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**ATHEISM IN
TRADITIONAL CHINESE CULTURE**

To speak of atheism in ancient China is to bring to mind such philosophers as Yang Zhu, Han Feidz, Wang Chong, the two proponents of "the gods destroyed" school—Heng Tan and Fan Zhen—and others. However, the atheism of these men by no means represented a complete or systematic philosophy. Their denial of the existence of God and their attitude towards religion in general was not in defence of something positive, but might best be described as somewhat individualistic and negative dispositions in opposition to the prevailing religious beliefs and Buddhistic teachings of their time and, therefore, they had no determining influence on the early development of Chinese academic learning.

The main reason why atheism failed to gain an important academic position and did not prosper within the context of traditional Chinese culture was because that culture,

from its inception, was qualitatively disposed to move in a religious direction and claimed a rich deposit of moral virtue as its special characteristic. The Six Classics, whose compilation is traditionally attributed to Confucius, made it possible to maintain and preserve the early thought of those pioneer philosophers. Relying on intuition and their experience of nature and of life, they affirmed a simple and unpretentious religious belief: faith in, reverence for, and obedience to Heaven. Following along this line, pre-Qin Confucianism, founded on the principle that Heaven is source and origin of human kind, exhorted man to imitate Heaven's nurturing activity within all creation. Thus, the whole order came to be built upon the virtue of overflowing love for all living things, with benevolence at its centre. This Confucian notion of reverence for Heaven and love for man has constituted the essence of Chinese culture for over two thousand years, and it has enabled the Chinese to become one of the world's most ethically conscious of peoples. Taoism, whose greatest contribution has been its metaphysical investigation of the nature of "the way", also opens frontiers in the direction of "Heaven's way" and religious perspectives. The Mohist school gave strong support to the spirit of ancient religious belief in and reverence for Heaven. The will of Heaven here becomes the ultimate basis for Mohist political and social teaching. While after the Han dynasty, the influence of the Mohist school declined in favour of Confucianism and Taoism, its place in Chinese culture, even up to the present day, is not to be taken lightly.

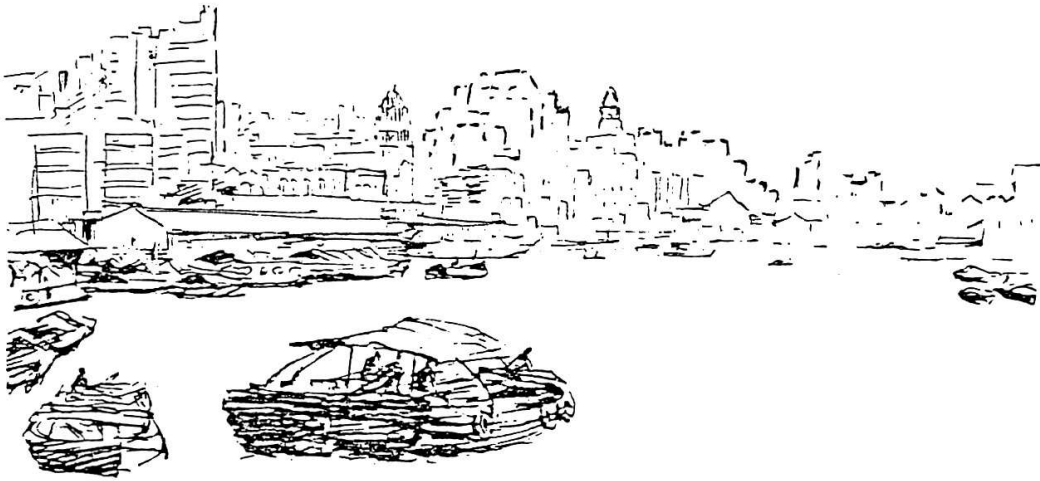
THE RESURGENCE OF ATHEISM IN CONTEMPORARY CHINA

It was only during the closing years of the Qing Dynasty and the beginning of the Republic that a comparatively systematic and influential atheism appeared in China. Important reasons for this rise of atheistic thought can be found in the following three areas: "China's national and social decline, Western imperialism and the introduction of atheistic philosophies from abroad, and China's inability to effect cultural self-renewal.

