

## THE UNITY OF MAN IN ANCIENT CHINESE PHILOSOPHY

In the history of Western thought, the philosophical study of man has been part of the philosopher's pursuits from the time of the ancient Greeks. But after a lapse of over two thousand years, the study in this field remains not much developed and its achievements are far from satisfactory. Already in 1928, Max Scheler in his *Man's Place in Nature* pointed out the troubled condition of the philosophical study of man: "Man is more a problem to himself at the present time than ever before in all recorded history... We do not have a unified idea of man. The increasing multiplicity of the special sciences, valuable as they are, tend to hide man's nature more than reveal it."<sup>1</sup> In more recent times, Paul Ricoeur, although approaching the issue from a somewhat different perspective, nevertheless came to a similar conclusion. In his essay *The Antinomy of Human Reality and the Problem of Philosophical Anthropology*, he stated: "The sciences of man are dispersed into separate disciplines and literally do not know what they are talking about."<sup>2</sup> It seems to me that part of the explanation for this

<sup>1</sup> Max Scheler: *Man's Place in Nature*, New York, Monday Press, 1961, pp. 4-6.

<sup>2</sup> *Readings in Existential Phenomenology*, ed. Lawrence and D. O'Connor, 1967, p. 390.

situation lies in the way of thinking of Western learning, with its peculiar segmentation of fields of inquiry. During this century, some branches of human sciences, such as psychology, sociology, ethnology, political science, economics and psychoanalysis, have developed rapidly. They deal with the study of man from different angles, and have really accumulated a rich wealth of data. But what man is as such is still not clear. Unless we succeed in forming a comprehensive view of man as a whole, we will not be able to have a real insight into human nature and will be lost in a mass of disconnected and isolated data which seem to lack conceptual unity. We must recognize that the sciences of man in the contemporary Western world belong exclusively to the Western cultural tradition which originated in the early Greek civilization with its own concepts of values. They are entirely divorced from the other great cultures of the world, for instance, the Indian and Chinese cultures, which are as important as the Greek culture in the history of civilization. In order to reach a deeper understanding of man, it is perhaps necessary to make cross-cultural comparative studies. Therefore a short survey of the studies of man in ancient Chinese philosophy may not be superfluous. I would like to confine my survey to the early Chinese philosophers of the pre-Qin period, not only because it is almost impossible to deal with the entire history of Chinese philosophical ideas spanning over two thousand years in an article, but also because the ancient time is the most creative and most important period in the development of Chinese thought.

## I

The history of Chinese philosophy may be characterized as intrinsically humanistic, and the unity of man can be regarded as the basis of Chinese humanism. It is no exaggeration to state that humanism came to dominate Chinese traditional thought from the very beginning of real philosophical consciousness. However, it is a special kind of humanism. With a strong emphasis on the holistic integrity and unity of man and with a concentration of man as a vehicle for fulfilling the ultimate value in the world, Chinese humanism has been developing under a specific social and cultural

background which is entirely different from that of Western countries.

As is known to all, Confucius was the founder of Chinese philosophy. He was the first to develop a true system of the philosophy of man, and thus determined the direction of, or set the pattern of, later development of Chinese philosophy. Prior to Confucius there were only fragmentary philosophical views scattered in ancient books and documents like *Shih Ching* (Book of Odes) and *Shu Ching* (Books of History), but these materials did not form an integrated system of thought. And it is really difficult to discover an emphasis on man at that time. People were preoccupied with the worship of divine beings and supernatural forces rather than the analysis of man. During the Shang dynasty and the early Chou dynasty, there was a popular belief that natural phenomena and human affairs are all under divine and supernatural control and that besides the multitude of ordinary spirits there existed a Supreme Being Heaven (*T'ien*) or God (*Ti*). Human institutions were also regarded by the ancient Chinese to be dominated by Heaven. For instance, in the *Shih Ching* it is said, "Heaven gave birth to the multitudes of people, so that they had faculties and law." And in the *Shu Ching* it is said, "Heaven, having produced the people below, appointed for them rulers and teachers." In these ancient books there are frequent references to Heaven and God, which is anthropomorphic in character. In this context, man is nothing but a plaything of the supernatural divine power. But gradually there emerged rationalism. The conquest of the Shang by the Chou in 1111 B.C. marked a transition from the old idea of Heaven and God to a new interpretation. During the Shang dynasty, the domination of man by spiritual beings had been almost total, no important human affairs could be conducted without their approval. During the Chou dynasty, however, people began to develop a new doctrine. For a ruler, a mandate from Heaven to rule is still needed, but this actually depends upon the personal virtue of the ruler himself and upon his own good behaviour rather than upon the pleasure of some mysterious spiritual beings. As it is said in the *Li Chi* (Book of Rites), "The people of Yin (Shang) honor spiritual beings, serve them ahead of ceremonies... The people of Chou honor ceremonies and highly value the conferring of favors. They serve the spiritual beings and

respect them, but keep them at a distance. They remain near to men and loyal to them.” The belief in God also underwent some kind of transformation. In previous times God was the supreme anthropomorphic deity who brought blessings or calamities on the people according to his own likes and dislikes and intervened in all important human activities. Gradually, this kind of concept was replaced by the concept of Heaven as a supreme being only in the spiritual world. Human virtue became a constant reliable factor, and man, through his moral deeds, could now control his own destiny. “Heaven is hard to depend on”. “Heaven is not to be trusted”. These statements marked the transition from the idea of dependence on Heaven to that of self-reliance of man. The authority exercised by Heaven or God over human affairs wavered, and this led to the emergence of a philosophy of man.

Confucius was the representative of this new trend of thought. Although he continued to maintain the traditional belief in Heaven and regarded himself as having been entrusted by Heaven with a holy mission, he did not further study the rule of Heaven over human affairs. To him, Heaven was the origin of social order and morality rather than the Almighty God who made all the arrangements for man. At the time of Confucius, there were a few more enlightened *literati* who held that it was no use talking much about Heaven, because “the way of Heaven is distant, while that of man is near. We cannot reach the former; what means have we of knowing it?”<sup>3</sup> Confucius had not reached such a conclusion explicitly, but in practice he had no interest in metaphysical problems and held a similar point of view on the question of Heaven. Confucius’ student Tze Kung once said: “We can hear our Master’s views on culture and its manifestation, but we cannot hear his views on the Way of Heaven.”<sup>4</sup> This shows that the Way of Heaven was not the main topic in the discussion of Confucius with his students. Moreover, Confucius’ concept of Heaven is somewhat different from the traditional one. He considered Heaven to be not only anthropomorphic, but also, in some aspects, naturalistic. An example of his naturalistic understanding of Heaven is his saying: “Does Heaven speak? The four seasons

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Tso Chuan.

