

RELIGION AND POLITICS
IN THE CHINA
OF THE TS'IN AND THE HAN

When, in the year 221 B.C., China found itself unified under the authority of the lord of Ts'in, the latter decided that his title of *king (wang)* no longer corresponded to his actual glory. After deliberating with his counselors, he decided that from then on his title would be Houang-ti, an expression which we translate as *emperor*. And if the dynasty founded by Ts'in Che houang-ti was ephemeral,¹ the title *Houang-ti* was destined to remain that

Translated by T. Jaeger.

[*Editorial note.* In order not to delay publication, it was not possible to render the Chinese names in this article in the usual English transliteration.]

¹ The Ts'in Dynasty founded by Ts'in Che houang-ti collapsed in 207 B.C. For good résumés of Chinese history and civilization, see *Aspects de la Chine*, Volume LXIII of the Bibliothèque de Diffusion of the Musée Guimet (Paris, 1959), in which are gathered the talks given on Radio Française by several specialists in 1954 and 1955.

of the Chinese monarchs until the revolution of 1911. This term, formed by two characters, was a neologism; the monarchs of preceding historical dynasties, Yin and Tcheou, were kings (*wang*).² But if the double expression was new, *houang* and *ti* were two very ancient words, belonging to religious terminology.

In the beginning, *houang* seems to have designated the brilliance of the rising sun; in the most ancient texts it is used almost exclusively as a characteristic of Heaven or of deified ancestors, in the sense of *shining* or *august*. But, at the time when Ts'in Che houang-ti took the imperial title, *houang* had changed its meaning, and designated more or less mythical sovereigns placed at the origins of history. One spoke of the Three August Personages (San Houang) who preceded the five sovereigns or emperors called Ti. There were also three divinities considered to form a triad of Three August Personages, and it is this triad which was referred to in deliberating on the title of the new monarch. This divine triad included the August Personage of Heaven (T'ien Houang), the August Personage of the Earth (Ti Houang) and the Supreme August Personage (T'ai Houang) who was superior to the other two. These were the old divinities of heaven and earth, who had always been and never ceased to be the principal objects of official worship, under another name. The Supreme August Personage seems to have been an original construction of the theologians of the province of Ts'in, an entity transcending the principles Yin and Yang, of heaven and earth, a sort of personification of the T'ai-ki (Supreme Roof) or of the Tao of the philosophers.

The title of Ti (sovereign, emperor) also had a long history. The Ti had originally been the ancestors of the first royal houses of China, particularly those of Yin. All these Ti were subordinated to a supreme Ti, the most ancient among the ancestors, the Chang-ti who was assimilated to heaven and was also called Celestial

² The Chang or Yin Dynasty is the first that one can consider historical; it remained in power until about the middle of the eleventh century B.C. Traditional history places a Hia Dynasty before the Yin, but no one knows whether or not it really existed. The Tcheou Dynasty succeeded that of the Yin and remained in power, at least in theory, until 249 B.C. These three dynasties, Hia, Yin and Tcheou, are sometimes called the three royal dynasties, because their sovereigns bore the title of king (*wang*).

Emperor (T'ien-ti). It is because heaven and the ancestors were one and the same that only the king, and then the emperor, had the power and the right to offer them sacrifices. At an indeterminate time one begins to speak of the series of Five Emperors who succeeded the Three August Personages; legendary or mythical personages, the Ti deserved their title because they were considered to be the ancestors of various princely families. They were also the object of particular veneration and were set before the princes as models, because they were the founders of civilization, the inventors of institutions. And so one came to forget that Ti was properly an appellation reserved for dead and deified persons and, when the Tcheou Dynasty was dying, ambitious princes who had already long usurped the title of king began to pretend to that of Ti as well. And so in 288 B.C. king Tchao of Ts'in named himself Ti of the West, and proposed that the king of Ts'i take the title Ti of the East. This attempt was only ephemeral, but two years later the princes of Ts'in, Tchao and Yen, leagued together against Ts'i, sought the titles of Ti of the West, the Center and the North. In 257 it was still the king of Ts'in, whose power increased steadily, who pretended to the dignity of Ti. This last title thus became, little by little, in the mind of the people, that which the future monarch would bear, that which realized the unity to which all the thinkers aspired.

In taking the title of Houang-ti, the first emperor meant to affirm a power which brought together at the same time the virtues of the holy sovereign founders, the virtues of the Three August Personages and those of the Five Emperors. For these virtues were not all the same; each ancient sovereign had a personality. A theory had even been accredited according to which the August Personages possessed a purer virtue than the Emperors, and from the origin of the world and the time of the Houang, the cosmic, social and moral order had never ceased to go downhill. Ts'in Che houang-ti no doubt believed that he was recreating the order that reigned at the time of the August Personages.

But, above all, Ts'in Che houang-ti wanted to realize unity. In modern terms, we would say that he wanted to institute a sole central power in contrast to the dispersion of the preceding centuries. But for the thinkers of that time the idea of unity, of center, could only be conceived in mystic values.