National and Social Decline

At a time when China's national strength was in decline and her people's livelihood was rapidly deteriorating,

the power of the industrialized Western nations was on the rise. Imperialistic policies encouraged colonialism. While China was not formally reduced to colonial status, she did suffer large-scale encroachments on her sovereignty and unprecedented national humiliation at the hands of the foreign powers. The Chinese intellectuals and political leaders of the time thought that the source of Western power lay in their mighty ships and sophisticated weapons, for their minds were still closed to a more serious investigation of the root of Western culture. At a time of famine, hungry people do not discriminate but will eat anything at hand. Blindly rejecting the values of traditional Chinese culture, the intellectuals were anxious to consume all things Western. This effort towards "complete westernization" turned out to be merely an empty phrase, for what the intellectuals absorbed in actuality was only the popular philosophical trends of the period and they completely overlooked the basic foundations of Western society: its traditional philosophies and Christian faith. Nor did they take into account the harmful effects that these same liberal Western writers and thinkers were having on traditional Western society itself. True, China was in dire need of technological science and democratic systems. However, the science they absorbed was not a rigorous form of scientific theory and methodology, but rather 19th century Western technocratism or positivism that raised science to the level of worship and omnipotence. As for democracy, they held that for China to become a democratic nation, it was imperative to sweep away her traditional faith, values, customs, and social organizations. They believed these to be the chief obstacles standing in the way of China's progress. The intellectuals were also shallow in their appraisal of Western democracy. They gave little thought to its gradual development throughout a long history and to how it had evolved from the Christian tradition that "before God all men are equal". Without this essential understanding a true spirit of democracy could not survive. Only Dr. Sun Yatsen's Three Principles of the People, harmoniously blending the special characteristics of Chinese and Western cultures, spelled out a practical revolutionary plan of reconstruction which approximated the ideal of the golden mean. It is a pity that Dr. Sun's theories did not receive the support they deserved. On the other hand, circumstances were such on the mainland that up to the final takeover by the Communists, the government of the Republic had few years of peace in which to implement his ideas.



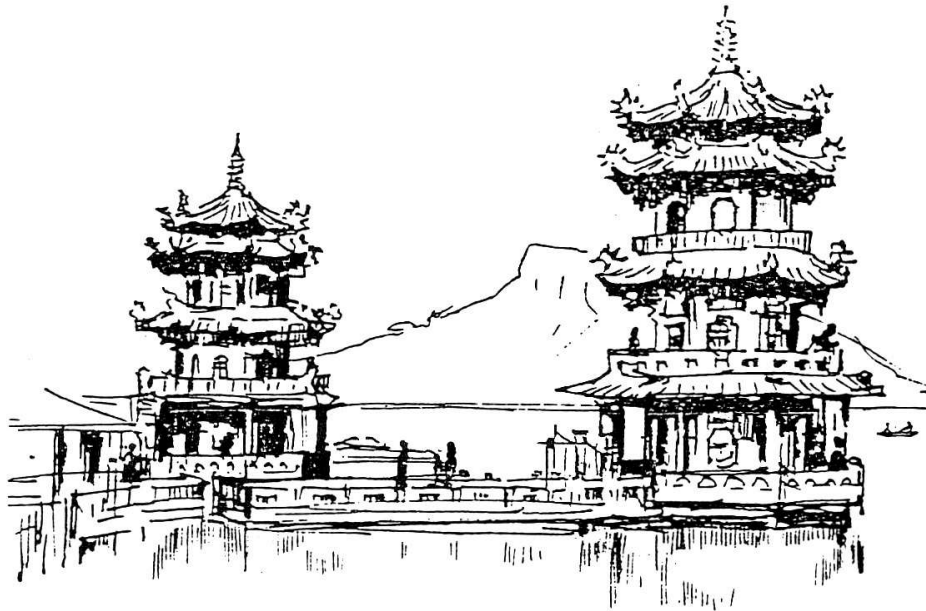
Imperialism and Atheism from the West

For over one hundred years China had been subjected to Western imperialistic policies and its culture had been under attack from Western atheistic philosophies. Confucian culture did not have the strength to offer strong resistance, and suffered much from incessant humiliation. While there was a commonly held deep faith in the hidden strength and tenacity of Chinese culture, this alone could not prevent its decline. What, then, caused it? The answer lies further back in history. Original Confucianism held that the three powers--heaven, man and earth--exist in harmony and that equal stress must be placed on each to achieve their proper balance. Unfortunately, after the Qin-Han dynasties this doctrine of the mean did not receive the emphasis that it should have. The traditional, simple faith of the pre-Qin was gradually lost, along with the ethical concept of the Heavenly Way. With them went a lively sense of the absolute and the inexhaustible power of God. A humanism with man as the centre of all virtue emerged, and within a short time Chinese culture distanced itself from the religious and supernatural. The task of "interior cultivation of virtue" fell into neglect and gave way to the technique of "governing others", an ideal pursued by most Chinese intellectuals. The emperor no longer followed the will of heaven, and what followed, of necessity, was an endless series of tyrannical and despotic rulers. The political ideal of the "virtuous king" became an empty slogan, and public officials, seeking rather their own advantage, took up the causes of their

people against imperial injustice in fewer and fewer numbers. Also, the basic social unit of China, the clan system, while offering security to most, put limits on traditional Chinese universalism. It cultivated a narrow point of view inimical to the development of universal love. (Such customs as that which favoured male births over female in order to continue the clan line smacked of individualism.) The traditional ideal of "within the four seas all men are brothers" was left unrealized. The emphasis on man to the neglect of matter prevented a balanced development of both. A spirit of humanism gradually predominated, and nature was reduced to becoming merely an object of man's personal enjoyment. While this led to individual works of art and literature rich in beauty, it left the door to technological advancement unopened and the people's livelihood was generally ignored.

