Vertu des Payens*. Paris, François Targa, 1642, seconde partie: "De Confutius, le Socrate de la Chine."

[13] *Op. cit.*, p. 284.

says, "their's (China's) is apparently the one which has been most clearly guided by natural light and which has erred the least in matters of religion." "For everyone knows," he adds, "with what miracles the Greeks, Romans and Egyptians have filled their cult of divinity."[14]

Le Vayer's source is chiefly the work of Trigault. It is significant of the influence of this book that it could cause a scholar like Le Vayer to write so enthusiastically of the Chinese system before the Confucian classics themselves had yet appeared in Europe. The importance of the *Vertu des Payens'* praise of China is shown in the fact that Moréri, in his Dictionary published a few years later, cites LaMothe le Vayer, together with Kircher and Trigault, as an authority on Chinese culture.

LaMothe le Vayer and his friends were, more or less, an isolated group in an age when free-thinking was dangerous but they mark the beginning of a movement whereby the wisdom of China was used as a weapon to attack the spiritual hegemony of Christianity.

The period 1685–1715 has been given, by an eminent French scholar, the illuminating title of "la crise de la conscience européene." During this period cosmopolitanism came into being. Fénelon, La Bruyère and others were hinting at moral and social defects in the *ancien régime*. The Extraordinary Voyage was providing literary material for the reform movement and Pierre Bayle was preparing his arsenal of anti-Christian propaganda. Bayle's references to China are closely linked to his theory of the respectability of atheism for he accepted the Dominican position that the Chinese were atheists. The author of the Historical and Critical Dictionary apparently had a wide knowledge of material provided by the books on China, although an understanding of his real views on the subject is hindered by his system of indirect reference and his habit of hiding important facts in notes dealing with unrelated subjects. He seems to have been more interested in the doctrines of Buddhism and their relation to similar ideas in the classic writers than in the doctrines of Confucius but on several occasions he champions the humanism of Confucius against the quietism of Buddhistic philosophy. It is interesting to note that he finds similarities between the animistic practices of China and the ideas of Spinoza (who has been thought by others to have been influenced by Chinese thought). Malebranche, also, noted these similarities. The latter writer studied carefully the thought of the Orient and his *Conversation between a Christian philosopher and a Chinese philosopher on the existence of God* (1708) is an attempt to refute certain Chinese doctrines. On the whole it is hostile to Chinese thought, but not radically so, for the China missionaries

[14] *Ibid.*, p. 280.

admired this and other works of the author and testify as to their usefulness in their work with Chinese scholars.

In France, at the turn of the century, the cause of China and her philosophy became involved in the quarrel over the Chinese Rites on the one hand and the growth of Deism on the other. Lecomte's *Mémoires sur la Chine*[15] was the center of a furious quarrel which had its roots in the struggle between the reactionary theologians and the humanistic liberalism of the Jesuits. Into the fight was injected also much of the bitterness aroused by the Jansenist controversy. Lecomte, in his little book, had upheld the richness and worth of the Confucian system which he (in common with other Jesuit writers) associated with an earlier monotheism. What irked the reverend fathers of the Faculté de Théologie particularly was Lecomte's claim that (1) China had a system of morality which was adequate for human needs and (2) this system, by the weight of its antiquity and success, was on a par with the Christian revelation as a supreme product of the moral aspirations of Man. The Lecomte book, with its "heretical" propositions, was condemned by the Faculty at Paris but the controversy, with its subsequent polemic literature, served to re-affirm, in the minds of many European thinkers, the excellence of the Confucian system and to spread the knowledge of the Chinese classics.

With the publication, in 1735, of Duhalde's widely read *Description de la Chine*[16] this early period of interest in Chinese thought may be said to come to an end. Sinophilism developed into Sinomania as Montesquieu, Voltaire and a score of lesser writers enthusiastically proclaimed the virtues of the great Oriental culture.