And so it was that when the counselors of Ts'in Che houang-ti deliberated on the imperial title, they began by proposing to him that of T'ai-houang, the highest figure of the divine triad, the supreme divinity to which heaven and earth were both subordinate. A text which must come from this period says explicitly: "He (the chief) who is illumined by the unity is Houang; he who has penetrated the meaning of Tao is Ti; he who has understood the Tö is Wang (king); he who seeks to win by force of arms is Pa (leader)."³

The spiritual hierarchy of the sovereigns is well marked in this passage, from the August Personages all the way down to the leaders who were military chiefs, and one sees that Houang is characterized by the unity that illumines him. This unity is here superior to Tao, which may seem surprising, for is not Tao exactly the supreme unity? But the word Tao has various meanings; if it is the name the Taoist philosophers give to the supreme and unique principle, it can also designate, among other things, the efficacious virtue of heaven or of the king who has the mandate of heaven here below. The Tao of heaven is certainly unique, but it is in a way a unity of second degree: it is the mysterious action of heaven which animates the universe and which is manifest in the great natural rhythms, day and night, the alternation of the seasons. The royal Tao is in a way the replica of the celestial Tao; they have solidarity, and this solidarity is realized by worship. The Houang were then, according to this passage, blessed with a transcendent virtue in relation to that of the royal Tao of the Ti, a virtue, consequently, which can be identified with that of the T'ai-houang which transcended heaven and earth.

Ts'in Che houang-ti, however, did not accept the title of T'ai-houang which his ministers proposed to him: "I reject 'T'ai' (supreme); I adopt 'Houang' (august); I add to it the imperial title of high antiquity: my title shall be 'Houang-ti'." It is probable, as we have said, that Ts'in Che houang-ti meant to synthesize

³ The leaders were the princes to whom the king had, by special investiture, given preeminence and police rights over a part of the territory. Their power was purely military and was thereby opposed to the religious or moral authority granted to the ancient sovereigns.

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the Three August Personages and the pseudo-historical Five Emperors; but at the same time that, in the case of the August Personages, he thought of the celestial Houang, he could not help thinking of the Ti above, divinities who had played an important role in the religious history of his own family. To tell the truth, we do not know to exactly what extent the Chinese of these distant times distinguished between the ancient sovereigns (Houang or Ti) and the celestial divinities. It seems that most frequently they assimilated them without agreeing on the identifications, which could differ according to the provinces.

In 771 B.C. the duke of Ts'in, who came to the aid of the king of Tcheou, for the first time attained the rank of an independent lord. He then instituted the worship of his ancestor Chao-hao, who was called, under the circumstances, the White Emperor; and his sanctuary was called the "holy place of the West." This information seems to imply—if it is authentic—that already at this time the Ts'in region was acquainted with the theory of the Five Emperors and the Five Elements. According to this theory, the Four Directions and the Center are bound by a sort of magic participation in the Five Elements and the Five Colors, and they are ruled by five emperors of five colors.⁴ These are sometimes called the Emperors of the Five Heavens, that is of the Four Directions and the Center; they are, then, celestial divinities, but they are sometimes equated with mythical emperors thought to have reigned on earth, or with ancestors. This is the case here with Chao-hao, ancestor of the princes of Ts'in. That he is white, being the divinity of the west, conforms to the theory of the elements, and you will notice that in this beginning of their power the Ts'in were content to have a divinity that was at the same time the patron of their race, since he was an ancestor, and of their territory, since this, they say, was the Western March (Si-tchouei). Later, as their power and ambitions grew, one sees the lords of Ts'in institute the worship of the Green Emperor (672); the Yellow Emperor (Houang ti) and the Emperor of

⁴ The Five Elements are bound to the directions and colors as follows: wood, east, green; fire, south, red; earth, center, yellow; metal, west, white; water, north, black. The above order is that of "production" or "generation" and is different, as we shall see, from that of "triumph."

Flames (Yen ti, that is, the Red Emperor) (in 422); and again the White Emperor (367). Recapitulating the cults of the time of the Ts'in, Sseu-ma Ts'ien⁵ writes that the Emperors above the four holy places of Jong (the ancient capital of Ts'in) were the most honored, and he gives the dates of sacrifices and lists the victims who were offered. Although we do not have explicit information on the motives of the lords of Ts'in in instituting the cults of the Ti, we can imagine that they wanted in this way to assure themselves of the protection of the divinities corresponding to the conquered or about-to-be-conquered territories: they were on their way toward universal monarchy which would have authorized them to sacrifice to the entire heaven (to T'ai-houang?) or to all the Ti. Now it happens that the Ts'in never instituted the worship of the Black Emperor, that is of the Emperor of the North. We do not know the reason for this omission. Shortly after the fall of the Ts'in the founder of the Han Dynasty, Kao-tsou, "asked which were formerly, in the time of the Ts'in, the emperors to whom one sacrificed in the sacrifices to the emperors above. They answered: the Four Emperors, and they are the White Emperor, the Green Emperor, the Yellow Emperor and the Red Emperor, to whom they sacrifice. Kao tsou answered: I had heard that there were five emperors in the heavens, and here are only four: how has that come about? And when no one knew the answer Kao tsou then said: I know. It is because they were waiting for me to attain the full number of five. Then he instituted the sacrifice to the Black Emperor and gave the sanctuary the name of the holy place of the north..." This text occurs in the discussion of the sacrifices Fong and Chan in the *Mémoires historiques*,⁶ and one can read in the *Traité sur le calendrier* of the same work⁷ the following passage: "The Han came to power.

⁵ Sseu-ma Ts'ien wrote, around 100 B.C., a general history of China, the *Che-ki*, which inaugurated the series of 24 dynastic histories. The 47 chapters have been translated into French by Edouard Chavannes under the title *Les Mémoires historiques de Sseu-ma Ts'ien*, 5 vols., Paris, 1895-1905. In the third volume of this translation, chapter 28, entitled "Les Sacrifices Fong et Chan", is of great importance for the religious history of ancient China.

⁶ *Mémoires historiques*, III, p. 449.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 328.