<sup>4</sup> *Analects*, V, 12.

pursue their courses and all things are continually being produced, but does Heaven say anything?"<sup>5</sup> As for other spiritual beings, Confucius adopted an overt skeptical attitude. People usually held that there were certain close relationships existing between Heaven and spirits, for Heaven was regarded as the highest in the hierarchy of spirits. We can find an account of Confucius' attitude towards spirits in the *Analects*: "Fan Chih asked what constituted wisdom. The Master said, 'To give one's self earnestly to the duties due to men, and while respecting spiritual beings, to keep aloof from them, may be called wisdom'."<sup>6</sup> When another student, Chi Lu, asked about serving the spirits, "the Master said, 'while you are unable to serve men, how can you serve the spirits?'"<sup>7</sup> And again in the *Analects*: "The subjects on which the Master did not talk were:— extraordinary things, feats of strength, disorder and spiritual things."<sup>8</sup> Confucius seldom dealt with the spiritual world and had no interest in the life after death. He concentrated on man, on daily life of this world, believing that man "can make the Way (*Tao*) great", and not that "The Way can make man great". In fact, his most important contribution to Chinese thought lies in diverting attention from the supernatural to the man himself. Since then, man became the center of Chinese philosophical thought. In this regard, Confucius played a decisive role in the history of Chinese philosophy, just like Socrates did in Western philosophy. The humanistic tendency had been started before the time of Confucius, but it was he who turned it into the strongest driving force of Chinese philosophy.

Confucius was the first Chinese philosopher who posed the question of human nature (*hsing*). As is known to all, the heated discussion and debate on human nature among different philosophical schools in the pre-Qin period was an important component part of ancient Chinese philosophy and is considered essential to the development of humanistic thought. However, Confucius' teaching on human nature is very simple as we can see in the *Analects*: "By nature, men are nearly alike; by practice, they

<sup>5</sup> *Analects*, XVII, 19.

<sup>6</sup> *Analects*, VI, 20.

<sup>7</sup> *Analects*, XI, 11.

<sup>8</sup> *Analects*, VII, 20.

become very different.<sup>9</sup> It seems that he maintained a theory of natural equality. All men are equally endowed at birth with a certain quality that forms the human nature. Because men are born equal, the differences among men are, therefore, due to different environmental factors and individual efforts at self-cultivation. Education was particularly stressed as the most important means to develop the real human nature and should be accessible to everyone. Confucius said: "In teaching there should be no distinction of classes."<sup>10</sup> In this regard, Confucius' position is essentially different from that of Plato who believed that men are born unequal and education should be given only to a small number of born elite with the so-called "golden" souls.<sup>11</sup> The Confucian idea of education originated in his treatment of human nature. Since men are nearly alike by nature, they have an equal opportunity to excel in moral growth, and this depends very much on education. The high plasticity of man is one of the basic notions of Confucianism and it has had a tremendous impact on the development of Chinese thought.

What, then, is human nature as understood by Confucius? We must admit that there is no clear explanation in the *Analects*, and the systematic exposition of human nature can only be found in the teachings of later Confucians. But Confucius' doctrine of *jen* was usually interpreted as his view on human nature. Actually, *jen* is not a very ancient word, as it cannot be found in the nomenclature of the oracles. It did appear in some pre-Confucian texts and had the connotation of a ruler's benevolence or kindness to his subjects. In previous time, people used the word *jen* only occasionally, but Confucius made it the main theme of his conversation and it appeared over a hundred times in the *Analects*. And more importantly, he gave new meaning to the concept of *jen* and transformed it from a particular virtue into general virtue and highest value for human beings. For *jen* was viewed as unique to man, it could be concluded that *jen* is human nature as such. According to the interpretation of Xu Shen, the world *jen* is composed of two characters: one meaning "man" and the other

<sup>9</sup> *Analects*, XVII, 2.

<sup>10</sup> *Analects*, XV, 38.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Plato: *Republic*, III, 415a.

meaning “two”. Therefore, *jen* embraces the moral principle governing the conduct of a man in his relations to other men. As Confucius said, *jen* is to love a man, and moreover, to love all men. It usually referred to the innate affection for kin, for instance, the affection for parents, but had the extended meaning of affection for all people. To him, this kind of affection was inborn feeling. In this sense *jen* is deeply rooted in one’s very nature. In the *Analects*, Confucius said, “Is *jen* a thing remote? If I desire *jen*, *jen* is at hand.”<sup>12</sup> Therefore, *jen* may perhaps be best translated into English as “humanity”. *Jen* is regarded as the basis of human being and the root of humanity. To seek for *jen* is to return to the root of humanity. Thus, Confucius said: “The superior man seeks roots. When roots are established, then there comes the Way. Filial piety and brotherly love, are they not the root of *jen*?”<sup>13</sup> Since filial piety and brotherly love are inborn natural feelings of all men, seeking *jen* is also a natural manifestation of the nature of man.

The Confucian doctrine of *jen* marked the beginning of self-consciousness in Chinese philosophical thought. It brought into relief individuality with its initiative and independence. Although *jen* must be expressed in the relation between man and his fellow men, the starting point and embodiment of *jen* is always in individual man himself. Confucius explained to his disciples about the essence of *jen*, that is “Do not do to others what you do not want them to do to you.”<sup>14</sup> And a man of *jen* or a superior man “wishing to establish his own character, also establishes the characters of others, and wishing to be prominent himself, also helps others to be prominent”, and “to be able to judge others by what is near to ourselves may be called the method of realizing *jen*.”<sup>15</sup> In this connection, the criterion of *jen* is to be found in oneself, in one’s nature. Man is identified as a moral subject acting according to his internal aspirations instead of being governed by external restraining forces. Thus, the practice of *jen* must be spontaneous and should never be compulsory. *Jen* is thus a lofty ideal and the highest human virtue which satisfies the deep moral needs of man. It is worthwhile to aspire to become, as defined by

<sup>12</sup> *Analects*, VII, 29.

<sup>13</sup> *Analects*, I, 2.

<sup>14</sup> *Analects*, XII, 2.

<sup>15</sup> *Analects*, VI, 28.