The Culture Unrenewed

The inner life of every culture must be in a continual process of self renewal. Part of this demands outside contact with other cultures and entering into exchanges with them. Such mutual penetration allows for the sharing of individual strengths and making up for individual deficiencies, in order that each may be enriched as both move forward to



new horizons. From ancient times China had been a great agricultural country, and it was not too difficult for her to maintain a satisfactory level of life for her people. She was also blessed with a highly developed culture. She had few expansionist ambitions nor any great desire to acquire more territory. She was concerned with securing her borders against the invasion of foreign tribes, but more often than not sought to resolve boundary disputes through peaceful negotiation. Such conditions helped to form a people rather conservative in outlook and closed off temperamentally from the outside world.

When over four hundred years ago, Matteo Ricci and the Jesuits came to China, they not only brought with them the Catholic faith but also new Western developments in the field of natural science. However, court officials and intellectuals still failed to recognize the importance of entering into cultural exchanges with the outside and, as a result, lost the opportunity to create something new. Had Chinese officials of those days openly embraced this new scientific knowledge and methodology and had they laid the foundation for further research into the natural sciences, what would the situation of China be like today? Imagine further: if the intellectuals of that time had explored with an open mind the foundation stones of Western culture: its traditional philosophies and the Christian Faith; and if this had led to an enriching mutual communication and exchange with Confucianism and traditional Chinese religious beliefs, what then would the situation of Chinese culture be like today? Confucius explained the meaning of change in this way: "Heaven and earth change four times a year. Because the changes wrought by Emperor Tang and Emperor Wu were in accordance with heaven and for the benefit of man, their revolutions were blessed with success and greatness." It is indeed unfortunate that later generations did not come to realize the importance change plays in the inner renewal of a culture and in the creation of new life within that culture.

TRENDS IN MODERN CHINESE ATHEISM

The Trend Towards Liberalism

The most important name associated with the trend towards liberal atheism in China is that of Dr. Hu Shih.

In a 1930 essay entitled "From Spirit Worship to Atheism", Hu recounts how at the age of eleven he came in contact with Fan Shen's teachings on the destruction of the gods while reading Sima Guang's Zizhi Tongjian. "From that time on", Hu wrote, much in admiration of Fan's theory, "I became, unconsciously a disbeliever in all devils and spirits."¹

Hu Shih became a supporter of Wu Jihui's new scientific world view as enunciated in his Belief in a New World Outlook and View of Life (Yige Xin Xinyang De Yuzhouguan Ji Renshengguan). Wu's thought was completely technocratic, affirming modern science as the measure of truth, and modern science alone to be in possession of useful knowledge. The moral and religious content of this point of view are spelled out in the following tenets from the New World Outlook:

- (3) Through science man is able to know that movement and change in the universe and in all created things are natural and as they should be. It is not necessary to posit a supreme being or creator.
- (4) Through knowledge obtained from the science of biology, man realizes the waste and cruelty in the material world, thus rendering the hypothesis of an all-good supreme being untenable.
- (7) From his knowledge of biology and sociology, man is able to comprehend that morality and manners are evolutionary, and that the root causes of their evolution are discoverable through the application of scientific methods.
- (9) From his study of biology and sociology, man is able to grasp the mortality of the individual and the self, as well as the immortality of universal or collective man. Religion of the truest and highest order is to realize this and live in this world just as any other creature. Religions that posit a life after death for the individual are essentially selfish.²

The "Ibsen Doctrine" (After the Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen) was quite popular at the time in China. It

advocated liberating man from all "idols" in order that man's personality might develop freely. Whatever could not be verified by scientific experimentation is "an idol" inhibiting man's freedom, and is therefore to be destroyed.

In his essay, "An introduction to my Thought", Hu Shih stated that the two men having the greatest influence on his thinking were Thomas Henry Huxley and John Dewey. "Huxley taught me to hold in suspicion and disbelief whatever could not be tested scientifically. Dewey taught me to be concerned with all modern problems, but to treat each proposed ideal solution only as an hypothesis in need of verification. Dewey also taught me to always pay close attention to the practical results of one's own thought." He insisted that the existence of God and the immortality of the soul could not be proven scientifically and therefore were to be rejected as unscientific. He asserted that the only realities in the life of man that were indestructable were the universe and society. This latter assertion was not without its correlates in Auguste Comte's humanistic and religious thought.