INFLUENCE IN GERMANY

In Germany, too, as the century came to a close, the new learning was affecting the thinking of scholars. The head of the movement, and its chief inspiration, was Leibniz.[17] The great German philosopher must have become interested in China at an early date for a letter, written in 1667 to the Landgrave Ernst von Hessen Rheinfels, discloses the fact that he was already studying the Confucian system at that time. When his dream of a synthesis of world systems of religion and ethics focussed his attention on the activities of the Jesuits in China he began to look upon the Society as

[15] Louis Le Comte, S.J. *Nouveaux mémoires sur l'état présent de la Chine.* Paris, 1696.

[16] J. B. Duhalde, S.J., *Description géographique, historique, chronologique, politique et physique de la Chine et de la Tartarie chinoise.* Paris, 1735, 4 vol.

[17] The sinophilism of Leibniz has been described in several works, notably: F. R. Merkel, *G. W. von Leibnitz und die China-Mission.* Leipzig, 1920 and Jean Baruzi, *Leibnitz et l'organisation religieuse de la terre.* Paris, 1907.

an instrument for the fusing of Oriental and Occidental cultures. Furthermore his enthusiasm for their missionary labors caused him to urge his Protestant friends both in Germany and England to emulate the Society. "What the Jesuits have done," he asserts to Gilbert and Thomas Burnet, to Wallis and Bentley in England and to Francke and others in Germany, "you Protestants could certainly equal if not surpass."[18]

The last decade of the century was the period of his most active interest in Confucianism. He shows the enthusiastic ardor of a new convert as he writes to the Electress Charlotte Sophia in 1697: "I shall have to post a notice on my door: Bureau of Information for Chinese Knowledge."[19] Eight years earlier, while on a visit to Rome, he had met the veteran missionary Philippe-Marie Grimaldi. His conversations with the Peking Jesuit concerning Chinese philosophy and institutions must have given him much information which he could not find in the Jesuit books and must have strengthened his already growing admiration for the Confucian system.

In 1697 he published the little volume entitled *Novissima Sinica*, a compendium of articles on China and the Jesuit mission. The work was avowedly a piece of propaganda and, coming from the pen of such a distinguished thinker, it received the respectful attention of scholars and acquired a reputation out of proportion, perhaps, to its intrinsic merits. Leibniz wrote a fourteen-page introduction extolling the virtues of the Confucian system and using the occasion to preach once again the necessity of a universal culture. "I almost think it necessary," he writes, "that Chinese missionaries should be sent to us to teach us the aims and practice of natural theology, as we send missionaries to them to instruct them in revealed religion."

The other important piece of written evidence concerning Leibniz' Sinophilism is a long letter written in 1716 to a friend, M. Rémond.[20] In this document Leibniz returns once more to his earlier enthusiasm for Chinese thought. As one reads this exposition of the complexities of the Chinese religious and philosophical systems one is impressed by the richness of the author's knowledge and the wisdom of his interpretations. The letter constitutes the most enlightening document on the subject, written by a non-Jesuit writer, before the nineteenth century; even, one might say, surpassing, in the clarity of its observations, the best that the Jesuit "experts" had written on the subject. Leibniz, on the whole, supports the view of the Society regarding Chinese religion, emphasizing the ancient, monotheistic cult at

[18] Merkel, op. cit., p. 191 *et passim*.

[19] *Ibid.*, p. 59.

[20] *Leibnitii Opera omnia nunc primum collecta studio Ludovici Dutens*. Geneva, 1678, tome IV. "Lettre de M. G. G. de Leibniz sur la Philosophie Chinoise à M. Rémond" (pp. 169–210).

the expense of the modern, agnostic interpretation. He upholds the theory that "*Tien*" meant "God in Heaven" and not the material heavens and that the term "*Li*" referred to Primal Intelligence rather than Primal Matter. He points out that theology was no more static in China than it has been in the West and that one is justified (as did the Jesuits) in choosing the highest existing interpretation of a religion, no matter whether ancient or modern.