Confucius, a man of *jen* who “does not seek life at the expense of *jen*. Some even sacrifice their lives to achieve *jen*.”<sup>16</sup>

At this point what is worthy of notice is that Confucius never attempted to develop internal human emotion one-sidedly or directed them toward mysticism. It is true that the perfection of personality depends upon continuous self-cultivation of individuals, but the goal can be attained provided that the development of the individual is in conformity with social and ethical norms which are universally recognized and accepted in society. In other words, the harmony of human relationships is the necessary presupposition of the moral growth of the individuals. And in order to maintain the balance and harmony of the individual on the one side and society on the other, self-restraint is always required. As it is said in the *Analects*, “To subdue oneself and return to propriety is *jen*.”<sup>17</sup> By Confucius, the value of the individual is fully recognized and respected, but it is to be judged in one’s fulfillment of social responsibilities rather than in the degree of his personal success. Whenever personal desire or interest goes in contradiction with one’s social responsibilities, self-restraint is the moral norm to regulate his behavior. Hence the prevention of absolute individualism which develops in the West under the influence of Christian theology.

In the Confucian theory of man, the nature of men is not simply to be comprehended and grasped by abstract thinking or speculation, but is to be fulfilled and realized by learning and social practice. Man, as an organic whole, has his own physical needs, sentiments, desires, ideas, will etc. All these combine to form an independent subject with his own personality and value. But according to Confucius, only in the real social life or in the association with others, can a man satisfy his different needs, attain his social ideals, perfect his personality, realize his own value and obtain comfort for his soul. His ultimate goal is not set up as a high and remote ideal incapable of realization. On the contrary, his goal is fully attainable in the daily life of this world. Some Chinese scholars held that this attitude could be called “practical rationalism” which constitutes an important feature of Confucian-

<sup>16</sup> *Analects*, XV, 8.

<sup>17</sup> *Analects*, XII, 1.



ism and has a deep impact on the development of Chinese thought. Practical rationalism is first of all a reasonable spirit of individuals for solving different problems that have cropped up in daily life. What is important for man is how to live his life in a practical and reasonable way, and practical rationalism helps him to adopt a cool, realistic attitude toward his social environment. Therefore, there is no need to create an imaginary City of God. Man has no need to escape from this real world, to shun daily life, to seek the release of the soul or to find spiritual consolation in an ideal world. Under the influence of Confucius, China never for long came under the rule of theocracy, or of mysticism and fanaticism. This spirit of dealing with concrete matters in daily life is undoubtedly one of the characteristics of Chinese philosophy dating from the time of Confucius.

## II

After Confucius' death, ancient Chinese philosophy reached its peak in the Warring States period. Chinese philosophers continued their exploration in the theory of man. Progress in this area is indicated in the book *Kuan-Tzu*. *Kuan-Tzu* has been attributed to the noted statesman Kuan Chung, who lived before 645 B.C. and was certainly a predecessor of Confucius. But Chinese scholars have long argued and proved that it could not have been written by Kuan Chung or by any single author. It is really a composite work, in which different chapters represent different views held by varied philosophical schools, and most of the chapters were probably written in the fourth and third centuries B.C. Some chapters of *Kuan-Tzu*, namely *Neiye*, *Hsinshu A*, and *B* and *Baihsin*, are closely related in content and could be regarded as the works of a certain philosophical school. But there are different views about the authors of these chapters. Some scholars think that they were written by Sung Hsing (or Sung Kieng, Sung Yung, different names for the same person) and Yin Wen. Both authors were the contemporaries of Mencius, but their academic activities in Chi-hsia Academy were probably a little earlier than those of Mencius. Other scholars disagree with this view, maintaining that the authors of these chapters belonged to the materialist school of

Chi-hsia Academy. This remains a controversial issue, but both sides do agree on one point, that is, the authors of these chapters were deeply influenced by the Taoist thought of Lao Tzu.

Among the philosophical schools of ancient China, Confucianism occupies the first place and Taoism comes second. Chinese thought and civilization in general would have been utterly different if the book of Lao Tzu had not been written. In contrast to Confucianism, Lao Tzu advocated the idea of naturalism. It represents the further development of the sceptical attitude toward the traditional concept of a ruling Heaven, denying not only Heaven's anthropomorphic character, but also its ethical and idealistic significance. Its interpretation of Heaven is purely naturalistic, claiming that Heaven has nothing to do with human affairs, "Heaven and earth are not humane (*jen*)."<sup>18</sup> And moreover, there is something more original than Heaven, that is *Tao*, the eternal unchanging principle lying behind the phenomenal world. In Lao Tzu's book we read:

"There was something undifferentiated and yet complete,  
Which existed before Heaven and Earth.  
Soundless and formless, it depends on nothing and does not  
change.  
It operates everywhere and is free from danger.  
It may be considered as the mother of the universe.  
I do not know its name; I call it *Tao*.  
If forced to give it a name, I call it Great."<sup>18</sup>

Through *Tao* all things, beginning with Heaven and Earth, were brought into being. And the process of producing things is as follows:

"*Tao* produced the One.  
The one produced the two.  
The two produced the three.  
And the three produced the ten thousand things.  
The ten thousand things carry the *yin* and embrace the *yang*, and  
through the blending of the material force *ch'i*, they achieve  
harmony."<sup>19</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Lao Tzu, ch. 25.

<sup>19</sup> Lao Tzu, ch. 42.

The producing of the ten thousand things from *Tao* is by no means a purposeful and conscious action, but a purposeless and unconscious one. For *Tao*, “no action is undertaken, and yet nothing is left undone”. In some sense, *Tao* undertakes no action, because it has no purpose. But at the same time nothing is left undone, because it has produced all things in the universe. What *Tao* accomplishes is not done consciously, but is simply done spontaneously. As the product of *Tao*, man occupies a specially important position, he has been put on the same level with *Tao*, Heaven and Earth. As it is said in Lao Tzu, “*Tao* is great. Heaven is great. Earth is great. And the man is also great. There are four great things in the universe, and man is one of them.”<sup>20</sup> However, the Taoist refused to treat man as if he were at the center of the universe. Man is only a part of Nature and the best way of living is to return to Nature, that is, to have fewer desires, submit to Nature and live in tranquillity. Not only the ordinary people, but also the rulers should follow the principle of *wuwei*, which means non-action. A ruler will govern best by governing least. Knowledge is also to be discarded, because human knowledge is always relative and one-sided and, moreover, it brings artificiality into life, thus causing discontent and unhappiness. But Taoism is not a philosophy of withdrawal. The ideal man is still living in this world. He is to follow Nature, and by doing so, his nature is fulfilled. He, as simple as an infant, is to forget the self, and by this means to enter the sphere of undifferentiable oneness with all creation, thus to obtain absolute personal freedom.

