"*LI*" AS IDEAL PATTERNS OF CULTURE IN CHINESE TRADITION

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I

Until the May Fourth Movement arisen in 1919 (Chow, 1960), the "*li*"* was traditionally considered in a broader sense as the essence of the ways of men, unique standards of conduct, or accepted codes of socio-political as well as ethico-moral order, which were cultivated for living and existed ever since ancient times, as potential guides for human behavior. They were essentially concerned with the characterization of culture now variously termed by social scientists in an attempt to bring out facets of total-culture analysis as master-ideas, themes, premises, etc. (when cognitively considered); as values, value attitudes, interests, etc. (when affectively considered); as ideals, orientations, sanctions, etc. (when conatively considered), and as configurations, integrating factors, socio-psychological constellations, etc. (when otherwise considered). All these terms are attempted to express the holistic or total characteristics of a culture as to the kinds of behavior in the various forms of social relationships and interactions the society counts "normal", "good", "right". In other words, the *li* represented in traditional China ways, rules, or norms of behavior held to be desirable by the members of the society; or, in short, what anthropologists have called ideal patterns of culture which are the imperatives and optatives developed by the members of a society themselves. They represent the consensus of opinion on the part of

* The term "*li*" has been variously translated into English as rites or ritual, ceremonies or ceremonial, propriety or decorum, ettiquete or courtesy, manners or customs, rules or norms of conduct, institutions and so forth, each of which does suggest some of its ordinary meanings, but none except all mixed together could connote its amply implicated meanings as an all-embracing virtue. (see Ruey, 1967:52–56).

the society's members as to what people should do or say in particular situations, if they conformed completely to the standards set up by their culture(Kluckhohn, 1941: 109–130; Linton, 1945: 34–35).

Those ways, rules, or norms related above were originated from human feeling and developed by the members of ancient society probably during times, as the Confucianists generally believed to be, when Emperors *Yao*(堯, reigned 2357?–2258? B.C.), *Shun*(舜, reigned 2255?–2208?B. C.); Kings *Yu*(禹, reigned 2205?–2298? B.C.), *T'ang* (湯, reigned 1783?–1754?B.C.), *Wen*(文, reigned?–1135?B.C.), *Wu*(武, reigned 1134?–1116?B.C.); and Duke *Chou* (周公, as Prince-Regent reigned 1115?–1109?B.C.) ruled. Subsequently, they were transmitted from generation to generation till the time of Confucius (551?–479 B.C.) who expounded them in a somewhat systematic way. As a result, there emerged, apart from several other works, the Three Classics of *Li*: the *Chou Li* (周禮) or literally "Rites of the *Chou* Dynasty", the *I Li*(儀禮) or "Rituals and Rites", and the *Li Chi*(禮記), or "Records of Rites". The *Chou Li* is, as the work exists today, considered as somewhat fitful reconstruction in the Confucian tradition of the governmental systems of the *Chou* Dynasty (1122?–222 B.C.) and a source of much information as well as misinformation on that period (Biot, 1853). The *I Li* deals with ceremonies and rituals regarding one's birth, puberty, marriage, death, burial, sacrifice, mourning, memorials, as well as visit of one to another, district symposium, archery meeting, banquet missions, and so forth (Steele, 1917). The *Li Chi* is a compilation of a miscellany of earlier materials pertaining to rites and rituals (Legge, 1885) which are, as it was, the means and ends of the Confucian conception of socio-political and ethico-moral order. By way of summary, we may say that the contents of the *li* cover all aspects of culture.

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Etymologically, the word *li* (禮<豊) is a kind of sacrificial vessel used for offering sacrifice to deities and ancestors, and thereby meaning to serve deities including ancestrial spirits, Heaven, earth, mountains, rivers, and other natural phenomena. Sentimentally, all kinds of services concerning ceremonial and sacrificial observances are involved with the *li*. Thus the *li* is religiously concerned by origin and thereof socially, economically, politically, as well as morally concerned by its extention. The term is therefore concerned with all aspects of culture. The *Li Yün* (禮運) or "The Origin and Development of *Li*" says:

> Drinking and eating, male and female, are what man needs the foremost; death and exile, poverty and suffering, what man hates the utmost. Thus needs and hatreds are the principal elements in man's mind which, however, kept hidden inside and cannot be inferred or measured. The good or the bad of one's mind depends upon his mental set without visible manifestation. How could it be conducted in a uniform way without *li*? (Cf., Legge, 1885, VII:380–381.)

This indicates that the *li*, viewed as the key to the minds of people, was formulated to provide a means of social control (see Ruey, 1967) for the purpose of conducting them in a uniform way. This way of *li* involves three basic problems of human existence and is concerned with the following three relationships (cf. Boas, 1938:4–5; Keesing, 1958:191):

1. Man to nature: especially technological and economic dimensions, e.g., drinking, eating, etc.
2. Man to man: especially dimensions of social institutions and interpersonal relations, e. g., marriage, family, etc.
3. Man to mind: especially dimensions of ideas and thoughts, e.g. death, religious belief, world view, etc.