The Trend Towards Marxist Materialism

The faith of Wu Jihui in a new cosmic order was opposed to the Confucian teaching which posited man as the soul of the universe. Wu's theory held that man in the same category as a rock in a material cosmos which had evolved from chaotic darkness, and that the three aims of human life were to eat, breed children, and entertain friends--a rather superficial and simplistic form of materialism to say the least. It was, however, the more complete form of materialism of Chen Duxiu (one of the founders of the Chinese Communist Party) that linked the Chinese anti-religious movement of the early Republican years to Marxism. In 1925, under Chen's influence, the Chinese Communist Youth League's Third Representatives' Meeting resolved (as stated in its "Resolution Opposing Christianity"): "to help all anti-Christian alliances to expand throughout the whole country, and to prepare to propagate the crimes of all Christians, churches, church-run schools, YMCA's and YWCA's" (China Youth, January, 1925). In 1929, the Second General Assembly of the Communist Youth League passed a "Resolution on Youth's Struggle Against Imperialism" which advocated: "to continue to oppose imperialism's cultural aggression and to continue the anti-

Christian campaign." (Lenin Youth, October, 1929). The students' "anti-Christian campaign" later became a political weapon in the Party's arsenal against Christianity because it dovetailed with the CCP's "anti-imperialist" policy of the time. Lenin Youth, 1929, Vol. 1, No.3 stated: "Christianity is one of imperialism's most effective tools for carrying out cultural aggression in China. We are opposed to Christianity. We are not only opposed to it as a superstition and heresy which misleads the masses, but also as a tool of imperialistic aggression against a weak nation. We oppose Christianity because it is a force which destroys revolution."³

The theories advocated by Chen Duxiu in his essay "The True Meaning of Life" ("Rensheng Zhenyi") had already moved from individualism to the communalism of Marx and Lenin:

1. While man is on earth, the individual is impermanent; only society really exists.
2. Society's work of art are created by man, and man should enjoy them.
3. Society is organized by individuals; if the individual is eliminated, then there is no society. Therefore, the individual's desire for happiness should be respected.
4. Society is the summation of the individual's life... Therefore, organization and order in society ought to be respected.
5. To do one's will and to fulfill one's desires (desires range from eating and sex to anything done in the name of virtue) is the basic reason for the individual's existence. From beginning to end this does not change...
6. Religion, law, ethics and politics are means for supporting society only when there is no other alternative...and they can change according to time and circumstances.
7. Human happiness is created by the forces of human life itself. It is not bestowed by God nor achieved by nature....
8. The individual resides in society like a cell in a person's body; its life is impermanent, but it gives birth to a new generation. Its death is as it should be, and is not to be feared.
9. Man should enjoy his blessings and not be afraid of suffering. An individual's suffering now can sometimes create happiness in the future.

When Mao Zedong was in control of the Party, he adhered to a policy of complete non-coexistence between communism and religious faith. While after the Cultural Revolution methods have changed, fundamental thinking and attitudes

have not changed. On April 28, 1982, the People's Daily published a "Corrected Draft of the Constitution of the PRC." The next day's paper contained Peng Zhen's "Explanation of the Draft Correction" wherein Peng pointed out: "The citizens of our country have freedom of religious belief. This is the consistent policy of Marxist-Leninist-Mao Zedong Thought in treating religious questions." Although Article 36 of the new constitution eliminated the phrase 'freedom to propagate atheism' from the 1975 and 1978 constitutions, Peng Zhen's words clearly indicate that the present policy of religious freedom does not cancel out the atheism fundamental to Marxist-Leninist-Mao Zedong Thought.

In 1982, the official magazine Red Flag published "Our Party's Basic Policy Regarding Religious Questions in the Period of Socialism." This document spells out clearly the present attitude of the communist authorities:

"We are Marxists and we understand the social and historical factors in human life that have given rise to religion. Religion is an inevitable phenomenon at a certain stage of human history. This phenomenon has to undergo the stages of emergence, development and withering away.... In a society of class antagonism, the most profound social factor that gives rise to religion, and enables it to develop, lies in the people's apprehension of the tremendous pressure of the system of exploitation, in the poverty and ignorance from which people cannot free themselves because of the control of an alien force, and in the needs of the exploiting class. The class factor that has given rise to the existence of religion has already been basically eliminated. However, because the development of people's ideology always falls behind social existence the old ideology and habits left by the old society cannot be thoroughly eliminated in a short period of time...."

"All the comrades in the Party should adequately and soberly understand that under socialist conditions religious questions are prolonged in nature. It is unrealistic to think that religion will soon wither away after the socialist system has been established and the economy and culture have developed to a certain extent."