The authors of the above-mentioned chapters of the book *Kuan Tzu* absorbed the fundamental ideas of Lao Tzu and further developed and transformed them into a systematic theory of man. This theory was based on their cosmology, which had given a new interpretation of the origin and composition of the universe, that is the doctrine of *jingch'i*.

*Ch'i* was mentioned in the book of Lao Tzu twice, but there was no explanation about what is *ch'i*. The relation between *Tao* and *ch'i* was not clarified either. *Kuan Tzu* answered these questions and threw new light on the creation of all things in the universe including man. The authors of these chapters of *Kuan Tzu*

<sup>20</sup> Lao Tzu, ch. 25.

interpreted *Tao* by means of *ch'i*. They hold that although *Tao* is undefined, formless and infinite, it is by no means supernatural. Actually, *Tao* is *ch'i*. According to their understanding, *ch'i* is infinite matter with a motive force in itself. As the primordial natural force, *Tao* is indefinite. *Ch'i*, in comparison with *Tao*, is more definite. The whole world is a product of the perpetual motion of *ch'i*.

According to the doctrine of *jingch'i* expounded in *Kuan Tzu*, *ch'i* is the origin of all things in the universe, including natural and material phenomena, as well as spiritual and mental phenomena. *Ch'i* is divided into two kinds, namely, *jingch'i* and *hsingch'i*. The so-called *jing* is the essence of the more refined sort of *ch'i*. It constitutes the Heaven. And it is equivalent to the traditional concept of *yang*, which represents the male principle of light, warmth, dryness, movement, etc. On the other hand, *hsingch'i* constitutes the Earth and is equivalent to the concept of *yin*, which represents the female principle of darkness, cold, moisture, quiet, etc. The interacting and combining activities of *jingch'i* and *hsingch'i* produce everything of the universe. The differences of things and phenomena are attributed to the different compositions of *ch'i*. Man is also a compound of *jingch'i* and *hsingch'i*. "When a man is created, he receives *jing* from the Heaven and *hsing* from the Earth. Man is the combination of these two. Life is produced from harmony. If there is no harmony, there will be no life."<sup>21</sup> In this harmonious combination of human life, *jing* is the more active part, which constitutes the spirit. The perfection of a living being depends upon the quantity of *jing*; the more *jing* it has, the higher it rises in the scale of being. For a man, the more *jing* he receives from Heaven, the wiser he is. As it is said in *Kuan Tzu*, *jing* gives life to the five grains and creates the order of the stars. When floating between Heaven and Earth, we call it spirit; when stored in the breast of a person, we call it a sage. In contrast to *jingch'i*, the *hsingch'i* constitutes the body of man. The human body is a "house" for *jing* to dwell in. In order to lead a good life, it is necessary to maintain the harmonious relation between *jing* and body. Otherwise, if *jing* abandons the body, there will be an end of human life.

<sup>21</sup> *Kuan Tzu, Neiye.*

In the history of Chinese philosophy, the *Kuan Tzu* was the first to pose the issue of the mind and body and try to give it a solution from the materialist viewpoint. Both spirit and body are made of *ch'i*, thus, the material *ch'i* is the basis of human life and all mental phenomena are its result. "When *ch'i* and *Tao* concur, then there is life. With life there comes thought; with thought, there comes knowledge." In the light of this interpretation, the relation between mind and body is really the relation between two different sorts of *ch'i*. Man, as is every other object in the universe, is totally a physical being, because the spiritual activities of man in the final analysis are also the activities of *ch'i*. In other words, the authors of *Kuan Tzu* believed that all mental phenomena could be reduced to physical ones. No doubt, their theory bore the imprint of the times, that is, the primitive simplicity and naivety of the way of thinking, but their interpretation of *ch'i* did play an important role in the future development of Chinese philosophical thought.

Another contribution of *Kuan Tzu* was in the field of epistemology. Emphasis had been put on the study of the knowing subject and of the relation between subject and object. In *Kuan Tzu* it is said that "all men desire knowledge but no one searches for the means to obtain it. What they know is the 'that'. But the means to obtain it is the 'this'. If they do not cultivate the 'this', how can they know the 'that'?"<sup>22</sup> This is an important viewpoint; previously, Chinese philosophers were not interested in making a clear distinction between the knowing subject and the object of knowledge, between the "this" and the "that". Now arises the question of how the subject can have knowledge of the object. Knowledge is regarded as the product of the interaction of these two. To the authors of *Kuan Tzu*, sensation is the only source of knowledge and sense organs are the means to obtain knowledge, but these organs are regulated by a special organ, *hsin* (heart, mind). As we know, earlier great Chinese philosophers, Confucius, Lao Tzu and Mo Tzu, said nothing about *hsin* or mind, the first systematic elucidation of *hsin* was probably made by *Kuan Tzu*. According to this book, besides the sense organs, there is another mental organ in the human body. This mental organ is engaged in certain types of activities such as thinking, judging and directing

<sup>22</sup> *Kuan Tzu, Hsinshu A.*

actions. And in ancient China, due to the scanty knowledge of the structure of the human body, these activities were supposedly controlled by the heart. Hence comes the name of *hsin*. In contrast to the sense organs, the mental organ *hsin* is more decisive in obtaining knowledge. "When our *hsin* is well regulated, our senses are well regulated too. When our *hsin* is at rest, our sense organs are at rest as well." What regulates them is *hsin*. Thus, although sense organs are also indispensable as the means to obtain knowledge, they have to submit themselves to *hsin*. "In the body *hsin* holds the position of Prince." In order to have correct knowledge, one must have a correct *hsin* lying within. If *hsin* rests in *Tao*, the nine apertures will function correctly, but if a person's *hsin* becomes filled with desire and lust, the eyes will not see and the ears will not hear. Therefore, the art of *hsin* consists in controlling the apertures through non-assertiveness. Thus, "Cleanse the mansion of your *hsin*! Open your gates of perception! Get rid of selfish desires and remain silent! The spirit will accordingly come to reside within you."<sup>23</sup>

It is necessary to mention that, according to *Kuan Tzu*, *hsin* was understood functionally and did not have any special metaphysical status as the word "mind" in Western philosophy usually had. *Hsin* and the sense organs were equally gifts of nature, they were all the products of *ch'i*. In Greek philosophy, for instance, in the Platonic theory of man, the body and mind or soul are regarded as different substances.<sup>24</sup> Mind becomes an eternal entity distinct from the body and is capable of existing even after the death of the body. Apparently, the Platonic concept of mind was associated with an immaterial soul and is easy to lead to religious belief. On the contrary, the theory of mind expounded in the book *Kuan Tzu* was based on the materialistic understanding of *hsin*. Therefore, it was irreligious by its very nature.