That the *li* concerning the relationship of man to nature began with drinking

and eating is many-sided. It includes beside the procuring and preservation of food and beverage, the securing of shelter, the ways in which objects of nature are used as implements and utensils, and so forth. The *Li Yün* tells the story as follows:

> Formerly the ancient kings had no houses. In winter they lived in caves which they had excavated, and in summer in nests which they had framed. They knew not yet the transforming power of fire, but ate the fruits of plants and trees, and the flesh of birds and beasts, drinking their blood and swallowing the hair and feathers. They knew not yet the use of flax and silk, but clothed themselves with feathers and skins. The later sage-kings then arose, and began to take advantage of the benefits of fire. They moulded the metals and fashioned clay, so as to rear platforms with structures on them and houses with windows and doors. They toasted, grilled, boiled, and roasted. They produced wine and beverage. They dealt with the flax and silk so as to form linen and silken fabrics. They were thus able to nourish the living, and to make offerings to the dead, to serve the spirits of the departed and the deities (cf. Legge, 1885, Ⅶ:369–370).

In most of these things the Chinese people followed, as it were, the example of those ways established by the early sages.

The *li* that pertains to the relationship of man to man commenced, as recorded in the *Li Chi* and the *I Li*, with the capping; to have its root in marriage; to be most important in mourning and sacrifice; to confer great honor in audiences at the royal court and in the interchange of visits at the feudal courts; and to be promotive of harmony in the festivals and celebrations of archery (cf. Legge, 1885, XLI:430; refer also to Steele, 1917). These were the principal points of the *li* concerning the cultural phenomena relating to the interrelation between members of a single society and between those belonging to different societies. The bonds

of family, of tribe, and of a variety of social groups were included in it, as well as the gradation of rank and influence; the relations of sexes and of old and young.

As for the li in regard to the relationship of man to mind, it is clearly stated in the *Chi-yi* (祭義) or "The Meaning of Sacrifices" and the *Chi-T'ung* (祭統) or "A Summary Account of Sacrifices." The former says:

> The gentleman, in harmony with the cource of Heaven, offers the sacrifices of spring and autumn. When he treads on the dew which has descended as hoar-frost, he cannot help a feeling of sadness, which arises in his mind, and cannot be ascribed to the cold. In spring, when he treads on the ground, wet with the rains and dews that have fallen heavily, he cannot avoid being moved by a feeling as if he were seeing the departed beings (cf. Legge, 1885, XXI:211).

The latter says:

> Sacrifice is not a thing coming to a man from without; it issues from within him, and has its birth in his mind. When the mind is deeply moved, expression is given to it by the li; and hence, only men of virtue can give complete exhibition to the idea of sacrifice (cf. Legge, 1885, XXII:236).

Both of the two statements tell us that the *li* commenced, in this aspect of culture, with sacrifice as coming from the mind, and ended with the display of its influence in the conduct which was concerned not only with religious belief, but with all the manifestations of life contained in the first two relationships. These are of intellectual and emotional nature and may be expressed in thought and feeling as well as in action.

It should be noted that the three relationships are closely interrelated. That interelation presents the problem of cultural life between the various aspects of culture, leading to the problem of the relation between individual and culture.

It involves socio-psychological problems in relation to the holistic characteristics of a culture. The understanding of that relationship requires a knowledge of the basic attitudes or dominating idea of culture controlling individual and group behavior. Confucianists called such attitudes or ideas as the *li*.

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Being considered as the very way of man and an all-embracing virtue, the *li* was so important that Confucius emphasized with the assertion that "one who does not know the *li* cannot play his role" (literally, "cannot take his stand", cf. Legge, 1961a: 354; Ku, 1898:182; Waley, 1938:233; Ware, 1955:125). While *Yu-tzu* (有子), a virtuous disciple of Confucius, said of *li* as the excellent quality in the ways prescribed by the ancient kings(cf. Legge, op. cit., 143; Ku, op cit., 4–5; Waley, op. cit., 86; Ware, op. cit., 23), *Hsün-tzu* (荀子, 306?–218? B.C), who represents the right wing of the Confucian School, said of it as the highest achievement of the way of man (cf. Watson, 1963:95). Thus the *Ch'ü Li*(曲禮) or "Summary of the Rules of *Li*" says:

> *Tao*,(道), *teh* (德), *jen* (仁), *yi* (義) cannot be fully carried out without the li; nor are teaching and oral lessons for the rectification of customs complete; nor can the clearing up of quarrels and discriminating in disputes be accomplished; nor can the roles between ruler and subjects, the high and the low, father and son, elder and younger brothers, be determined; nor can learners for office and school students, in serving their masters and teachers have attachment for them; nor can majesty and dignity be shown in assigning different places at court, in governing armies, and in discharging the duties of office so as to secure the operation of the laws; nor can there be sincerity and gravity in presenting the offerings to spiritual Beings on occasions of supplication, thanksgiving, and the various sacrifices (cf. Legge, 1885, I:63–64).

This statement implies that the *li* is that kind of the means of social control by which the moral order can be established, the socio-political order may thence-forward be expected to be properly maintained, and the service in the temple reverently performed, but vice versa without it.