The document also declares:

"True, we communists are atheists and we advocate and will propagate atheism among the masses of the people. However, we, at the same time, understand that it is not only ineffective but also very harmful to use simple and forceful methods to handle the ideological problems of the people and problems concerning the spiritual world of the people, especially the problems of religious belief... Therefore, the policy of freedom of religious belief is the only correct religious policy that our Party has formulated according to the theory of Marxism-Leninism and is a policy that really conforms to the interests of the people."

The Trend of Modern Neo-Confucianism

After the communist takeover in China, and a period of painful reflection, the modern Neo-Confucianism emerged. With Professors Tang Junyi and Mou Zongsan as its central figures, the modern Neo-Confucianism reexamined, and then reaffirmed the values at the essence of Chinese Culture. It emphasized the importance of morality and religion, and pumped new life into Confucian and Taoist philosophies. This new energy surpassed even that of the cultural movements of the early Republican years. However, the new philosophy was unwilling to separate itself from the influence and ideas of atheism. Its basic philosophy remained completely humanistic in spirit (renwen zhuyi), and, therefore, it might more properly be called a philosophy of human nature (renben zhuyi). In this system religion is reduced to the realm of ethics; heaven's way (tiandao) is necessarily circumscribed by man's way (rendao); transcendent nature must surrender to immanent nature and is thus reduced to human subjectivism. Such extreme humanism could not divorce itself from an intrinsic relationship with atheism.

While affirming the presence of religion in Chinese culture, Tang Junyi fused it with humanism: God existing in man. In Cultural Knowledge and Rational Ethics (Wenhua Yishi Yi Daode Lixing), he wrote that the foundation of religious consciousness is individual desire. When my desire confronts a transcendent ego, I still remain only a limited and subjective person. However, all limitations faced by desire are not of the individual. The will to transcend individual desire is also the cosmological will to surpass all boundaries. This will is an unlimited will. The ego

that can produce an unlimited will must then be an unlimited ego (Vol. II, P.179). As for the existence of an absolute Spirit as an object of belief in the higher religions, Tang Junyi considers this to be immanent to man: "God is only a transcendent spiritual will" The Reconstruction of Humanism (Renwen Jingshen Zhi Chongjian), P.35. One can almost see here Nietzsche's authoritative will: by using such a will, the superior man can change himself into God.



Tang Junyi acknowledged the God of the Book of Odes to be personal God. However, he interprets the identification of human benevolence with the will of heaven as found in Confucius and Mencius as the spirit of humanity at its most noble. This is the meaning of "to affirm is to see heaven's will" (The Reconstruction of Humanism, p.328).

In The Idealism of Ethics (Daode de Lixing Zhuyi) Professor Mou Zongsan has written: "Religion points man in the direction of the absolute and directs his heart to

concentrate on the absolute, thereby inverting the way of God and the way of man so that the way of God becomes very clear but the way of man becomes dark and confused." (Note 2, p.271). Therefore, Mou says that man must return to his own interior nature, for this was the path taken by Confucius and Mencius. It is to follow the path of benevolence in one's life, which is the natural and human way. If benevolence is in harmony with the heavenly way, then, to experience benevolence is to experience the way of heaven. This is the absolute, and this absolute is the substance of universal human life. This substance makes human life good and causes heaven's way to complete man's way. Through the practice of virtue man can realize himself, and thus experience the way of heaven.

In his "The Special Characteristic of Chinese Culture," (Zhongguo Wenhua de Tezi) Professor Mou insists that the classical virtues spoken about by Confucius and Mencius (benevolence, righteousness, propriety and wisdom) are all internal to man's nature. "This nature is a moral nature. We call it moral reason and it is determined and unconditional. Once this nature is made manifest in practice "the essential moral nature of man" in will become apparent and be developed in all its fullness. Above it is linked to heaven and below it is linked to man; in this manner, the ways of heaven and man are united." Mou added this corollary: "Since Mencius pointed to heaven's nobleness (meaning the all important role of morality), everyman is capable of becoming a Yao or a Shun; every man is an absolutely complete person of value."

From this one can see that the religious elements of Professor Mou's humanism are radically man-centered, and his view is in opposition to the affirmation of a transcendent reality posited by theism. His interpretation lies, therefore, not outside the sphere of atheism.

Tang Junyi prefers to call Confucian humanism "Idealistic Humanism" or "Humanistic Idealism" for the reason that he sees the idealism of modern Western philosophy to be very close to Chinese humanism. Confucianism's highest ideal is the virtuous union of God and man, which can come about if every man, generously and reverently, strives to put this ideal into practice. The practice of virtue of the truly

great or holy person should expand to the unlimited horizons of heaven. In this way a virtuous union between heaven and earth is realized and the human heart is joined to the heavenly heart. Heaven's nature is transcendent to the extreme, yet it does not lie outside human nature. Thus, Chinese religion and ethics fuse, and humanistic thought must necessarily contain religious ideas. (The Reconstruction of Humanism, pp.451-2).