Kao-tsou said: The holy place of the north waited for me to give it honor. He thought that he too had obtained the favorable presage of the virtue of water..." These texts are generally interpreted as meaning that Kao-tsou considered himself as the Black Emperor and that, consequently, the Han Dynasty in its beginnings reigned by virtue of water.

In any case, this interpretation relieves problems that are all the more difficult to resolve since the texts are contradictory and not explicit. The question of the Five Emperors of the directions is, in effect, tied in at least some sources, to a theory of the Five Virtues which played a considerable role in the political thought of ancient China, and about which we shall have to say a few words. But if this theory is well known, the way in which it was applied nonetheless remains obscure in many instances.

According to the ancient concept of royal power, the Son of Heaven (born of a virgin or descending from a hero born of a virgin mother) had to receive the Heavenly Mandate in order to rule legitimately. Heaven manifested its will by the apparition of signs or of holy objects, animate or inanimate. Specialists identified and interpreted these manifestations. In receiving a new Mandate, the new Son of Heaven changed that of the king or of the dynasty which he replaced; that is, he inaugurated a new era by means of a double series of rites—rites of expulsion to eliminate the expired virtues of his predecessors, and rites of inauguration to install the new order.

At the time of the Combatant Kingdoms (5th to 8th centuries), the last royal dynasty, that of the Tcheou, had lost all authority. A certain number of lords disputed the power among themselves, and people expected to see a new Son of Heaven arise from their midst. It was then that Tseou Yen, a man from the province of Ts'i (the powerful principality of Chang-tong, which was always a threshold of philosophic and religious thought), had the idea of tying the concept of royal virtue to the theory of the Elements. He wrote a certain number of books which we unfortunately do not have, but the essence of his ideas was preserved for us by Sseu-ma Ts'ien, who gives us a résumé in his *Mémoires historiques*.⁸ His theory of the virtues was part of a vast philosophical-

⁸ *Che-ki*, ch. 74.

religious speculation on the cosmos, on geography and history. He taught that since the separation of heaven and earth (that is, since the origin of our world), the cosmic order was commanded not only by the alternation of Yin and Yang, but by a cyclic alternation of the Five Virtues, that is by the alternate influence of the Five Elements: each sovereign or dynasty governed in conformity with his own virtue. How to recognize this virtue? By the presages sent by heaven and by the order in which these virtues succeed each other. According to Tseou Yen, the virtues succeed each other in the "order of triumph," that is, by defeating and eliminating each other successively. This theory is expounded as follows in the *Lu-che-tch'ouen-ts'ieou*, 13, paragraph 2: "When a new sovereign (Ti or Wang) is about to arise, heaven does not fail to announce this to the people here below by presages:

When the time of Houang ti had come, Heaven first sent earthworms and giant crickets. Houang ti then said: see how the energies of the Earth triumph! This is why he took yellow as his emblem and in every enterprise conformed to the element Earth. When the time of Yu came, Heaven first sent vegetables that did not wilt in the autumn and winter. Then Yu said: See how the energies of wood triumph! And so he took green as his color, and in all enterprises conformed to the element of Wood. When the time of T'ang came, Heaven first sent swords, that were born from a river. Then T'ang said: See how the energies of Metal triumph! And so he took white as his emblem, and in all enterprises conformed to the element of Metal. When the time of the king Wen came, Heaven first sent fire, and then a red crow holding red writing in his beak alighted on the altar of the sun of the Tcheou. The king Wen then said: See how the energies of fire triumph! And so he took red as his emblem, and in all enterprises conformed to the element of Fire. The virtue which is to replace Fire will necessarily be that of Water. And Heaven will first manifest the triumph of Water, and that is why black will be the emblem, and all enterprises will have to conform to the element of Water. And if the energies of Water are not recognized when they arrive, the cycle will be accomplished just the same, and will bring back once more the reign of Earth."

One sees how this text, certainly inspired by the ideas of Tseou Yen, presents the succession of the virtues: Earth, the virtue

of Houang ti (the Yellow Emperor) is defeated by Wood; the latter is defeated by Metal, which is itself defeated by Fire. And it is interesting to find attested the fact that at the moment when the *Lu-che-tch'ouen-ts'ieou* was completed, in 239 B.C., the Ts'in had not yet chosen Water and Black as their emblems. It is indeed only after having realized the unity of the empire and taken the imperial title that Ts'in Che houang-ti "adopted as Virtue that which [the virtue of the Tcheou] had not defeated," in other words the triumphant virtue of Water, and that consequently he "reformed the institutions." That is, in conformity with the traditional correspondences he gave honor to black as the color of ceremonial dress, flags and insignia; he instituted a new calendar, making the civil year begin with the tenth lunar month; he adopted the number 6 for protocol, measures, etc.⁹ But here the question arises: Why didn't Ts'in Che houang-ti at this time institute the cult of the Black Emperor which would have completed the series of five? And why did Kao-tsou consider himself, as seems to be indicated by his words quoted in the *Che-ki*, as the Black Emperor, and as invested with the virtue of Water, when that had been the virtue of his predecessor on the throne of the Son of Heaven?