The moral order refers to the organization of human sentiments into judgments as to what is right (Cooley, 1909:54; Park, 1952:22–23), while morality is a set of principles on which such judgments are based (Firth, 1951:183). The first two Chinese words, *tao* (道, the way or principle) and *teh* (德, virtue) in the above citation, when combined into one term, may mean morality or moral virtues. The next two Chinese words, *jen*(仁, love, loving other men, or benevolence) and *yi* (義, righteousness, rightness, or justice), can be said to be two all-round virtues, two synthetic concepts regarding morality, which are in some measure like the law in the sense that both are obviously concerned with more compulsive categories in conduct relating to such concepts as right and wrong, good and evil, duty, justice. Nevertheless, the former is concerned with the control and regulation of the use of socio-cultural forces, and the latter with differentiated governmental institutions to handle enforcement and adjudications.

The *li* as an all-embracing virtue is most closely associated with the two all-round virtues *jen* and *yi*. Confucius said in reply to his best virtuous disciple *Yen Hui* (顏回): "The tempering of oneself and return to the *li* constitute *jen*" (cf. Legge, 1861a:250; Ku, 1898:95; Waley, 1938:162; Ware, 1955:76). When talked about *Chün-tzu* (君子) or "gentleman", the Master said: "He who takes *yi* as his substance, and put it into practice by the *li*, is really a gentleman" (cf. Legge,op. cit., 299–300; Ku, op. cit., 137–138; Waley, op. cit., 197; Ware, op. cit., 101). Thus Mencius often talked about *jen* along with *yi*, while *Hsün-tzu* spoke of *li* together with *yi*.

It should be added that the all-embracing *li* is concerned with all kinds of

virtues. The *Li Ch'i* (禮器) or "The *Li* in the Formation of Character" says: "While the important rules of *li* are 300, and the smaller rules are 3000, the result they all lead is one and the same" (Legge, 1885, VIII:404). As annotated by Cheng Hsuan (鄭玄, 127–200 A.D.), what the "one and the same" meant was the virtue "*ch'eng*", (誠, honesty or sincerity). The *Chung Yung* (中庸) or "The Doctrine of the Mean" explains "*ch'eng*" as "the way of Heaven" and the attainment of *ch'eng* is "the way of man" (cf. Legge, 1961a:413; Lin, 1942: 856; Hughes, 1942:127; Mei, 1960:134; Chais, 1965:315). The *Ta Hsueh* (大學) or "The Great Learning" talks about "*ch'eng*", saying: "only when knowledgies extended are thoughts *ch'eng*; only when thoughts are *ch'eng* are minds justified" (cf. Legge, 1961a:359; Hughes, 1942:146; Mei, 1960:129; Chais 1965:295). Confucius talked repeatedly, aside from *hsiao* (孝) or "filial piety", *ti* (悌>弟) or "fraternity", *chung* (忠) or "loyalty", *hsin* (信) or "reliability", etc., about *chih* (智<知) or "wisdom", *jen* (仁) or "love", and *yung* (勇) or "courage", which are called in the *Chung Yung* or The Doctrine of the Mean as "the three *tah teh*" (三達德) or three universally recognized virtues. Earlier than Confucius, *Kuan-tzu*, (管子), Minister of the *Ch'i State* (齊國), talked about *li*, (禮), *yi*, (義), *lien* (廉) or "incorruptness", and *ch'ih* (耻) or "(sense of) shame", as four pillars of national maintainance (國之四維). Later than Confucius, Mencius said of four senses as four beginnings of the four virtues—*jen*, *yi*, *li*, *chih*. The Works of Mencius says:

> The sense of commiseration and compassion marks the beginning of *jen*; that of shame and dislike, the beginning of *yi*; that of modesty and complaisance, the beginning of *li*; and that of right and wrong, the beginning of *chih* (cf. Legge, 1861b:202–203; Ware, 1960:69).

By adding the virtue *hsin* (信) or "reliability" to the four virtues of Mencius, *Tung Chung-hsu*, (董仲舒, 179–104 B.C.), systematizer of Confucianism, called them as *wu-ch'ang* (五常) or "five constants" in the sense of what the social

scientist calls cultural universals.

All the virtues related above have been the principal constituting elements of the *li*. They have been the moral judgments of the good of human conduct. They have provided the normative ideas controlling more or less individual and group behavior. They have by and large been achieved through proper training and discipling—hence the term "*li-chiao*"(禮教)or "instructions of *li*". They have been the basic principles of child-rearing and moral education in traditional China. In short, they are the essence of Confucianism and ideal patterns of Chinese culture. Except those of the radical *Taoists* (道家), *Moists* (墨家), and, of course, most Communists, they are expected by almost all of the Chinese people, especially Confucianists and intellectuals, to be fitted into the actions of the members of a society in order that an ethico-moral order might be established with an expectant result of producing a peaceful and stable socio-political order in the society. However, they had only been causatively effective at times, and never been fully carried out in the past, (see Wright, 1959, 1960, 1962, 1964). The questions of how could the traditional ideal patterns of Chinese culture be adapted to the present situation and how could they be carried out into effect remain to be explored.

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