CHINESE AND WESTERN ATHEISM COMPARED

In comparing contemporary Chinese and Western atheism, it becomes apparent that Western atheism is closely linked with a kind of humanism that rejects metaphysics along with religion. The popularity of subjectivism, the separation of faith from reason, the split between philosophy and theology, and the rapid development of the natural and technological sciences have all been factors in the rise of Western atheism. And while atheism runs counter to classical Western philosophy, it did, unlike in China, emerge from the interior spirit of its own philosophy. It is an ironic fact that atheism's cause in the West was advanced indirectly by such thinkers as Descartes, Spinoza, Locke and Kant, who were certainly not atheists. Also, it is important to note here that among modern adherents of atheism and atheistic humanism can be found many sincere seekers of the truth and meaning of life, whose advocacy of atheism arises from deep personal concern for mankind and deep emotional commitments to internal needs.

In China's ancient times, atheism was the personal preference of a few individuals; it was neither a part of the mainstream of Chinese thought, nor did it have a widespread influence on the culture. The anti-religious and atheistic ideas of Chinese intellectuals during the early Republican years were foreign to Chinese culture. They were part of the onslaught of modern Western ideas which, along with science and democracy, were sweeping through China. They did not rise out of traditional Chinese philosophy, nor the needs of Chinese culture itself, but they were rather local adaptations of an often mistaken understanding of Western religion, metaphysics, democracy, and science. They were neither systematic nor based on solid theoretical foundations. It is easy to spot from their writings the obvious

influence of Marxism on Chen Duxiu and the Chinese Communist Party, of Dewey's pragmatism on Hu Shih, and that of 19th century French positivism on those who promoted the omnipotence of science. Even in the past thirty years, the writings of Tang and Mou reveal the close relationship the Western philosophies of Kant and Hegel have had on the idealism, moral subjectivism, and humanism of the modern Neo-Confucianism.

China's modern philosophers were drawn to Western philosophy's strong stress on man, nature, science, technology and freedom: its reasonable and pragmatic aspects. However, in Western philosophy such emphases often evolved into forms of humanism and atheism in which everything was internalized, relativized, and closed to God; universal moral principles were denied, and religious faith, in such circumstances was no longer considered to have anything of value to offer. Modern Chinese philosophers met modern Western philosophers at this point in history.

For over two millennia, the study of the nature of "being" provided Western philosophy with an ontological continuity in its search for truth, beauty, goodness and holiness. Its accomplishments have had a deep and wide influence on all of humanity. Despite the limitations of man's existence, a history strewn with human mistakes, a light was cast on the possibilities of human culture to rise above itself. What faces Western philosophers today is: when the roots of "being" are torn from the soil, what will be planted in its place? Where does one find another system of thought that will be capable of contributing something of value to other cultures, to universal man? Certainly not in the contemporary philosophies of "non-being". Responses to this question have been fragmentary. Nietzsche advocated a conversion of values. After the destruction of "being", this was a logical alternative. But how does one set up a new value system? After "being" surrenders to "non-being" should not "goodness" surrender to "evil", "love" to "hate", "truth" to "falsehood", and "life" to "death"? The pursuit of atheistic philosophies cannot fail but to lead Western culture to an ultimate crisis.

One can distinguish different stages in the 400 year process of the development of modern Western atheism. There has been a progressive movement from "I think" (cogito) to "I will" (volo) to, finally, "I act" (ago). The movement from "I think" to absolute idealism, resulted in modern

philosophy's enthronement of reason; but in absolutizing reason, human reason itself becomes more and more an exercise in empty abstraction. Following on the philosophy of idealism came the philosophy of the will. Volitionism held that reason is not able to solve all man's problems; one must rely, rather, on a will in possession of unlimited power. The will here replaces reason as an absolute principle. However, the denial of reason reduces the will, in the end, to complete blindness. In practice, "superman" is nothing other than a limited man relying on his native ability to be roused to action.

Next to arrive on the scene was the 19th and 20th centuries' choice of "action" and "praxis" as the ultimate principle. Engels had announced early on that with the establishment of Marxism the one and only true philosophy had been born into the world. The philosophical books of the past could now all be burned; nothing else was needed but to put Marxist philosophy into practice. The communist parties of the ensuing years actually considered "struggle" to be more important than thought. The increasingly popular pragmatism and positivism of the 20th century also maintained that practical usefulness, and not metaphysical theory, was the only criterion in handling human and social problems. In the United States a survey taken among atheists showed that most of them had no interest in the theoretical question of God's existence. Even if God's existence could be proven as clearly as the mathematical formula $2 + 2 = 4$, they still would not believe in him because he would set limits to their freedom and activity.