Among Leibniz's Jesuit correspondents was Father Joachim Bouvet who belonged to a small group of China missionaries known as the Figurists. This group had evolved a highly mystical interpretation of Chinese religious development, finding the key to its secrets in the cryptic classic *I Ching* (Book of Changes). They thought they had found in the ancient trigrams of the *pa kua* and in the symbol of the *yin-yang* dualism a mystical expression of the ancient Logos and they identified the traditional author of these symbols, Fu Hsi, with the primal Lawgiver of Western religious thought, the Hermes Trismegistus of the Greeks, the Zoroaster of the Persians, the Enoch of the Hebrews.[21] With this beginning they wove a fascinating fabric of fact and fantasy, bringing back all religions to a common source. These ideas made a strong impression on the universalistic mind of Leibniz, even while the extreme views of the Figurists were being rejected by their fellow Jesuits. The members of the group advocated the establishment of a Sino-European Academy whose duty it would be to accumulate evidence from Chinese sources to prove the common origin of Eastern and Western religions and Leibniz, who had previously championed the establishment of a Berlin Academy with the same universalistic motive, supported them in this plan.

It was Father Bouvet who chiefly encouraged Leibniz in his belief that his system of binary arithmetic was a re-discovery of truths cryptically expressed in the *pa kua* trigrams. In 1703 Leibniz read a paper before the French Académie des Sciences in which he supported this theory. The German philosopher felt that the Book of Changes contained a hidden philosophy of great richness and power. In bringing mathematics to the solution of its mysteries he was merely putting into practice a belief in the necessity of an alliance between science and religion which he was constantly preaching.

In the absence of explicit avowals of debt it is of course impossible to determine accurately the influence of Confucianism on the thought of Leibniz. All the evidence is inferential. One can at least say that there is a curious parallelism between the ideas expressed in the Confucian classics which he read and some of his own theories. We know that he was reading these

[21] A. Waley, "Leibniz and Fu Hsi," *Bull. of (London) School of Oriental Studies*, II (1921), pp. 165–167.

classics at a time when he was developing his ideas regarding pre-established harmony. As a modern sinologue has pointed out, there are striking similarities between the philosophy of Leibniz and the Sung school of Confucian exegesis, as found in their commentary of the *Chung Yung* and the *Ta Hsüeh.*

In a more general way his study of Chinese thought stimulated his dream of a universal culture. He looked upon Chinese and Christian cultures as two poles of thought from which should emanate influences radiating in every direction until they filled all the gap between and the two great civilizations would become as one, bringing about a perfect internationalism of the spirit.

Leibniz is the greatest of the seventeenth century sinophiles. While others gazed in admiration at the spectacle of this new knowledge he, almost alone, was able to appreciate its richness and profundity, its variety and its possibilities. While others looked upon Confucianism as a kind of arsenal from which might be obtained moral weapons to aid in the attack on contemporary social and religious abuses Leibniz looked upon it as a powerful ally in the fight to break down all those moral and spiritual barriers which separated man from man and nation from nation.

Other men in Germany caught the Leibniz vision. Among the disciples of the great philosopher the most important was Christian Wolff. In 1721 the latter made a Pro-rectoral address at the University of Halle in which he boldly eulogized the Chinese system for harmonizing the happiness of the individual with the welfare of the State. He asserted that the Confucian canon was, in reality, the teaching of the ethical and political power of natural reason and he upheld the adequacy of the system as a code of morals and ethics. As, by inference, this eliminated the need of Christian dogma as a necessity of moral perfection, Wolff was immediately accused of atheism. Bitterly attacked he was forced to give up his position at Halle. He went to Marburg where he continued his sinophile propaganda, making notable converts, chief of whom was Bulffinger, an ardent champion of Confucianism.