It is not possible to answer these questions with certainty. Certain commentators have suggested that Ts'in Che houang-ti did not institute a special cult of the Black Emperor because he himself was assimilated with him, an unconvincing explanation since his ancestors, assimilated with the Emperor of the West, sacrificed to him. Why would the first Ts'in emperor have neglected a worship so important, it seems, for his glory and for the supernatural protection of his dynasty? And if he had some reason which we do not know, why was this reason not good for Kao-tsou? Most commentators admit that they are perplexed by these difficulties. Could it not be that they have attributed to this system of the Five Virtues a rigidity and generality that it took on only later in the course of the Han dynasty? The activity of Tseou Yen and the propaganda of his disciples

⁹ *Mém. hist.* II, pp. 128 ff.; Granet, *La Civilisation chinoise*, pp. 41-42. Numbers were associated with the elements and the directions, the number 6 corresponding to Water, the North, and Black.

took place in the eastern and maritime provinces of Yen and Ts'i; it is improbable that they would have exercised an important influence in the province of Ts'in. It was only when Ts'in Che houang-ti was possessed of the entire empire that specialists of Ts'i expounded the theory of the virtues to him, some sixty years after it had been invented. The first emperor agreed to accept it, and reigned by the virtue of Water. However, he himself had not received the corresponding presage. Those who counseled him simply reminded him that long ago the duke Wen of Ts'in (765-716) captured a black dragon in a hunt. The appearance of a black dragon was indeed a good presage: the dragon is a royal symbol, and black is the symbolic color of the North and of Water. But it would seem that heaven should have made the announcement to the new emperor and not to a distant ancestor. Doubtless Ts'in Che houang-ti had not been prepared to see a celestial sign arise, and they had had to find one in history. Now there were good reasons for evoking the memory of the duke Wen: together with his father, the duke Siang, he had been one of the first founders of the power of Ts'in. Not only did he excel in military feats, but above all, he was granted by heaven a certain number of miraculous deeds, and he instituted the most venerable sanctuaries of the province of Ts'in—the holy place of Fou, where one sacrificed to the White Emperor, and the temple of the Jewel of Tch'en, where a prestigious talisman was preserved.¹⁰ Ts'in Che houang-ti was therefore disposed to give credit to the idea that a presage of Water had appeared at that time, but apparently neither he nor his counselors put forth the idea that the duke Wen had instituted a cult of the Black Emperor at that time, and he himself did not feel the necessity of so doing.

In truth, the heavenly emperors of Ts'in did not have much truck with the theory of the Five Virtues, partly because they were much more ancient than it, and partly because it was not propagated in the kingdom of Ts'in. But there were other decisive reasons why Ts'in Che houang-ti did not assimilate himself with the Black Emperor, and why he did not accept the theory of the Virtues with as much haste as history implies. If he had

¹⁰ *Mém. hist.* III, pp. 421 ff. Cf. Granet, *Danses et Légendes de la Chine ancienne*, Paris, 1926 (new edition 1959), pp. 572 ff.

chosen the title of Houang-ti, implying the idea of universal sovereignty, he could hardly accept assimilation with a partial and transitory virtue; he could certainly not identify himself with the Black Sovereign, but only with Heaven in its totality, or rather, as we have seen, with T'ai-houang, superior to both heaven and earth. Also we do not find, on the inscriptions where Ts'in Che houang-ti wanted to immortalize his own merits, any allusion to the virtue of Water. They celebrate, instead, the universality of his power and of "his glory that surpasses that of the Five Emperors;" they affirm that under the reign of the latter, as under the dynasties that followed them, "knowledge and teaching were not uniform, laws and measures were not clear;" while "now, the emperor (Houang-ti) has united all that lies within the oceans, he has divided it into commands and prefectures; the empire knows harmony and peace. He has covered with brilliance the temple of his ancestors; he is the incarnation of Tao and makes virtue (Tö) circulate."¹¹ For Ts'in Che houang-ti, therefore, his power is not comparable to that of the Five Ti, it is the synthesis of the cosmic forces of the heavens (Tao) and of the earth (Tö).

Ts'in Che houang-ti did not only mean to reign over the whole earth, he also wanted to create an eternal dynasty. Being himself the First Emperor, his descendants should carry the titles of emperors of the second and third generations and so on, "until the thousandth and ten thousandth generations." His dynasty therefore would be the last. This ambition was hardly to be reconciled with the theory that provided, after the virtue of Water, for the return some day of the virtue of Earth, by which the cycle had begun in the time of Houang-ti (the Yellow Emperor). If the first emperor accepted to have his reign placed under the sign of Water, he could only do so with the idea of closing the cycle once and for all: the virtue of Water would then become unique and immovable. But this is far from the theory of Tseou Yen, and had no other interest in the adoption of the virtue of Earth, and the different symbols which are attached to it, than that of having offered a means of marking a final point in the succession of dynasties.

As for the attitude of Kao-tsou, I do not believe that the text

¹¹ *Mém. hist.* II, pp. 145 ff.

of the *Che-ki* cited above means that he considered himself as the Black Emperor awaited to complete the Five, but simply that heaven awaited him, Kao-tsou, to fulfill the worship rendered to the Five Emperors above. It is without doubt this fact that constitutes the "presage" of Water which *he too* had obtained and which authorized him to reign by that virtue. But this "*he too*" is an affirmation of the historian and was perhaps not pronounced by Kao-tsou himself. Indeed, the founder of the Han was not granted a presage any more than was Ts'in Che houang-ti; apparently he was content to inherit the protocollary "institutions" of the Ts'in.