The movement from "I think" to "I will" to "I act" is slowly draining the content out of Western philosophy and culture. However, even as "being" and cosmic reality--life which is based upon "being"--is being denied, man is still not able to completely surrender himself to nothingness. If God alone can bring man from nothingness into being, then only God is able to return man to non-being. Even after atheists surrender to the void, they must grasp at some principle or other as motive for their actions, and thus appear all kinds of misrepresentations which de-humanize man: man as god, man as beast, man as thing, or perhaps finally, man who has lost contact with the very character of his true nature.

Since the beginning of the Republic many Chinese intellectuals have wished to push Chinese culture in the direction of a Western type of atheism or humanism. But if Western thought is moving towards a crisis of nihilism and dehumanization that will involve all of Western culture, does Chinese culture have to be brought to this critical point, too? This is a most serious question that we must ask ourselves. Tang Junyi and Mou Zongsan seem to think that China's Third Period Confucianism ought to take the road of complete immanentism and humanism. Let immanentism replace transcendence; let subjective ethics substitute for objective religious faith; and let man's way swallow up heaven's way. They consider this to be the only realistic way for Confucian thought to develop, and the most ideal direction for Chinese culture to take. However, the question must be raised as to whether it is the internal needs of Chinese culture itself that dictate such a direction, or whether it is, rather, a response to the pressure and influence placed upon it from the outside by modern Western atheistic and humanistic philosophies? This writer, for one, hopes that the younger generation of Confucian scholars will bring a more open and objective spirit to the problem, and, for the sake of the future of Chinese culture, make sound choices firmly based on the intrinsic needs of a great people.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS FOR CHINESE CULTURE

In the modern era, in the contact between Chinese and Western culture, Chinese traditional religion and ethics have borne the brunt of the attack of Western thought (especially the philosophies of humanism and atheism) on Chinese traditional society. Chinese culture has been held suspect, where its values have not been denied altogether. It has been as if only a Kant, or a Marx, or a Dewey, or a Russell could save China. During the period of the decline in Chinese national life, Confucius was singled out to be the main culprit; traditional Chinese beliefs were labelled as superstition and ignorance; Christianity was branded a tool of imperialism because it came from the West. To say that such ideas and attitudes did not have far reaching effects on the present division in China would hardly be to take an objective point of view of the present situation.

The division of our country is an historical tragedy which has caused inestimable suffering to the Chinese people. But in the midst of that suffering, a calm and reflective search for renewal and the reordering of Chinese cultural life continues. At first, Communist rule on the mainland seemed like a victory for Marxist atheism. When Maoist leadership pervaded the CCP, there was an attempt to establish a completely communist political authority and system, but contradictions between Marxism-Leninism and the essence of Chinese culture also became evident. The ten year catastrophe of the Cultural Revolution revealed the CCP's uneasiness with traditional Chinese culture and their efforts to deliberately suppress it. However, the effort failed and the Cultural Revolution came to a halt as the CCP adopted a policy of accommodation and tolerance towards traditional culture and religion. Yet it would be unrealistic and premature to say that today's Chinese leaders have completely abandoned fundamental Marxist thought.

In Taiwan, the Republic of China has continued to exist for the past three decades, creating what has been called an economic miracle that has brought steady improvement to the lives of the people. It has also made great strides in the area of democracy. In the years since the division of our country, Chinese intellectuals in Taiwan have engaged in much soul-searching, and, as a result, have brought people to a re-affirmation of Chinese values. In general, both intellectuals and politicians have maintained a neutral or doubtful attitude towards religion, feeling that religion is strictly a personal matter. Many of the older intellectuals are still reluctant to part with the liberalism, positivism, and pragmatism formerly promoted by such scholars as Hu Shih and Yin Haiguang. The attitude of the younger generation with regard to religion is not so much one of antipathy as one of feeling little concern about it at all. This attitude is sometimes more frightening than that of the militant atheist because, fundamentally, it is a disregard for religion's very existence.

The influence of the modern Neo-Confucianism, which originated at Hong Kong's New Asia College, in recent years, has been felt on the university campuses and among the younger generation of scholars in Taiwan as well. Aiming at renewing the spirit of Chinese culture, the modern Neo-Confucianists

affirm the value of pre-Qin Confucianism and the idealism of the Song and Ming dynasties, while, at the same time, not overlooking traditional Taoist philosophy. They have also rethought some of the ideas of Western philosophers such as Kant and Hegel, and they have used certain Western principles of immanentism to explain and supplement Confucian thought. They call for a rejection of transcendental principles and an acceptance of immanentism and humanism in this third phase of the renewal and development of Confucianism. The trend here remains basically atheistic and extremely humanistic. In pre-Qin Confucianism "heaven" was the origin of "man", and the "way of benevolence" was established with this principle as its source. Modern Confucianism makes "man" the source of "heaven", it is man who unifies and directs "the way of heaven".