Others, too, were influenced by Leibniz, notably A. H. Francke, La Croze, Plath, G. S. Bayer, Neubauer and, particularly Conrad Mel, court preacher at Konigsburg. These men, in their different ways, preached the moral worth of the philosophy of Confucius and its appeal to men of reason.

INFLUENCE IN ENGLAND

The enthusiasm of Leibniz for Confucian thought communicated itself to English scholars at the end of the century but several decades earlier men of

letters had already begun to examine the new knowledge with interest.

Robert Burton was perhaps the first outstanding writer to make use of the Jesuit literature on China. Although published for the first time only six years after the appearance of Trigault's volume the *Anatomy of melancholy* already contains a number of references to the Jesuit work. Burton, however, had an encyclopedic rather than an original mind. He was a *fureteur* rather than a constructive thinker and he used the China material much as the sixteenth century thinker used the newly acquired knowledge of strange lands, as an object of intellectual curiosity. Burton's attitude towards the great Oriental civilization may be summed up in his remark: "We (wonder) in our time how these witty Chinese, so perspicacious in all things, should be so gulled, so tormented by superstition, so blind as to worship stocks and stones."[22] He coins the felicitous phrase "land-leaping Jesuits" but, though he accepts their testimony without acrimony or prejudice, he does not become a victim to the contagion of their panegyric.

The Jesuit books on China were probably not so well known in England in the seventeenth century as on the continent. Trigault's work does not seem to have been translated although Purchas, in the fourth edition of his *Pilgrimes*, relies chiefly on the Jesuit author for his pages on China and it was probable that through him a knowledge of the country was disseminated among the general reading public.

The first English man of letters to be influenced by Confucian thought was Sir William Temple. The philosophy of this eminent public official rests on the two bases of conservatism and cosmopolitanism. However while the eighteenth century philosophers were to use their cosmopolitanism as a point of departure for their dreams of a new world order, Temple drew from his study of other civilizations (notably those of Peru, Scythia, Arabia and China) evidence for his theory that human nature and human thinking have been and will be the same for all eternity, a theory which made him the outstanding champion of the Ancients in England. His conservatism, however, did not prevent him from being an enthusiastic admirer of China. He saw in Confucianism the basis of a universal code of human conduct, a system "which outdoes all utopias." Admiring Confucius as "the most learned, wise and virtuous of all the Chinese" he praises him for his "mighty learning, admirable virtue and excellent nature" and terms him "a true patriot of his country and a lover of mankind."

He accepts the Jesuits' dualistic interpretation of the Chinese religious system and emphasizes still more strongly their distinction between the

[22] *Anatomy of melancholy* (ed. Philadelphia, 1847), p. 602.

religion of the learned and that of the masses. "He was," says the unkindly Bishop Burnet, "a great admirer of the sect of Confucius, who were atheists themselves but left religion to the rabble."[23] The idea that the Chinese literati were atheists—obtained probably from the well-known book of the Jesuits' Dominican opponent Navarrete—was widely accepted in the seventeenth century. As we have seen, it was the point of view of Pierre Bayle and seems to have been accepted at first even by Voltaire. Later, under the influence of the Jesuit writings, this belief was replaced, in the minds of most people by the belief that in China an ancient but decadent monotheism prevailed, not much different in its essentials from the contemporary European cult of Deism.

As a practical statesman Temple was interested chiefly in the relation of Confucianism to government. "Confucius, like Socrates," he says, "had the design of reclaiming man from the useless and endless speculations of nature to those of morality."[24] This seems to imply that he looked upon the Oriental philosopher as a teacher of social ethics and not as a metaphysical thinker —which, of course, is true. In his *Essays upon the origin and nature of government* the English writer defines ideal government as one where "kings are philosophers and philosopher kings." This idea is not, of course, original with Temple but goes back as far as Plato. However it was used by the former—as later it was used by Voltaire—as the acme of praise for the Chinese system. Temple's symbol of government—a pyramid of which the large and solid base is the consent of the people and the apex the concentration of power in the hands of the monarch—contradicts the spirit of the "divine right" theory prevalent in Europe at the time but it has striking similarity to the Jesuits' idealistic picture of benevolent despotism in China. At any rate the Oriental system wins Temple's warm praise and he concludes: 'No people are better governed nor with greater felicity than the Chinese."[25]

Temple, then, found in the alliance of the moral code of Confucius with the machinery of government a cause of profound admiration.