But there is a difficulty, resulting from what appears to be a contradiction in the text of the *Mémoires historiques*. Just before the passage concerning the institution of the cult of the Black Emperor, it is said that when Kao-tsou was named king of Han he placed in honor the color Red: the virtue of the Han would then have been Fire, and not Water. Now, a celebrated legend tended to prove that Kao-tsou really received the presage of Fire. At a time when he was still only a lowly and obscure functionary, Kao-tsou one day met on his path a great serpent. He hit the creature with his sword, and cut it in two. One of his companions, who had tarried behind, arrived at the place where the serpent had been, and "there was an old woman who lamented in the night; the man asked her why she lamented; and the old woman replied: A man has killed my son and that is why I weep. The man said: Why was your son killed?—My son, answered the old woman, was the son of the White Emperor; he changed himself into a serpent and barred the road; now he has been killed by the son of the Red Emperor, and that is why I lament." When Kao-tsou learned of this, "he rejoiced inwardly, and gathered confidence in himself. All those who followed him feared him more and more every day."¹² Modern Chinese historians consider this text an interpolation. Indeed, not only did the founder of the Han keep black as his symbol and Water as the virtue of the dynasty, but in the time when Sseu-ma Ts'ien was writing the Han had been ruling, since 104 B.C., by the virtue of Earth (which had triumphed over the Ts'in virtue of Water). The historian could

¹² *Mém. hist.* II, pp. 330-332.

therefore not have inserted this text by which the Ts'in ruled by virtue of Metal (white) and where the Han are announced by the presage of the virtue of Fire (red). It is at the time of the usurper Wang Mang¹³ that one would have invented this story and that one would have attributed the color red to the Han to favor the projects of the ambitious who wanted to create a new dynasty ruling by Yellow (Earth). Now, Wang Mang did not want to be accused of having overthrown the dynasty; he wanted to have the idea accredited that the throne had been *ceded* to him, as had been the case when the holy emperor Yao ceded the power to his not less holy minister Chouen. Wang Mang invented for himself a genealogy making him a descendant of Houang-Ti (virtue of Earth) and of Chouen, and invented another which made Yao (virtue of Fire) the ancestor of Kao-tsou. On the other hand, adopting the system of the successive elements which succeed each other not by military triumph but by generation, he managed to justify his usurpation under the appearances of a supernatural cession of power from the virtue of Fire to the virtue of Earth. In addition, in the same system of succession, the virtue preceding Fire had to be Metal—thence the story of the son of the White emperor killed by the son of the Red Emperor.

To tell the truth, in this case there has been an excess of critical spirit among Chinese historians, due to the fact that they have discovered that ancient Chinese literature was in part reconstituted under the Han, and that the scholars who did this work often took advantage of this to correct, modify and complete the texts in order to adapt them to their own religious, philosophical and political conceptions. It develops that the scholars who seemed to have been favorable to the coming of Wang Mang played a particularly important role in the edition of the ancient texts, and that they are suspected of having made numerous interpolations, indeed of having fabricated a number of entire pieces. If this suspicion is certainly justified, one must still not exaggerate and, under the pretext of not being fooled, fall into the inverse fault

¹³ The Han Dynasty which ruled from 206 B.C. to 220 A.D. was interrupted from 9 to 24 A.D. by the reign of the usurper Wang Mang who wanted to found a new dynasty. This is why history distinguished between the earlier Han (206 B.C. to 9 A.D.) and the later Han (25-220 A.D.) Dynasties.

of declaring apocryphal or interpolated every text or passage which is not in agreement with our own way of reconstituting history. This is a reproach that can be made to modern Chinese historical science, which is otherwise extremely brilliant and learned.

In the present case, it is certain that Wang Mang and the scholars who worked for him had an interest in accrediting the idea that the virtue of the Han was Fire, their symbolic color Red. It does not follow that it was they who invented the myth of the serpent killed by Kao-tsou and interpolated it into the text of the *Che-ki*. On the contrary, this is an extremely significant document.

The story in question, at the beginning of the chapter devoted to the biography of the founder of the Han, is one of a series of hagiographic legends which tend to prove that Kao-tsou was a real Son of Heaven, that he was destined to mount the imperial throne. It is not at all doubtful that this hagiography is late, or even in part interpolated into the work of Sseu-ma Ts'ien, but there is a chance that precisely the myth of the serpent and of the two sons of emperors, so suspect to the historians, is contemporary with the revolt.

The civil war which ended the Ts'in Dynasty began in 209 with the rebellion of two men of popular origin, two soldiers, Tch'en Cheng and Wou Kouang. At the moment when they decided to revolt, they were in cantonment, and to incite the other men to join their cause they talked of heaven. They wrote with red crayon on a piece of material the words "Tch'en Cheng will be king," and then pretended to discover this text in the stomach of a fish. To confirm this miracle, they invented a second. Wou Kouang, hidden in a neighboring temple, imitating the voice of a fox, shouted:¹⁴ "The great Tch'ou will be elevated, Tch'en Cheng will be king." Thus was presaged the resurrection of the kingdom of Tch'ou, formerly the most powerful rival of Ts'in at the time of the struggles for the conquest of the empire. These miraculous phenomena impressed the men of the contingent, who immediately saw in Tch'en Cheng the Son of Heaven designated by the divinity.

¹⁴ The fox has always played an important role in Chinese folklore. The three old foxes were considered to be gifted with great magic powers, or even capable of entering into relations with the celestial divinities.

Kao-tsou too was a man of the people. A petty functionary in his native town of P'ei, situated in the ancient kingdom of Tch'ou, he revolted in the same year as Tch'en Cheng. It is clear that he too, as his ambitions took shape, made careful propaganda and had circulated marvellous stories certain to move the people. Now it is not certain that he was very well acquainted with the theory of the Five Virtues, nor that he knew that the court of Ts'in had adopted black as its symbolic color. In their place the system of the Elements and Colors of Directions, much more ancient, was without doubt more popular: for centuries the Ts'in (a western kingdom) had sacrificed to the White Emperor. The new Son of Heaven, product of Tch'ou (a southern kingdom) was naturally the Son of the Red Emperor. There is no reason to let the Five Virtues interfere here, nor to imagine a falsification of the partisans of Wang Mang.