We can see clearly that *Kuan Tzu* represents a further development of some fundamental ideas of Lao Tzu while correcting some of his mistakes, such as his negligence of the sensual experience and his preference for the attainment of the state of unconsciousness. But its significance is more than that, for

<sup>23</sup> *Kuan Tzu, Hsinshu A.*

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Plato's *Timaeus and Phaedo*.

it is an important link in the development of ancient Chinese philosophy.

### III

The theory of man was expounded in the philosophy of Mencius and Hsun Tzu. Both of them were distinguished figures of Confucianism in the Warring States period and have generally been considered as representing the two different tendencies of idealistic Confucianism and naturalistic Confucianism in ancient Chinese philosophy. And it is worthy of note that both of them were one-time eminent scholars in Chi-hsia Academy, and were most likely familiar with the views expressed in the above-mentioned chapters of *Kuan Tzu*. In fact, we can find some linkage between them.

Fundamentally speaking, Mencius' thought was derived from Confucius, but he developed Confucianism along idealistic lines. Similarly, he assimilated some concepts from other philosophical schools and interpreted them in the light of idealism. For instance, the so-called *ch'i*, which is the origin of the world in *Kuan Tzu*, was transformed by Mencius and became something spiritual rather than a natural and material entity. *Ch'i* developed into *haoran zi ch'i*, which means vital spirit. Mencius says: "it is *ch'i*, supreme great, supreme strong, which when properly cultivated without sustaining injury, pervades all between Heaven and Earth."<sup>25</sup> This *haoran zi ch'i* is not obtained from the external world, but originates in the nature of man. Thus the main task is to develop and fulfill the human nature rather than to explore the external world, "to know thyself" rather than to seek objective truth. Mencius regarded man as an organic whole while recognizing the existence of different parts in a human body. The senses of hearing and of sight which give us sensual experience constitute that part of man which is shared by men in common with animals. Another nobler part of man is the mind (*hsin*), which is capable of thinking, judging and evaluating. Only this part differentiates man from animals. It is peculiar to human beings and is given by

<sup>25</sup> Mencius, IIA, 2.

Heaven. Hearing and seeing do not imply thinking, sometimes they are obscured by the things of the external world. But the faculty of the mind is thinking, and only by thinking does the mind seize the correct view of things and can discern between the nobility and baseness, rightness and wrongness, propriety and impropriety of an object or event. Like *Kuan Tzu*, Mencius held that desires and lust are harmful to the mind, therefore he also recommended that people should reduce their desires in order to cultivate the mind and thus to preserve their human nature. Mencius said, "He who has exercised his mind (*hsin*) to the utmost, knows his nature. Knowing his nature, he knows Heaven."<sup>26</sup> This can only be achieved through personal cultivation. If we can extend our mind to the utmost, then we shall discover that "all things are complete within us". In this sense, we can not only know ourselves and the external world, but also identify ourselves with the universe as a whole.

Thus, Mencius made a step forward, advancing from the concept of the unity of man to that of the unity of man and Heaven. In another classic of Confucianism, the *Doctrine of the Mean*, we can find a similar idea. It states, "Only those who are absolutely sincere can fully develop their nature. If they can fully develop their nature, they can then develop the nature of others. If they can fully develop the nature of others, they can then fully develop the nature of things. If they can fully develop the nature of things, they can then assist in the transforming and nourishing process of Heaven and Earth. If they can assist in the transforming and nourishing process of Heaven and Earth, they can form a trinity with Heaven and Earth."<sup>27</sup> The ultimate trinity with Heaven and Earth stated here is another expression of the unity of man and Heaven. As a theory dealing with the relationship between man and nature, the doctrine of the unity of man and Heaven is unique in the history of philosophy. It had a great impact on the development of Chinese thought, especially on Neo-Confucianism of the Sung dynasty.

Mencius delved deeply into the problem of human nature, he was the first in the history of Chinese philosophy to make concrete analysis of the nature of man and at the same time give a

<sup>26</sup> Mencius, VIIA, 1.

<sup>27</sup> *Doctrine of the Mean*, 22.



comprehensive criticism of different views on human nature. In this regard, his debate with Kao Tzu was very well-known and played an important role in the evolution of Chinese ethical thought. Kao Tzu held that what is inborn is called nature, and that man's nature is neither good nor evil. He compared human nature to the willow tree and righteousness to a wooden cup or bowl fashioned from willow. The willow tree itself has no natural tendency to be a cup or bowl, for the same reason human nature is simply raw material without any predisposition to morality. And again, he compared man's nature to whirling water. If a breach is made in a pond at the eastern end, the water will flow to the east. If a breach is made at the western end, it will flow to the west. Man's nature is indifferent to good and evil, just as water is indifferent to east and west. Besides Kao Tzu, there was another view claiming that man's nature may be made good or evil and that some men's natures are good and some men's natures are evil. Mencius criticized all these views and insisted that human nature is originally good. He recognized that there are a number of constant activities which man shares with other animals, such as eating, drinking, sleeping and sex. He said, "What man differs in from the lower animals is but small. The mass of people cast it away, while superior man preserves it"<sup>28</sup> "If men are well fed, warmly clad, and comfortably lodged, without being taught at the same time, they become almost like beasts."<sup>29</sup> This means that Mencius did recognize some similarities between man and other animals, but maintained that these are not the real human nature, because the nature of man is something which is peculiar to man and differentiates man from other animals. Man possesses morality and is essentially a moral being—this is the real nature of man. Mencius stressed that "*jen* is man." That is his concise definition of man. In *The Works of Mencius*, it is written, "If you let people follow their feelings (original nature), they will be able to do good. If man does evil, it is not the fault of his natural quality. The feeling of commiseration is found in all men; the feeling of shame and dislike is found in all men; the feeling of respect and reverence is found in all men; and the feeling of right and wrong is found in

<sup>28</sup> Mencius, VIB, 19.

