

A NOTE ON DUBS' NOTE IN A.M. III, 2

by EDUARD ERKES

Highly interesting though Professor Dubs' remarks are, I am sorry that I can neither agree with his results nor with his method. The starting point of his investigations is the widely accepted but entirely erroneous assumption that, the older a text is, the older also are the notions contained in it. This is, however, a mere formalistic point of view. The essential question regarding the age of a notion is when it originated, not when it was first written down. This question can only be answered when the ethnological age of a conception is determined. Now the notion of the two souls, which I have shown to form the basis of the phrase *sz-wang*, is common to all or nearly all primitive peoples. Therefore it is far older than other philosophic ideas we find connected with this expression. Therefore the sense in which Lao-tse and other Taoists use this phrase must be older than the sense we find in the *Tso-chuan*, no matter whether the *Tso-chuan* was written earlier or later than Lao-tse. (In my opinion, the *Tso-chuan* was later, for I have shown in my review of Waley's "Way and Its Power" in *Artibus Asiae* V (1935), pp. 288-307, that Lao-tse cannot be later than 500 B.C., so that the date of about 300 B.C. for him is in every respect impossible.) That the ideas expressed in the *Tso-chuan* are indeed much younger than those of the Taoist writers is clearly shown by the passage adduced by Professor Dubs from IX, 24, where the kindred expression 死而不朽 "to die but not to rot" is explained as pertaining to the immortality of fame and influence. For "to die and not to rot" means, as Granet has correctly, though somewhat obscurely, stated, that the bodily soul, *po* 魄, is alive as long as the body has not decayed. The explanation given in the *Tso-chuan* simply shows that the original meaning of the phrase was then already forgotten and had given way to a more "sublime" conception. The fact that an old text, such as the *Tso-chuan*, contains a notion later than certain Taoist texts, which are not much earlier or even later, is easily explained if we remember that this text took its origin in a different social sphere. Like other historical works, the *Tso-chuan* was written by a highly cultivated person who, like the historical characters whose views he reproduces, had long forgotten or at least did not want to remember certain popular beliefs and gave them a new philosophical and ethical meaning. Taoist literature originated in a much lower social class than did the *Tso-chuan* and retained many popular ideas after they had become obsolete in more learned circles. Then what counts is not the age of a text but the age of an idea. The explanation by the *Shuo-wen*

tells us nothing concerning the origin or the original meaning of the phrase, but merely shows how it was understood or rather misunderstood by the scholars in Han times. Then we cannot begin this sort of research with the *Shuo-wen* but must end it there.