In the past 20 years Chinese Catholic philosophers in Taiwan have been quite active in their research and published writings, and are to be found in the philosophy departments and graduate schools of all Taiwan's universities. Their influence is widely felt. About ten years ago when a few young scholars were causing somewhat of a sensation in their promoting of the atheistic existentialism of Nietzsche and Sartre (Taiwan University's Chen Guying was representative of the group), Catholic philosophers were able to introduce gradually a theistic existentialist philosophy as equally systematic and even more complete than its atheistic counterpart. The realization among Chinese students that among existentialist philosophers not only did theists have a place but their influence far outweighed that of the atheists helped to restore a more proper balance, and the sensational aspects of the situation gradually evaporated. Chinese Catholic philosophers also affirm the value of traditional Chinese culture. They point to the paramount and unchanging truths to be found in the ancient classics such as the Book of Odes and the Book of Changes, as well as to the Pre-Qin philosophies of Confucius, Mencius and Mozi. They see traditional Western ontology and metaphysics as being able to supplement and add new vitality to Chinese philosophy. At the same time, they view the blending of the Christian gospel with traditional Chinese religion as important in raising the horizons of both Chinese and Western thoughts, and also as a way of overcoming the limitations created by extreme humanism. Such a cultural exchange, and communication and

re-creation of traditional Chinese and Western cultural values could offer new opportunities and benefits for all mankind.



Since the beginning of the Republic, Chinese liberal thinkers have been promoting Western pragmatism, scientism, and positivism, and have been following the path of modern relativism and atheism. They have been unable to affirm the metaphysical meaning and overall value of Chinese culture; nor have they been able to offer the Chinese people a suitable scientific theoretical base or democratic system commensurate with China's needs. On the contrary, their philosophies were in the long run more harmful than constructive for Chinese culture and society, and they inflicted much damage on traditional Chinese religion, philosophy and ethics. However, Hu Shih's return to traditional Chinese culture in his later years and Yin Haiguang's affirmation of the values of its religious aspects before his death indicate that it was not what was lacking in traditional Chinese culture but rather a spirit of skepticism which was the overriding factor in their espousal of pragmatism and positivism.

For several decades the CCP has placed its faith in the certitude of Marxist-Leninist Thought. With communist ideology as the only criterion of truth and the communist explanation of the historical development of human society as being absolutely scientific, they hold to the final victory of the proletariat over capitalism, the inevitable disappearance of religion, and the eventual triumph of atheism.

Obviously, these beliefs are diametrically opposed to the fundamental spirit of both Chinese and Western traditional cultures, a point which, from its inception, the CCP itself has not hesitated to make clear. But after more than 30 years of rule, such signs as the suspension of the Cultural Revolution, the declining influence of Mao Zedong Thought, recent assertions that Marxism is not able to solve all of China's problems, and the pragmatic adoption of some capitalistic policies to speed up China's modernization give enough indications of a vacillating faith in the absolute certainty of Marxism-Leninism even among some CCP leaders.

Borrowing from Western immanentism and humanism to explain traditional Confucian thought is an attempt by the modern Neo-Confucianists to make Confucianism follow the road of atheistic humanism while still affirming the value of religion and ethics, which can only develop within the realm of human nature, morality and literature. The problem is that once having denied the transcendental principle or God, and the absolute as the foundation for benevolence, will not the essence of Chinese culture be radically changed? Furthermore, the prevalence of modern humanism and atheism in the West has already led Western culture to a critical point in history. Will modern Neo-Confucianism, in altering the essence of Chinese culture by a completely humanistic spirit, not be leading Chinese culture and society down the same path? Chinese scholars should give this question some serious consideration.

The Chinese Catholic Church is a miniscule element in the great mass of the Chinese people. However, belief and philosophy are closely related to the special characteristics of Chinese culture. Through a blending of the two, Catholic faith and philosophy can serve to help supplement what is lacking in Chinese culture and infuse it with new life. At the same time, the Chinese culture can enrich Catholic belief and thought with a new spirit and energy capable of producing results that can well make a significant contribution to universal human culture. Chinese Catholic scholars are now producing sparks which, hopefully, may one day ignite a fire that will help to guide us towards a true renewal of Chinese culture, a renewal based on heaven's mandate and in accord with the deepest aspirations of the Chinese people. (footnotes see p.15)