<sup>29</sup> Mencius, IIIA, 4.

all men.”<sup>30</sup> To Mencius, the feeling of commiseration implies the principle of *Jen* (humanity); that of shame and dislike, the principle of *yi* (righteousness); that of respect and reverence, the principle of *li* (propriety); that of right and wrong, the principle of *zhi* (wisdom). Humanity, righteousness, propriety and wisdom are not infused into us from outside. We originally have them with us. Therefore, the moral principles originate in human nature itself. They are innate: “Seek and you will find them, neglect and you will lose them”. Among the four principles of morality, Mencius took *jen* as the basis of the other three, although all these four principles are essential to man. For Mencius, it is self-evident that all men have a mind which cannot bear to see the suffering of others. He said, “Take a man who suddenly sees a child about to fall into a well; invariably he will feel a sense of alarm and distress. This is not because he wants the gratitude of the child’s parents. Neither may he seek the praise of his neighbors and friends, nor because of fear of blame if he does not try to save the child.”<sup>31</sup> This feeling of commiseration is deeply rooted in human nature, and a man without such feeling is not a man. So that man’s nature is naturally good just as water naturally flows downward. There is no man without this good nature and the moral consciousness in different persons differs only in degree, not in kind.

Mencius stressed the universality of the moral sense, comparing it with other senses. He said, “there is a common taste for flavor in our mouths, a common sense for sound in our ears, and a common sense for beauty in our eyes. Why then do we refuse to admit that there is something common in our minds also?”<sup>32</sup> The thing that we have in common in our minds is the sense of principle and righteousness. The sages only apprehended before me that of which my mind approves along with other men. Therefore, the sage and we are the same in kind. Every man can be perfect through his own effort, and in this sense, all men are basically equal.

However, according to Mencius, the statement that human nature is originally good does not mean that all men are really

<sup>30</sup> Mencius, VIA, 6.

<sup>31</sup> Mencius, IIA, 6.

<sup>32</sup> Mencius, VIA, 7.

equal in morality. The goodness in human nature is the kind of goodness which is in the embryonic stage rather than something which has already become an established fact. He called the feeling of commiseration, and that of shame and dislike, respect and reverence, right and wrong, the “four beginnings” of virtue. That means, if properly developed, they can become the four cardinal virtues of man, which are: humanity, righteousness, propriety and wisdom. Hence the need for education and self-cultivation. Since men are nearly alike by nature, it is obvious that men’s natural differences have little effect on their future conducts and achievements in society. The different performances of different men have resulted from different circumstances. As Mencius said, “In good years most of the children of the people are good, while in bad years most of them abandon themselves to evil. It is not because of any differences of the natural qualities conferred on them by Heaven that they are so different.”<sup>33</sup> To him, human nature is originally good, and evil is not original but results from the underdevelopment of one’s original quality. There is a potentiality to be good in everyone’s nature, and every individual can become a sage. “All things are complete in oneself.” The question is how to develop oneself fully and in an all-round way. Mencius seemed to have put more emphasis on the individual than Confucius, for he gives more importance to the moral power which is inherent in one’s nature. By making the innate integrity of man the basis of moral development of individuals, Mencius gave a psychological basis for humanism which marked a decided advancement in Confucianism.

On the question of human nature, the doctrine of Hsun Tzu is diametrically opposed to that of Mencius. Hsun Tzu is the last great thinker of the Chi-hsia Academy and one of the most distinguished figures of Confucianism in the Warring States period. As a matter of fact, in the ensuing centuries he exerted far greater influence on Chinese thought and politics than did Mencius. While Mencius professed the original goodness of human nature, Hsun Tzu held that human nature is originally evil. Their different views on human nature is the inevitable outcome of their different world outlook. Mencius attributed ethical value to

<sup>33</sup> Mencius, VIA, 7.

Heaven, and believed that human nature is a part of Heaven. Thus his doctrine of the original goodness of human nature is metaphysically justified. Hsun Tzu differed fundamentally from Mencius: he attempted to interpret Heaven in the light of naturalism. In this regard, he came close to Lao Tzu. To Hsun Tzu, Heaven was not a moral principle or a spiritual entity, as conceived by Mencius, but Nature itself with its immutable laws. Since human nature is a product of Heaven, it likewise cannot contain a moral principle. He said, "Heaven operates with constant regularity. It does not exist for the sake of *Yao* (the famous legendary sage-king) nor does it cease to exist for the sake of *Chieh* (the notorious wicked king). Respond to it with peace and order, and good fortune will result. Respond to it with disorder, and calamity will result."<sup>34</sup> Thus, Heaven had nothing to do with human activities. It was man himself who was responsible for his own life. Order and chaos were not due to Heaven. Natural factors were the same at the times of either the sage-king or the wicked king. Yet the former brought about order while the latter brought about chaos. Nature itself could not cause misfortune and impoverishment, all these things could not be blamed on Heaven. Therefore, it is important to distinguish the function of Heaven from that of man, and one who knows the different functions of Heaven and man may be called a perfect man.

Although Hsun Tzu stressed the recognition of the distinction between Heaven and man, he did not reject the idea of the unity of Heaven and man, but he gave it a new interpretation. He said, "Heaven has its seasons, Earth has its wealth, and man has his government. This is how they are able to form a triad."<sup>35</sup> His understanding of the trinity of man with Heaven and Earth is different from the theory set forth in the *Doctrine of the Mean*, because it is based upon a naturalistic explanation of the relationship between man and nature. To Hsun Tzu, man is undoubtedly a part of nature and one of the products of natural processes. He said: "The fixed stars rotate in succession, the sun and moon shine alternately, the four seasons follow one another, *yin* and *yang* effect their great transformations, and the wind and

<sup>34</sup> Hsun Tzu, ch. 17.