Also, the hypothesis of such a falsification must be done away with because of a decisive fact: during the civil war, the Han armies carried red banners. Red was, therefore, certainly the emblem of the partisans of Kao-tsou and the myth of the serpent explains the choice of this color. It is only when he took the title of emperor that Kao-tsou changed his emblem, adopting purely and simply the black of Ts'in Che houang-ti. One can object that when the discussions about the dynastic virtue took place during the first Han reigns no one suggested the necessity of adopting Fire and Red until the very end of this dynasty. This is because Fire could not be considered because it had been the virtue of the Tcheou. Even the discussions which ended in the emperor Wou's adoption of the color yellow prove that neither red nor black had been considered to represent the virtue of the Han. Red, however, remained the symbol of the dynasty when it was restored after the fall of Wang Mang. He had created in his own interest a myth of the Red Lieou (Lieou was the name of Kao-tsou's family). One of his means for making acceptable the idea that he was destined to replace the Han was that which Tch'en Cheng had used: he produced miraculous and explicit texts by which heaven clearly manifested its will to confide the Mandate to him.

The Chinese people have always been very sensitive to prophecies, to prodigies of all sorts expressing the will of heaven. These were naturally very numerous in times of crisis, when the

fall of a dynasty was manifested by a series of catastrophes (droughts, floods, epidemics, crickets, earthquakes, eclipses etc.). It was then that the rumor spread that a new Son of Heaven would appear, that a new era was being prepared; it was then that one saw troops of peasants form, carrying ensigns (painted eyebrows, red banners, green caps or yellow turbans) and following the first adventurer marked by a "sign." Sometime it was the entire population of a province that, seized with a messianic fervor, poured out onto the highways in search of a savior. It is in this atmosphere of mystic excitement that dynasties were made and unmade. It is natural that these prodigies and significant phenomena were carefully recorded and interpreted by the scholars and historians: all the dynastic histories devote a chapter to them entitled *Discussion of the Five Elements*. It was in effect by means of the theories of Yin and Yang that they explained the nature of abnormal phenomena and that they drew lessons to the advantage of the prince. Was he not responsible for the cosmic order? It was his conduct and that of his entourage that was reflected by nature, it was for him to expiate if some disorder interrupted the universal harmony. History offered famous precedents in this respect: You, the founder of the Hsia and T'ang the founder of the Yin had to confess their faults and expiate their victory. This religious rule was reaffirmed by the emperor Wen of the Han (180-157) when he proclaimed: "The Heavenly Way (Tien Tao) wishes calamities to be born of detestable actions and prosperity to come as the result of virtue. The faults of all the functionaries must have their origins in me. Now the functionaries, called secret invokers, place the responsibility for faults on their inferiors, and so bring to light my own lack of virtue. It is this which I will in no way admit; I suppress this function."¹⁵ The emperor Wen thus wanted to put an end to a practice which spared the sovereign the charge of expiating sins: he suppressed the invokers whose mission was to place the calamity secretly on the shoulders of an inferior. It is improbable that his successors had the same scruples, and it seems that the emperor Wou found the means of turning aside the misfortune which should have struck him.

¹⁵ *Mém. hist.* II, pp. 473 ff.

The concept of "government" in ancient China had not the same meaning as for us. To govern was, above all, a magico-religious function: it was not a matter of laws and regimentations. Basically all the thinkers agreed on this point; it was only in its realization that they differed. To remain in the time of the Han, two concepts shared the people's allegiance, at least in appearance: Confucianism and Taoism. The philosophers belonging to these two fundamental currents of Chinese thought were on both sides equally preoccupied with questions concerning "government." Both proposed to furnish counsel and practical methods for becoming holy (Cheng), a man blessed with a beneficial virtue, to the prince. To acquire such virtue, it was necessary for the prince above all to bring the rhythm of his life into agreement with the universal rhythm, so that he could identify himself with the great principle of the cosmic order, the Tao. But the Confucians had moral, ritual and religious recipes for attaining this end; the Taoists had magic or mystic systems. One mustn't think, however, that for the Chinese of this time these were irreconcilable attitudes or conceptions. Indeed, in the ruling classes the two doctrines were often accepted and practiced by the same person, Confucianism in public life, Taoism in private life. Even more, in the attitude of some emperors it is very difficult to say what is due to the influence of one and what to the other. Such a case is the emperor Wou (Wou-ti: 141-87).