It is to be expected that the exponents of Deism, the liberal movement in England in the latter half of the century, would be interested in the new knowledge. Speaking of a later period Sir Leslie Stephen says: "Throughout the eighteenth century the deists were always taunting the orthodox with the startling fact of three hundred million Chinese whose case cannot be squared

[23] *History of His own times*. Oxford, 1923. II. 61.

[24] *Upon the ancient and modern learning*. Spingarn ed. Oxford, 1909, p. 13.

[25] "Essay on heroic virtue," *The works of Sir Wm. Temple*. London, 1814, vol. III, p. 342.

with their theories." As far as the writers before 1700 are concerned, however, we find little evidence to show that this condition prevailed in the earlier period. The literature of English deism was chiefly a discussion of theological dogma treated, more or less, *in vacuo;* very different from that of French Deism which was closely related to the movement of cosmopolitanism.

Slight as they are, however, there are indications of the interest of the Deists in Confucian thought. The chief advocate of this cultural rapprochement was Matthew Tindal. His interest in the subject may have come from his correspondence with Leibniz, since he refers several times to the ideas of the German philosopher. Like the latter he thought that much good might come from an interchange of ideas: "I am so far from thinking the maxims of Confucius and Jesus Christ to differ," he says in his *Christianity as old as creation*, "that I think the plain and simple maxims of the former will help to illustrate the more obscure ones of the latter, accommodated to their way of thinking."[26] Several times he comments approvingly on Leibniz's plan for an exchange of cultural ambassadors.

Tindal obtained from his reading of sinophile literature support for his conviction that Christians had arrived at no higher state of perfection than the rest of mankind. He quotes the assertion of the Dominican Navarrete that "It is God's special Providence that the Chinese did not know what was done in Christendom; for, if they did, there would never be a man among them but would spit in our faces."[27] In his use of the Chinese material as a weapon of anti-Christian propaganda Tindal is a precursor of Voltaire and the eighteenth century *philosophes*.

EFFECT ON EUROPEAN THOUGHT

We have reviewed the evidences of influences of the teachings of Confucianism in France, Germany and England. It remains, now, to examine briefly the effect which this new knowledge had on European thought. This influence made itself felt in three important movements of the time: (1) the increasing spirit of criticism directed at Christian fundamentals; (2) the awakening interest in the problems of the relation of the individual to the State and (3) the position of the scholar in the social structure.

The Renaissance had introduced into Europe a new form of authority, the authority of the Greek and Roman Classics. This broke the intellectual

[26] *Christianity as old as creation or the Gospel, a Republication of the Religion of Nature.* (2nd ed.), London, 1731, p. 314.
[27] *Ibid.*, p. 372.

hegemony of the Church, which was never again to assert the same power over the minds of men. The whole idea of Revelation was threatened and with it the idea of the identity of religion and morals. With the seventeenth century—particularly in France—there was an attempt to return to the authoritarianism of Christian tradition. The seeds of doubt had been sown, however, and they were to bear fruit in a number of startling discoveries in astronomy, physics, anatomy and other fields. The age which produced Louis XIV and the Stuarts produced also Galileo, Descartes, Leibniz, Harvey, Hobbes and Newton. These men and their compeers re-examined the evidence and laid the foundation of rationalistic, "scientific" thinking. From their discoveries grew a desire to reevaluate the teachings of Christian theology and to bring them into line with the new fields of knowledge.

In the realm of morals there was no system comparable to Christianity, for even the wisdom of Greece did not sufficiently link itself to the actualities of permanent human experience. With the discovery of Chinese thought, however, European thinkers learned of an ethico-moral system which had stood the test of over two thousand years and had produced a code of social and moral practices of great richness and power.