<sup>35</sup> Hsun Tzu, ch. 17.

rain spread over all things. Each of the ten thousand things attains its harmony, and thus grows. Each obtains its nourishment; and thus achieves full development. We do not see their activities but we do see their results.”<sup>36</sup> Human beings are no exception, and they are also one of the results of the activities of Heaven. “When the office of Heaven is established and the work of Heaven is done, the body will be provided and the spirit born, and the feeling of like, dislike, pleasure, anger, sorrow, and joy embodied. These are called the natural feelings. The ear, the eye, the nose, the mouth, and the body are, each in its own way, able to respond to external things, and cannot be interchanged. These are called natural organs. The mind (*hsin*) occupies the cavity in the center to control the five organs. This is called the natural ruler.”<sup>37</sup> Thus, body and mind combine together to form an organic whole, both of them are the work of Nature. The unity of man is established on the basis of naturalism. In this unity, the body is primary but the mind plays the decisive role in the process of knowing. Hsun Tzu held that knowledge comes from the meeting of the knowing faculty with the objects of the external world. The first step of knowing is through the sensory organs. Relying upon the sense, one can distinguish the same things and the different things. This is the beginning of knowledge. The next step of knowing is by means of thinking, which is the faculty of mind (*hsin*). The mind possesses an overall understanding, but it must always rely upon the data received by the senses. “The mind collects the knowledge of the senses. It is because the mind collects knowledge that it is possible to know sound through the ear and know form through the eye. But the acquisition of knowledge must also depend on the natural organs, which first register it according to its classification. If the five organs register it without knowing what it is, and the mind acquires it without understanding it, then everyone says there is no knowledge.”<sup>38</sup> If a man fails to use his mind, then black and white may be right before his eyes and he does not see them, thunder and drums may be sounding in his ear and he does not hear them. It is true that if there is no body, there will be no mind at all. But at the same time, mind should be regarded as the ruler of the body

<sup>36</sup> Hsun Tzu, ch. 17.

<sup>37</sup> Hsun Tzu, ch. 17.

<sup>38</sup> Hsun Tzu, ch. 22.

and the master of its godlike intelligence. The body is more or less passive and can be forced to do something; while the mind is active and dynamic and it gives commands without being subject to any command. It is the nature of the mind that no prohibition may be placed upon its selections and it cannot be made to change its ideas. Therefore, by means of the mind man can make his own judgement about what is right and wrong, what is true and false and what is good and evil. This sense of righteousness is peculiar to man and it makes man stand high above all other things. As Hsun Tzu said: "Water and fire have *ch'i* but no life; plants and trees have life but no knowledge; birds and beasts have knowledge but no sense of righteousness; man has *ch'i*, knowledge, and also a sense of righteousness. Therefore, man is the most valuable one in the universe."

For Hsun Tzu, only through the mind can man understand *Tao*. But how can the mind understand *Tao*? He replies, only when it is empty, unified and still. Obviously, this idea came from Lao Tzu and *Kuan Tzu*, but Hsun Tzu modified it, offering a new interpretation. To him, to be empty, unified, and still does not mean a passive attitude in the knowing subject. The emptiness of the mind means "that which does not allow what is already stored away to injure that which is about to be received"; the unity of the mind means to concentrate on one thing in order to avoid the diversion of the mind; and the stillness of the mind means "that which does not permit dreams and confusion to disturb one's knowledge." This is by no means a theory of non-activity. On the contrary, Hsun Tzu emphasized the subjective initiative of man in the process of knowing the external world and, moreover, the use of knowledge to control nature. As it is said in his essay *On Nature*: "Instead of regarding Heaven as great and admiring it, why not foster it as a thing and regulate it? Instead of obeying Heaven and singing praise to it, why not control the Mandate of Heaven and use it?"<sup>39</sup> Man, as a part of the trinity with Heaven and Earth, is the product of Nature, but after he has a good command of the knowledge about Nature, he can make use of the natural law and transform Nature. On the question of the relation between man and Nature, Hsun Tzu was the first to put forward the idea of

<sup>39</sup> Hsun Tzu, ch. 17.

controlling and transforming nature with such explicitness.

Now, we return to Hsun Tzu's doctrine of human nature, which has hitherto been considered irreconcilable with that of Mencius. In the book of Hsun Tzu, there is a chapter entitled *The Nature of Man is Evil*, in which we can read: "The nature of man is evil; his goodness is the result of his activity. Now, man, by nature, at birth loves profit. If this tendency is followed, strife and rapacity result and deference and compliance disappear. Man at birth is envious and hates others. If these tendencies are followed, injury and destruction result and loyalty and faithfulness disappear. Man at birth possesses the desires of ear and eye, and likes sound and beauty. If these tendencies are followed, lewdness and licentiousness result, and the pattern and order of propriety and righteousness disappear. Therefore, to follow man's nature and his feelings will inevitably result in strife and rapacity, combine with rebellion and disorder, and end in violence."<sup>40</sup> Perhaps, this is the strongest argument for the doctrine of "original depravity" of man which can be found in ancient Chinese philosophical works. Certainly, it is entirely different from the Christian concept of "original sin." From this point of view, Hsun Tzu concluded that in order to transform man into a good citizen the civilizing influence of teachers and laws is absolutely necessary. His doctrine exerted tremendous influence on the Legalistic School and it was further developed by his pupil Han Fei Tzu, but unfortunately turned out to be the theoretical justification of political authoritarianism.

It seems that Hsun Tzu's theory of man was based more on actual human and social conditions and less on abstract speculation of the ideal man. We can see the beginning of psychology in his analysis of man. He held that a real man has emotions and desires as well as mind. Man should be regarded as a unity of these three. The emotions such as love, hate, joy, anger, sorrow, pleasure, etc., are the materials of human nature. Desires are the reactions of the emotions to external stimuli. Emotions and desires are natural and should not be eliminated or suppressed. But if they are given free rein, the result will be disastrous. Therefore, they need to be regulated and to be kept in proper restraint. This

<sup>40</sup> Hsun Tzu, ch. 23.

is the function of the mind, which controls and guides emotions and desires in a reasonable way through its power of cognition. "When, the emotions being so, the mind selects from among them, this is called cognition. When the mind cogitates and can act accordingly, this is called the acquired."<sup>41</sup> Since there is no innate moral principle in human nature, morality must be something acquired. If the nature of man is evil, it is necessary to achieve propriety and righteousness, and, with the help of teachers and laws, to encourage people to be correct and disciplined. "The sage-kings of antiquity, knowing that the nature of man is evil, and that it is unbalanced, off the track, incorrect, rebellious, disorderly, and undisciplined, created the rules of propriety and righteousness and instituted laws and systems in order to correct man's feelings, transform them, and direct them so that they all may become disciplined and conform with *Tao*."<sup>42</sup> But for Hsun Tzu, education was still regarded as the key to the solution of the problem, and the functions of laws and punishments were rather secondary. Believing that human nature is evil, he had never lost confidence in man and had never rejected the possibility of men to become good through their own efforts as the Legalists did.