It is under the reign of this emperor that the first Han dynasty saw the height of its glory and power; it is he who gave the Chinese state its fundamental structure, thus completing the work of Ts'in Che houang-ti. Now this sovereign favored Confucianism, which for the first time took the position of an official and orthodox doctrine. The triumph of this school was inevitable. It was in its midst that the only specialists who could give China the institutions wanted by the majority of the people grew up. The experience of the Ts'in, who would have liked to govern with the aid of the methods of the school of laws, had failed; that of the first Han emperors, who had been largely inspired by the Taoist concept of "non-intervention" (*wou-wei*) and had practiced a *laissez-faire* politics, had good results in the beginning, but in the long run, risked leading to anarchy. Confucianism, practicing the middle way, restored respect for the hierarchy and for the tra-

ditional values, but tried at the same time to moderate despotism by morality and by religious fear. This last point is important. If the question of the dynastic virtue constituted a problem of high political importance, it is certainly because it established the divine right of the dynasty, but also because it reaffirmed and systematized an old principle: that of the precariousness of the Heavenly Mandate. Heaven gives its investiture only as a temporary title, it maintains it as long as the reigning virtue is new and vigorous. When this virtue becomes old and corrupt, another virtue must replace it. Heaven lets people know that the time has come to change an era, that it is ready to confer the Mandate on another family, by presages. The members of government had the right to remonstrate with the sovereign, and they normally did this by pointing out the natural phenomena interpreted as "signs." These could be acts which had really occurred recently; but these could also be real or invented precedents recorded by historians. The plea to the throne was therefore a warning. It must be added that the presages were used not only to criticize the emperor, but also by one political faction against another.¹⁶ The scholars of this time were, as we see, well versed in the occult sciences condemned by Confucius. Very different from the first disciples of the master, they were hardly to be distinguished, in fact, from the "recipe" men, the magicians, alchemists and soothsayers (*fang-che*) who intrigued at the court of the great. These *fang-che* represented the syncretist tendency of the time. Some, those of Yen and Ts'i (actually the provinces of Hopei and Shantung), propagated the ideas of Tseou Yen; others defended those of Houang-ti and Lao tseu; still others spread *Wei-chou*, or *Tch'an-wei*, very curious apocryphal books attached to the Confucian classics, of which they were a sort of gnostic branch, and which had a considerable influence. All these *fang-che* did not form different schools, by the way; certain ones simply specialized in one or the other of these disciplines. Certain of these thaumaturges and charlatans acquired high posts and played an important role in the entourage of Ts'in Che houang-ti and especially that of Wou-ti. And so

¹⁶ W. Eberhard, *The Political Function of Astronomy and Astronomers in Han China* in Fairbank, ed., *Chinese Thought and Institutions*, Chicago, 1957.

it is a very mitigated Confucianism which gave the Han their institutions, and particularly, their religious institutions.

At the time of the Tcheou, the lords worshiped their ancestors and the divinities of their territory. The latter were represented by the altar of earth (*che*) and by the cults called *wang* (sacrifices made "long distance"). There was a whole hierarchy of gods of the earth corresponding to the political or administrative divisions. In the case of the Son of Heaven and of the sovereign lords, each had two gods of the earth: one established for the good of the people, called the great god of the earth or the god of the regional earth; and the other, called the god of the royal or lordly earth, as the case might be, assuring the prosperity and authority of the reigning house.

The great god of the royal earth (imperial under the Han) had a rectangular altar (for the earth, in the traditional concept, was square). Each of the four faces was made of earth of the color corresponding to one of the directions of space, and the center was yellow. In the home of a lord, the altar of regional earth was all of a single color, corresponding to the direction of the fief in relation to the capital. When the Son of Heaven invested a vassal, he did it by giving him a clump of earth of the desired color from one of the sections of his own altar of the earth.

Beyond their gods of the earth, the lords of feudal China sacrificed only to the gods of their territory, to those of the mountains and rivers which were "within reach of their looks:" these were the sacrifices called *wang*, from a term meaning "to look afar." Each lord had his *wang* and no prince, in a time where feudal principles of morality and religion still reigned, would have usurped the prerogatives of his neighbors in offering sacrifices to the gods of their territory, for that would have been the equivalent of an attempt at annexation.

In addition to these cults common to all the lords, the king had to himself the right to sacrifice to heaven. When the old feudal order ceased to be respected, when the "Combatant Kingdoms" began to destroy each other and to snap up the territories of the defeated, lords also annexed new gods, and the most ambitious manifested the intention of sacrificing to the supreme divinity, to heaven itself. But that was a serious act, without measure, a defiance hurled at men and gods. This is why the lords

of Ts'in were content to prepare their enterprise slowly. Not yet daring to sacrifice to heaven as a whole, they created the cults of the Ti who represented sectors of the heavens. During the first Han reigns, the sacrifice Kiao to heaven was none other than that which was offered to the Five Emperors.

Kao-tsou, after having installed the altars of the celestial emperors, re-established the various cults that existed formerly, particularly those of the gods of the earth. These were masculine gods. Now one characteristic of Chinese philosophical and religious thought is the dualism represented above all by the opposition of the principles Yin and Yang, but which is marked also by a polarity of the sacred. All sacred power is double, the sacred objects and the gods go in sexual couples. From then on, in the face of heaven, Yang and male, a cult of the earth, Yin and female, grew up. However, the texts are silent on the subject of such a cult among the Tcheou kings. But that would be easily explained if one supposes that the cult of the feminine earth was a privilege reserved for the queen. The institution of the male gods of the earth, of a purely political character, could not fail to appear in the midst of a feudal organization which depended on the recognition of masculine privilege. But the importance of the feminine group within the women's apartments never ceased to weigh against the male authority in public life. This feminine group had its own cults; there is no reason not to believe that the queen had the privilege of sacrificing to the earth as the king had that of sacrificing to heaven. However, from the moment the authority of the sovereign pretended to universality, the necessity of a sacrifice to the earth imposed itself.¹⁷ Also, in 113 B.C., the emperor Wou who had just made a sacrifice Kiao, held council and said: "Now I have made in person the sacrifice Kiao to the emperors above, but I have not sacrificed to the sovereign earth. The rites, therefore, do not correspond." He established the sanctuary on a hill in the shape of a rump, where they erected five altars, the emperor and his assistants officiating in yellow robes; the victims were buried. It was the time when, on the counsel of the *fang-che*, the emperor Wou was seeking to do what Kao-tsou had not wanted or dared to do: to inaugurate a

¹⁷ M. Granet, *Civilisation chinoise*, p. 449.

new era, to affirm the religious existence of his dynasty in choosing the virtue of the Han and proclaiming that heaven accorded him the investiture. Three years after having inaugurated the cult of the sovereign earth, he accomplished a ceremony of exceptional character, an act of high religious and political import: he made to heaven and earth the sacrifices Fong and Chan on the T'ai-chan.

