

**CHINESE MORAL SENTIMENTS
BEFORE CONFUCIOUS;
A STUDY IN THE ORIGIN
OF ETHICAL VALUATIONS**

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Chinese moral sentiments before Confucious; a study in the origin of ethical valuations by
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HERBERT FINLEY RUDD

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THE CHINESE MORAL SENTIMENTS BEFORE CONFUCIUS.

A Study in the Origin of Ethical Valuations.

INTRODUCTION.

I. OUR THEORY.

A. *General Statement.*

In entering upon this study we frankly accept the genetic point of view, which characterizes the modern social sciences. We assume that race characteristics must be explained in the light of race history. The experiences through which a people has passed must influence its whole view of life. The problems which any race meets in its struggle for the satisfactions of life, will have the determining influence in shaping its standards and ideals.

The desire for food gives meaning to the whole process of getting the food. Everything that will aid in this process becomes significant. Rules and customs are established with reference to this and all other necessary activities of the group.

People come to feel deeply about that which has seemed to be most significant in their history. That which has required the greatest struggle becomes the most immediate basis of sentiment. The sentiments of any people are thus a record and a product of their past life.

Even among the most primitive people the animal impulses must be controlled by the group interests. Certain acts are condemned as harmful to the group, while others are praised as most helpful. The man whose conduct is considered especially injurious becomes an outcast. He whose activity seems most valuable becomes a hero.

The type of conduct which meets the needs of the race in its particular situation is idealized. In this way the moral sentiments are built up.

These moral sentiments are the cumulative results of the race history and of the race reflection upon that history.

Hence in entering upon the study of a people's moral sentiments, we must know the historic background of its cultural life.

It is the purpose of this thesis to investigate the moral sentiments which prevailed in China before the time of Confucius,—that is before the middle of the sixth century B. C. The most essential prerequisite for this is an understanding of the external conditions of life and of the socio-religious world-view of the people whose sentiments we are to study.

B. Specific Development.

We here offer a preliminary statement of the conclusions to which our investigation leads us.

a. As to occupational influences, we shall defend the hypothesis that the Chinese never were a typical nomadic people; but that for thousands of years before Confucius, the more peaceful occupation of tilling the fields had given the foundation for their whole view of life. The evidence for this will appear in a study of the philological records and of the social tendencies which come down from the earlier times. It is in the discussion of this topic that we find our field for the most original investigation.

b. We claim also that so far as it is possible to trace their origin the Chinese were an indigenous population; that they never had to supplant another people; that there were no rivals claiming possession of the land. Apparently there were no strong, hostile neighbors pressing in upon them before the beginning of the Chou dynasty in 1122 B. C. Their early struggle was with nature, rather than men. *The stimulus to development was from within, not from without.* Their problems were domestic rather than military.

c. The family, which is everywhere a biological necessity, here became most naturally the foundation of the social order. The personal relationships of the family gave the pattern for the larger organization.

We may call that organization patriarchal, if we do not emphasise the arbitrary, individualistic

standing of the patriarch. It is the group life of the family as a whole which is the center of attention. The father symbolizes the dignity and unity of the family but has his standing *within the group*, not over against the other members. Many writers have remarked on the place of the family in Chinese society. It is for us to show its permeating influence in all the early thought life of the people.

d. We maintain that the early religion is not quite properly called monotheism or even theism, still less should it be called pantheism, fetishism, animism, or atheism. Probably the best term to describe it is *social monism*. All nature has meaning for human society, but there is comparatively little tendency to personalize or anthropomorphise natural objects. Heaven and the spiritual beings are conceived as benevolently supporting the standards of human society. But the relation of spiritual beings among themselves is never considered. This early life is singularly free from superstitious fears, having little thought of spectres, demons, devils, etc. The present life of men is the center of attention. The celestial world, if we may so speak of it, exists for the sake of men even more than men exist for it. Heaven and the spiritual beings form an aggregate complementary to human society but are never contrasted with human society.