

The Wisdom of Old China

Masters of Chinese Political Thought,
edited by Sebastian de Grazia, *New
York: the Viking Press, 1973. 430 pp.*
\$3.95 (paper).

HERE IS A COMPACT yet comprehensive collection of writings by ancient Chinese philosophers (all before the third century B.C.) that represent the very best in the rich cultural heritage of China. In a sense, this is not a book to read so much as a book to ponder over. The wisdom in it transcends both time and space, for it shows the universality of human intelligence. For the novice, the volume affords a panoramic view of the breadth of the minds of ancient Chinese thinkers. In the serious student, the selections as usual will not fail to evoke a

sense of awe and admiration for their intellectual depth. They are like some of the herbal roots which, the more you chew on them, as the Chinese saying goes, the more flavorful you find them to be. The intrinsic value in them is universal and therefore appealing to the human mind, whatever the cultural background.

I believe there are two tests a volume of selected writings should meet, namely, comprehensiveness and representativeness. The former shows the compiler's knowledge of the literature in the field; the latter indicates his bias or lack of it. Dr. de Grazia clearly has passed the first test with flying colors, for his selections encompass the cream of the Chinese canonical texts, including the venerated Five Classics (*Book of Changes*, *Book of Documents*, *Book of Songs*, *Book of Rites* and *Spring and Autumn Annals*) and the Four Books (*Great Learning*, *Doctrine of the Mean*, *Analects* and *Mencius*) of the orthodox Confucianist school, and also the works of Hsun Tzu, that heterodox Confucian disciple who boldly disagreed with his mentor by affirming the evil nature of man. Masters of other schools of philosophy, including Taoism, Moism and Legalism, are generously represented. Mo Tzu, the arch enemy of orthodox Confucianism, for example, receives ample coverage. In advocating what he claimed to be "universal love" from a utilitarian point of view, Mo Tzu attacked family and thus challenged the very ethical foundation of Confucianism. The editor rates Mo Tzu as one of the "most original and interesting thinkers" for "sheer boldness and diversity." In addition, Dr. de Grazia has included selections from lesser thinkers such as the hedonist Yang Chu, who has been traditionally despised by mainstream Confucianists and thus suppressed. Sun Tzu, the ancient Chinese military genius who wrote what must have been the world's first comprehensive book on strategy, is also introduced. It is no secret that Mao Tse-tung has drawn heavily upon Sun Tzu for his ideas on guerrilla warfare.

Fittingly, selections from the canonical texts and other Confucian classics take up about one half of the volume while the rest of the book is devoted to masters of the other three schools and to Sun Tzu. Professor de Grazia has undertaken no translations of his own, but uses available English versions, making only minor alterations in them where he sees fit.

One must keep in mind, however, that the editor's emphasis is on politics. As Dr. Frederick Mote, the noted classicist at Princeton, points out in the preface, the selections here are not in all cases those which a Sinologist might make. Professor de Grazia, being a political scientist steeped in the West's intellectual traditions, has searched China's past with another kind of eye. Hence his inclusions and omissions here are of interest. Having combed the writings of the various masters, the editor freely chooses what he considers the appropriate passages which at times might not convey the full dimensions of a particular work. This appears to be the case in several of the Confucian classics. For example, in *Shu Ching* (*Book of Documents*), one searches in vain for the Chapter of "T'ai Shih" ("Great Declaration") that records an episode of the early Chou Dynasty (1122 B.C.) in which occurs the famous and highly significant passage "Heaven sees what my people see; heaven hears what my people hear." In *Li Chi* (Ritual Records), another of the Confucian canons, the editor has chosen not to include the important section on "Ta T'ung" ("Great Unity") in which remarkably democratic and utopian ideas are expressed, ideas that captivated the minds of nineteenth century reformers as well as revolutionaries from K'ang Yu-wei to Sun Yat-sen. In the *Book of Mencius*, the editor leaves out Mencius' detailed discussion of a government of benevolence based on an equitable system of land distribution and its utilization known as the *ching-i'en* ("well-field" system). All this, it appears, is highly relevant to the development of Chinese political thought in this seminal period and

therefore might have merited Professor de Grazia's consideration.

Professor de Grazia does point out the profound influence of Taoism on Chinese thinking and he includes in this volume extended selections from *Tao Te Ching*, the most important source book on this ancient Chinese philosophy which teaches that one should follow the eternal way of the nature by freeing oneself from all man-made social conventions. He also devotes considerable space to the writings of Chuang Tzu, which had a great impact on Zen Buddhism and on Chinese art. Witty, imaginative and full of fantasy, this Taoist recluse wanted to smash all Confucian morals and ethics. He is at his best when poking fun at the serious-minded Confucian scholar-officials whom he regarded as vain, hypocritical and downright foolish in claiming moral absolutes while blind to the relativity of things.

The Legalists talked about "weakening" the people, by which they meant making people docile and obedient. Translated into modern terminology, it means sacrificing individual interest to the interest of the state.

A weak people means a strong state and a strong people means a weak state. . . .
If a weak people are even weaker, the army becomes doubly strong. . . . One (the government) becomes doubly strong and attains supremacy.