The new discovery came at a time when there was a growing movement in Europe towards the displacing of the doctrine of Revelation by a new conception of Nature. This new sense of values was based upon an increased knowledge of universal phenomena and of human relationships and aspirations. It strove to answer the question: Can man's relation to the universe and to his fellow men be solved in any other terms than that of Revelation? Or, in other words, Can the rationalistic processes of man's mind produce a sort of marriage of Nature and Reason? Men began to talk of Natural Religion and then they discovered that the Chinese had, for centuries, apparently solved the problem. Confucianism, they found, had thoroughly explored the questions of the relation of man to man and of man to the infinite without too great a preoccupation with the esoteric and the metaphysical but with a strong emphasis on the art of living. No such complete system of human thought and action had been previously known. Plato had preached the moral law but while Plato was theoretical and metaphysical Confucius was practical and—what is more important—successful. (Later Voltaire upheld this point of view when he turned with good-humored contempt from the metaphysics of the Greeks to the practical humanism of Confucianism.) It is not to be wondered at, then, that many of the leading minds of the time saw in the discovery of the Confucianism system an aid to progress in moral and religious thought. Many of them saw in it, also, the possibility of a system

of public and private morals, divorced from the influences of religious dogma.

To the theory of government, too, the Chinese system provided new inspiration. One of the most vital movements in European thought after the Renaissance was the attempt to solve the problem of the relation of the individual to the State. It has often been pointed out that the century which produced the theory of the Divine Right of Kings produced also a number of thinkers who analysed and attempted to define the rights of the people, and to create a new formula for government. Beginning two centuries earlier with the political utilitarianism of Machiavelli and continuing with the social pacts of Grotius and Puffendorff, the pessimism of Hobbes, the empiricism of Locke, and continuing with the rationalism of Mandeville and the sentimental optimism of Shaftesbury, the movement was to reach its climax in the next century with the monumental *Esprit des lois* and the brilliant confusion of the *Contrat social*.

While there is no evidence that any of these writers except Montesquieu, made extensive use of the China material, consideration of the Confucian system was in the air as is shown by the work of Bernier, Temple and others. Those who studied the Confucian classics saw in them a system of government which seemed to have solved the problem of the antinomy between the interests of the governing and those of the governed. They thought they had discovered a compromise which had resulted in the efficient longevity of the political institutions of the country which practiced it. From the time of Temple to the period of the Physiocrats in the next century—when the theory of benevolent despotism reached its climax—China was looked upon as a country where the monarch ruled by the will of Heaven, was responsible only to Heaven and yet was constantly impelled to protect the happiness of the people, on the one hand, and to inculcate what the eighteenth century called "virtue" on the other. To Temple, Beurrier and their compeers this was Utopia. It was the answer to Fénelon's dream of a monarch who ruled by virtue and a people who lived happily under this rule; of a country where the monarch felt to the fullest extent his moral obligations and where this moral responsibility was fully shared by the officials under him. What these men found most admirable in the Confucian system was not so much a definition of the rights of the social classes as the foundation of government on a moral basis.

This led to another important problem: the relation of Religion and State. The old alliance of Church and Empire (replaced by the seventeenth century idea of the Divine Right of Kings) was being increasingly subjected to criticism by political thinkers, who were asking the question: What should be the nature of this alliance, if it be permitted? Here again China seemed to

furnish striking material for study. Following the interpretation given by the Jesuit writers European thinkers saw in Confucianism a state cult with other cults merely appendages to it. In this system the only contact between the people and the Supreme Being was through the emperor. Furthermore, since the Confucianist scholar and the official were identical there could be no rivalry between Church and State, no impingement of the former on the rights of the latter. This system made for solidarity and efficiency in government but it also made public morals not so much the affair of a priestly hierarchy as of the governing classes.

