INTRODUCTION

By Professor Soothill

It has sometimes been thought that Chinese civilization is entirely different in its essential principles from that of the West. None will dispute that there are great and far-reaching differences. Chinese writing, for instance, notwithstanding the very early though imperfect development of a phonetic system, has not developed an alphabet and remains, in consequence, attractive to the eye but the despair of most Western students, and a difficult vehicle of intellectual expression.

In general, however, Chinese development has followed the normal human course, differing in form but not in fundamentals from our own. In agriculture, in industry and trading, in the use of money and of banking, the line of development has been similar to that of other advancing peoples. In the courtesies of human association the Chinese are not behind other races. In literature, there is both prose and poetry, as with us: and they have produced essay-writers and historians, biographers, novelists, and dramatists. In art their fundamentals are those of the rest of the world; perhaps less realistic in execution but more suggestive than in the West. In music they have remained in the early stages out of which the West has grown; but, however undeveloped, the elements of music are theirs. In all these things they have reached in due time a limit, and then experienced a fresh impulse; but the principles of growth have been the same as elsewhere.

In government, perhaps more than in any other branch of civilization, the surface differences appear most marked: but it is hoped that the evidence assembled in this book will indicate that, even in this respect also, and in the origins and processes of Kingship, the experience of the Chinese nation has not differed fundamentally from that of other races of mankind.

Kingship, which was the primary theme of this work, has come to have unique significance for us to-day. Having dominated the world for thousands of years, it has apparently expired almost in a night, and in both east and west. In the early decades of our twentieth century, monarchy of the theocratic order was shaken to its foundations. It was Portugal in the West and China in the East, the latter in 1911, which led the way with the overthrow of their dynastic thrones; and, shortly after, Russia, Austria and Germany followed with the

downfall of Czar, Kaiser, and Emperor; and after these fell the sultan-caliphate of Turkey. Such a dissolution of imperial Kingship, sudden, startling, unforeseen, both in orient and occident, lends peculiar interest to a study of its origin and growth, and to a consideration of its purpose in human development. As China was the country in which it has had the longest continuous history as an institution, it seemed to me probable that researches into her earliest conceptions of Kingship might not only prove of interest, but might throw light on a subject which, with its corollary of Divine Right, has in all parts of the earth been the basis of much political and religious activity.

This search, however, opened before me so many other lines of inquiry that the theme, as first conceived, became inadequate. The more I dug, the more the roots were exposed; and it became evident that it would be impossible to limit the inquiry to Kingship, for Kingship, like the trunk of a tree, was the medium uniting the roots and branches of Chinese culture and practice. My search, which has been extensive, does not pretend to be exhaustive, and has necessarily been confined to Chinese traditional history as recorded in Chinese literature. Confirmation or refutation of any deductions set down in this book will only be obtained when archæologists can wield their spades in China under conditions which will leave posterity no reasonable room for doubt. The area in which Chinese culture arose is, in general, known; its delimitation is made the more possible by reason of the traditions and records of the people; and China presents one of the richest possible fields for such research. Indeed, light may thereby be thrown upon the origins of kingship in the west; on the office, for example, of the Roman Regia whose site was excavated about 1905, and whose resemblances to the institution known in China as the Ming T'ang or "Hall of Light " are referred to in later chapters.

Ultimately, of course, it will be the Chinese archæologist and anthropologist, liberated in these modern times from worn-out superstitions and fears, endowed with the invaluable heritage of nativity in speech, and descendant of generations of scholars whose reputation is second to none in the world, who will bring the most welcome contribution.[1] But neither the Chinese archæologist, nor any other "field-worker", can

[1] After Professor Soothill wrote, the Japanese invasion of China drove her scholars into evacuation north, west, and south: and the result has been a phenomenal increase in anthropological research in the remoter parts of China. (Eds.)

be independent of traditional records or the whisperings, however faint, of history. Apart from these, and including also legend and myth, archæological work would depend on random finds. But it is as useless merely to dig as to believe. It is true that at times traditions may mislead; but for all that they remain the sole magnetic needle pointing to the buried treasure, the wand which indicates where lie the hidden springs. In this book, therefore, the tràditions and earliest written histories of the Chinese people will not be treated cavalierly and as of small account, but with the respect which research into the foundations of other civilizations, from Troy to Ur, has proved such traditions and records to deserve. Till the spade has done its work early Chinese "history" must remain in a balance between credibility and credulity; but it will be enlightening to discover how far the archæologist and the early Chinese historian complement or contradict each other.[1]

In the meantime, however, we are fortunate to have also at our hands the findings and suggestions of comparative anthropology. What Sir James G. Frazer in his work on magic and religion in his volumes entitled *The Golden Bough* called "homeopathic or imitative magic", I have termed throughout this book "mimetic magic", following the modern anthropologists such as Dr. Marett, of Exeter College, Oxford, and it seems to me to explain and clarify the significance of the ritual of China's early leaders, wise men, and kings.[2] It is, therefore, more especially with this light shed on the traditions, myths, and legends of Ancient China, and in co-operation with the archæologists, that we can approach the subject of early state religion in China, with its admixture of magic and morality, in the hope of evoking some trustworthy concept of the beginnings of one of the oldest and greatest civilizations of the world. Perhaps we may come to understand thereby some of the reasons which have kept the Chinese a homogeneous people, with a stable civilization throughout the centuries, and despite many changes of dynasty and rulers.

I am indebted to many advisers and helpers in my researches in this subject:

To Dr. T. L. Yuan, Librarian of the National University, Peking, for obtaining for me a copy of that valuable guide, the *Ming T'ang Ta Tao Lu*;

[1] See *The Shang-Yin Dynasty and An-Yang Finds*: W. Perceval Yetts. *Journal of R.A.S.*, July, 1933.

[2] Professor Soothill was President of the Oxford University Anthropological Society, 1931, and for many years a constant attendant at its meetings.

To Dr. Fotheringham and Mr. Knox-Shaw, both of Oxford University, for astronomical advice;

To Mr. Cyril Bailey, M.A., of Balliol College, Oxford, for enlightening suggestions regarding the Roman Regia;

To Professors Sayce and Langdon, for Sumerian comparatives;

To Professor Griffith, Oxford University, for Egyptian comparatives;

To Professors Granet and H. Maspero, Père Wieger, and many other seekers and learners in every land, for their notable works on similar subjects;

To Miss Mabel Buchanan and Miss G. M. Bevan, for the loan of books bearing on these researches;

And especially to those scholars of the past, East and West, students in their own generation of China's philosophy and thought, into whose labours, translations, and commentaries, we have all of us entered.

WILLIAM EDWARD SOOTHILL.

Oxford University, 1934.