This passage from the *Book of Lord Shang* certainly has a very familiar ring to it and is highly relevant today. For in an ideological sense, humankind is still in the midst of the perennial struggle between the advocates of individual interest and of group (state) interest which also means the continued struggle between capitalism and socialism. Although the ancient Legalists have long since taught us the "correct" answer, the struggle is raging today with ever-increasing force and the issue is far from settled. In the final analysis, it concerns the quality, or meaning, of life. We know that while unrestrained pursuit of

individual interest would ultimately bring on a new age of the jungle inhabited by clothed savages, the total denial of individual integrity and existence would likewise reduce us to nuts and bolts in a dehumanized machine. In either case, the essence of humanity is missing. In an age when people are increasingly concerned about the quality of human life, the answer may very well lie in the Confucian approach, as embodied in the Doctrine of the Mean, a doctrine of moderation, balance and human reasonableness.

Some minor mistakes and oversights in the book are to be noted. Chu Hsi, the towering Confucian philosopher, lived in the twelfth century A.D., not B.C. (p. 9.) The editor finds the title of the Confucian classic *Tso Chuan (Commentary of Tso)* to be "of uncertain meaning." (p. 86.) It is a commentary on Confucius' *Ch'un Ch'iu (Spring and Autumn Annals)* written by a man named Tso Ch'iu-ming and hence his name was made part of the title. Professor de Grazia surmises that Confucius "must have been married." (p. 112.) Indeed he was; his lineal descendant of the 77th generation, K'ung Teh-ch'eng, is now a professor of classics at the National Taiwan University. Because the selections of various classics are translated by no less than thirteen persons, the lack of uniform terminology is understandable. However, some translators appear to have taken too much liberty, and some translations of terminology are too important not to have the original Chinese included in parenthesis. For example, *chun-tzu* is translated by E. G. Hughes as "man of true breeding" (p. 189) while others have commonly translated it as "gentleman" elsewhere in the book. Hughes also translates *t'ien-hsia* freely as "Great Society" (pp. 189, 190, 192) while the two Chinese characters simply mean "under heaven" in a physical sense without the value-ridden connotation of the term "Great Society." Elsewhere in the book *t'ien-hsia* is indeed translated as "all-under-heaven." (p. 381.) Dr. de Grazia's free rendering of the Taoist classic

Tao Te Ching as the *Book* (Ching) of the *Way* (Tao) and *Power* (Te) is debatable, for the character *te* means "virtue," not "power" in the conventional sense. Ts'ao Ts'ao, the powerful political leader and general of the third century at the end of the Han Dynasty, was not king of Wei (p. 318.) Although *de facto* ruler of the State of Wei, he never usurped the imperial title but contented himself with that of prime minister. It was his son, Ts'ao P'ei who, upon Ts'ao Ts'ao's death in A.D. 220, assumed the title of emperor.

The relevancy of ancient Chinese political philosophy to present-day political institutions in China is inescapable. Many people have given us the benefit of their interpretations. Some insist that behind the Marxist garb little has changed in that the present "new wine" is essentially contained in an "old bottle." Others tell us that there is clearly a break with the Chinese past, since Confucius has been denounced as a feudal reactionary and Peking has consistently claimed to be the true guardian of Marxism-Leninism. Between the two extremes there are dualists of all shapes who believe in both continuity *and* break with varying degrees. Professor de Grazia falls into this third category, as he realizes that to break a tradition so long enduring and so strong as that of China is very hard. Incidentally, Professor de Grazia's interpretation of Mao Tse-tung's "Snow" as an attempt to "break" with "model kings" of the past appears to be a misreading of this well-known poem. In haughtily dismissing the emperors of the Ch'in, Han, T'ang, Sung, and Yuan Dynasties, Mao is not making a break, but is showing his utter contempt for their lack of intellect and vision in comparison with his own.

Professor de Grazia has rendered a useful service in providing us with this convenient collection with a central theme. For many, to wander once again in these timeless and fathomless passages can be a joyful experience of spiritual renewal with some therapeutical effect in today's chaotic world. But the words of these ancient

masters are more than just either soothing or appalling; they also bespeak the unfortunate frailties of human nature in that, more often than not, it is the appalling words that have been quietly followed and the soothing words to which lip service has been paid through the centuries. This only goes to prove the validity of another ancient Chinese saying: "Good medicine tastes bitter in the mouth; sincere advice sounds offending to the ear."

Reviewed by TA-LING LEE

The German Antitheses

The Life and Death of Adolf Hitler,

by Robert Payne, *New York: Praeger Publishers, Inc., 1973. 623 pp. \$12.95.*

FOR SEVERAL DAYS recently, I set up a routine for myself that I am sure no one else has ever thought of before. In the morning I sat down with a biography of Hitler; in the afternoon, when my patience was likely to be weaker, I turned to a biography of Johann Sebastian Bach. Crazy? Incredible? Not completely. I am a teacher of modern European history. So I read the biography of Hitler, a new one by Robert Payne, because I am supposed to know something about Hitler. I read the biography of Bach, the old one by Philipp Spitta, because I wanted to. It was my reward for doing my duty to Hitler. Of course, the life work of Bach is a splendor of European history. Unlike the great monuments in the world of the visual arts, it is a splendor that is still probably invulnerable to the worst excesses of human destructiveness. The domination in music—mostly posthumous—which Bach eventually gained was appropriate and inevitable. Especially in counterpoint he had a genius that looks today like the culmination of