One of the elements of the Confucian system most pleasing to the European intelligentia was the position of the scholar in China. In the later seventeenth century, in continental Europe, one can trace the beginnings of a movement towards the public recognition of the man of letters. This movement, it is true, did not make much progress until the time of Diderot, d'Alembert and Voltaire but in its beginnings it received much encouragement from the example of China. From the time when Trigault wrote in glowing terms of the Confucian scholar-official the Oriental empire was looked upon as a land where the barrier between the statesman and the man of letters had been demolished. When Voltaire—in timidly exploring the field of political reform—saw the ideal State as one in which the king was a "philosophe" with the gift of choosing "philosophes" as his ministers, the sinophile sage of Ferney was merely giving expression to a thought which had been in the minds of the intelligentia for over a century.

In the Chinese system it was the homogeneity of its parts which European thinkers admired. In the seventeenth century European scholars were beginning to envisage a new relativity to take the place of the mediaeval unity, a relativity based upon the essentials of *scientia*, knowledge or science. This relativity was not to be found in China in a scientific sense, it is true, but in a social, moral, and political sense it existed to an extent which impelled the admiration of the sinophiles.

But above all, it was the humanism of the Chinese system which made the strongest appeal to the West. This humanism differed in many ways from that of the Renaissance. The latter was based largely on individualism. Across the seventeenth century Europe moved slowly from this individualistic point of view to a conception of man as a social animal, until the idea of Society, based upon human needs and aspirations, was created. (Here again the movement did not reach its climax until the period of the Encyclopedia, roughly 1750–1778.) Confucianism had the advantage of partaking of the essence of both movements. The Chinese sage, while preaching the moral perfection of the individual, saw his moral progress chiefly in its relation

to that of his fellow men. The Superior Man was admirable in so far as his excellencies coincided with the highest moral ideals of his social environment. The dual aspects of his theory of ethical perfection must have appealed strongly to men who were about to surrender the Renaissance idea of humanism for a broader, more pervasive, conception.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE CONFUCIAN INFLUENCE

One must not, of course, exaggerate the effect of this movement of sinophilism in the seventeenth century. It is always a temptation, in the face of similarities in the culture of two civilizations, to infer direct influence of one on the other. It is extremely tempting to do this in the field we have discussed. The seventeenth century ideal of the "honnête homme" for example, has many points of similarity with the Confucian cult of the "Superior Man," with his doctrine of the Mean and his emphasis on decorum, but to infer from these similarities a direct and unique source would be to overlook the obvious influence of Horace and other classical writers. The growth of Deism and that of sinophilism in the thought of the time were parallel trends yet it seems certain that the philosophical movement towards a Natural Religion would have developed even if China had never been "discovered." This did not, however, prevent the thinkers of the time from linking the two in a relationship of cause and effect. The same mistake may be made for individual writers. There were some, such as Leibniz and, later, Voltaire, who were undoutedly influenced by Chinese thought, but evidence is lacking to prove—as a recent writer has implied,[28] that J. J. Rousseau's ideas were sometimes inspired by the sinophilism of the time.

But, eliminating all these false inferences, there is still much evidence to prove the validity of these claims of Confucian influence. The fact of the matter is that the new knowledge struck Europe at a time of intellectual ferment, not the ferment of active revolt but the slow, often hidden, preparation for greater intellectual victories to come. At such a time it is natural that the intelligentsia should be receptive to outside stimuli, to outside examples to follow; and the potency of this example from the other side of the world could not be overlooked. Less profound and certainly less widespread than the vision of classic antiquity the sinophile cult was, nevertheless, in a sense a complement to the latter. When one of its proponents exclaimed: "If Plato were to rise from Hades he would find his ideal republic realized in China" he was giving utterance to a recognition of the identical rôles of both movements in the task of the emancipation of European thought.

[28] E. R. Hughes, *The Great Learning and the Mean-in-Action*. London, 1942, pp. 22–31.