Hsun Tzu criticized Mencius for his ignorance about the nature of man and his failure to distinguish between man's nature and his effort. Actually, Hsun Tzu's understanding of human nature is different from that of Mencius. To Mencius, man's nature is not that which is inborn, but is that which is peculiar to man, and in this sense, the essence of man. But to Hsun Tzu, "that which at birth is so, is called nature." Man's nature is understood as the product of Nature, it cannot be learned and cannot be worked on; while something acquired does not belong to man's nature, and it can be learned by men or can be accomplished through work. Hence the difference between human nature and human activity. Because propriety and righteousness are produced by the sage and can be learned by men, it is obvious that they are not man's nature but the result of human activities. By nature a man does not originally possess propriety and righteousness; hence he makes strong efforts to learn and seeks to have them. Thus, from the point

<sup>41</sup> Hsun Tzu, ch. 22.

<sup>42</sup> Hsun Tzu, ch. 23.



of view of Hsun Tzu, it is clear that the original goodness of human nature is unfounded. But he did not realize that his concept of human nature is not the same as that of Mencius. In fact, when Mencius referred to the original goodness of human nature, he really meant that there is a potentiality, a possibility to become good in man's nature, and strange as it may sound, Hsun Tzu's view is close to that of Mencius. Although Hsun Tzu insists that the nature of man is evil, he maintains that everyone has the same possibility to become good by his own effort. He said: "Any man in the street can become sage-king Yu. What does this ancient saying mean? I say that Yu became sage-king Yu because he practised humanity, righteousness, laws, and correct principles. This shows that these can be known and practised. Every man in the street possesses the faculty to know them and the capacity to practise them. This being the case, it is clear that every man can be Yu."<sup>43</sup> Since the ability to know is present in human nature, every man has a potentiality to become good. The sage is not inborn, but a man who has reached the state of highest goodness through accumulated effort. As Hsun Tzu pointed out, if, in his constant practices and studies for a long period, a man concentrates his mind, has unity of purpose, thinks thoroughly and discriminately, and accumulates goodness without stopping, he can finally become as wise as the gods, and form a trinity with Heaven and Earth. The goal is about the same for both Hsun Tzu and Mencius, their differences lie in the means for reaching it. While Mencius advocated personal moral self-cultivation, Hsun Tzu emphasized the development of intellectual capacities and the importance of law and social control.

From the above we can see that Hsun Tzu attached great importance to the intellectual development of man. But for him the importance of the intellectual development is manifested not only in the process of knowing the outside world, but also in doing, in using the knowledge for the benefit of mankind. Hsun Tzu was an optimist, insisting that by means of knowledge man could make himself master of his own destiny. He believed that if a man understands and grasps *Tao*, if he has penetrating insight into all being and understands their true nature, studies the period of order

<sup>43</sup> Hsun Tzu, ch. 23.

and disorder and comprehends the principles behind them, he can govern all beings and master the great principle and all that is in the universe. This is his ideal of the Great Man.

Generally speaking, Hsun Tzu summed up the development of ancient Chinese philosophy in pre-Qin period. He inherited and, at the same time, criticized the philosophical thought of different schools, absorbed what was useful to him and established his own school of Confucianism. The study of man reached new profundity in his philosophy, and this should be regarded as one of his main contributions to the development of Chinese philosophy.

#### IV

In this paper I have offered a brief historical review of the theory of man set forth in the works of early Chinese philosophers. Needless to say, my account is far from complete. But I hope from the above narration we can see some basic characteristics of the theory of man in ancient China.

1. Early Chinese philosophers always treated man as an organic whole, and the basis of this organic whole is the unity of body and mind. Body and mind are distinct from each other, but they are regarded as different organs of man, which are sense organs and a mental organ. They have different functions in determining different human behaviors. Purposeful behavior is determined by the mind, by one's apprehension and desire for some future goal; while natural behavior is determined by sense organs, by prior physical causes. Chinese philosophers usually hold the viewpoint of the so-called interactionism, maintaining that both body and mind can causally affect each other, that events in the body can produce mental occurrences and mental events can produce bodily behavior. This is also one of the basic ideas of Chinese traditional medicine. However, there is no philosophical dualism in ancient China, because body and mind are always understood functionally and do not have any special metaphysical status. Therefore, body and mind should be regarded as component parts of an organic whole. There is no split or antagonism between body and mind, and the unity of man has been theoretically justified.

2. In ancient Chinese philosophy, the unity of man is closely linked with the idea of the unity of man and Heaven, or in other words but with the same connotation, the idea of the trinity of man with Heaven and Earth. The nature of man is pertaining to Heaven, and, accordingly, man and Nature constitute a harmonious whole. We can see that there is a naturally close relationship between man and the universe, and that the nature of one embodies the principles of the other. Man had been elevated to the same level as Heaven, and the concept of God as supreme anthropomorphic deity no longer existed in Chinese philosophical thought following the time of Confucius. In ancient Chinese philosophy, we can find no place for a bifurcation of human existence by either confronting it with a God to be submitted to, or by contrasting it with an alienated material world to be fought with. This is one of the main reasons for the non-development of religion and natural sciences in China.

3. According to early Chinese thinkers, human nature can only be realized and developed in social life, in human relationships. Whether the nature of man is good or evil, it has to be cultivated or transformed in society by education and social activities. It is characteristic of Chinese humanism that men are regarded as ethically, morally and self-consciously interactive individuals with the need to exist in social groups. Everyone is derivative from the social relations to which he belongs, and is bound to each other in the social community with which his destiny is closely connected. The social ideal of Chinese philosophers is the harmony of human relationships which enables men to realize that every man's individual place, value and significance lie in his association with other men, that is, in social life. In this sense, Chinese philosophy is highly secularized, for it has been primarily devoted to the quest for the solution of human problems. In the study of man, Chinese thinkers put emphasis on ethics and did not have equal interest in metaphysics.

4. In the theory of man, the Chinese philosophers of different schools propagated the idea of the natural equality of men in contrast to the doctrine of natural inequality, which was the classical heritage from Plato and Aristotle and was paramount in the West until modern times. The concepts of man in early China could be applied to all men without exception, because Chinese

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thinkers held that all men are born equal, that all men have the same human nature and that all men have the same potentiality and possibility to become an ideal man, a sage. Whether human nature is good or evil, there are no fundamental differences in men at birth. The differences among them which emerged in their later development should be attributed to their own efforts and other environmental factors. It is true that early Chinese philosophers were not the advocates of social equality, because they believed that a social hierarchy was natural and necessary. But they demanded an aristocracy of merit, maintaining that merit should be the main criterion in awarding political and economic privileges. This was undoubtedly a progressive idea more than two thousand years ago.

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