The T'ai-chan (Supreme Mountain), is one of the most famous mountains in China.¹⁸ It rises in the province of Ts'i, not far from the frontiers of the small principality of Lou, homeland of Confucius. Originally, this mountain was only one of the gods to which the lords of Ts'i offered the sacrifice *wang*. But as it was considered the highest mountain in the world, since Confucius himself considered it a very venerable holy place, its religious importance soon surpassed the limits of the principalities of Chan-tong. At the time of the empire, it was one of the five sacred peaks, the Peak of the East.¹⁹ With this title, because the orient is not only the source of light, but also the origin of all life, the T'ai-chan was considered the principle of life and death, a divinity bringing about births and taking up the dead. But even before the institution of the Five Peaks, which cannot antedate the foundation of the empire by very much, the T'ai-chan had the advantage over the other famous mountains of being the holy mountain of one of the most ancient Chinese regions and one very rich in prestigious cults. According to old myths, the coasts of Chan-tong had been inhabited by Manbirds, in relation with a sun cult. Left over in popular belief was the conviction that off the coasts of Ts'i there existed marvellous islands inhabited by spirits possessing the drug of immortality. The wise men of the province of Ts'i affirmed that it was possible to enter into relations with these spirits and to become immortal. The various local cults of the province of Ts'i, and among them that of T'ai-chan, thus

¹⁸ Edouard Chavannes has devoted an important work to this mountain: *Le T'ai chan, essai de monographie d'un culte chinois*, Paris, 1910. In an appendix there is a fine study of the god of the Earth.

¹⁹ The history of the five sacred peaks (the four directions and the center) is not well known, but their institution, such as it existed under the Han, must go back to the time of the Combatant Kingdoms, although they are given a much greater antiquity by myths.

found themselves indissolubly linked with the search for immortality. Also, Ts'in Che houang-ti and then Wou-ti attached great importance to these holy places, visiting them several times, and the first emperor had his famous steles erected there. And it was at T'ai-chan that they held the most solemn sacrifices.

The sacrifice Fong was for heaven and was made on an altar erected at the summit of a mountain; the sacrifice Chan, for the earth, was made at the foot of the mountain. In the first, the offerings were burnt; in the second, they were buried in a ditch. The aim of this double ceremony was to announce to heaven and earth the success of the dynasty and the reception of the Mandate. Although some texts claim that it was a solemnity accomplished from highest antiquity on and by numerous sovereigns, the first who certainly celebrated these sacrifices was the emperor Wou, in 110 B.C. But a little before, in 119, the general Ho K'iu-p'ing, who had won a great victory in Central Asia, had made the sacrifice Fong; for this purpose he had elevated a cairn at the summit of a mountain. The word *fong* in its proper meaning designates a rising of earth which one makes to mark a limit or a frontier, and, by extension, designated the investiture which a sovereign conferred on a vassal and which authorized the latter to erect an altar of the earth, also giving him the quality of an enfeoffed lord. The commentator of the *History of the Han* explains the meaning of the *fong* of Ho K'iu-p'ing by saying: "one elevates the summit of the mountain, and by thus increasing the amplitude of the visible horizon, enlarges one's domain." Other generals, who had also conquered foreign territories, were content to elevate metal columns, which were supported so that they formed little hillocks of stone and earth. These columns assured the stability of the conquered territory no less than a mountain, for they served to hold in submission the demons, and particularly the subterranean monsters, of the annexed domain. In both cases, *fong* or column, it was a matter of taking possession of a new territory, not by assigning limits by tracing a frontier, but by instituting a sacred center. The example of the sacrifice offered by Ho K'iu-p'ing leaves no doubt as to the meaning of this ceremony: it was a rite of taking possession and of triumph.

And so the emperor Wou made the sacrifices Fong and Chan on T'ai-chan, the ancient *wang* of the province of Ts'i which had

become the *wang* of the entire empire. But he did it after much hesitation and after taking great precautions. The ceremony was performed under mysterious conditions, as well: the emperor mounted to the summit of the mountain accompanied by a single officer attached to his person, the son of Ho K'iu-p'ing. Now, the young man died suddenly some days later; there is hardly any doubt that this death was connected with the sacrifice. While the father celebrated the triumph of the Han over the barbarians, it was on the son that the emperor turned the danger that had menaced him himself. What was the misfortune in question? We find here once more, still living under the Han, old religious concepts attested to by the myths.

The most ancient sovereigns succeeded each other traditionally not from father to son, but from sovereign to minister, the former ceding the power to the latter. The Confucian texts present this procedure as demonstrating the high disinterestedness of these wise men who held their moral values higher than their private and family interests. But the non-Confucian texts show that this fable conceals a less amiable reality: the old sovereign was chased out of the city by the new one. There is even a possibility that he was killed unless, having enough energy left, he killed the minister instead. Ritually, the theme is presented as follows: a new chief must inaugurate a new order in the world, and in order to do this he must expel the expired virtues of his predecessor. But in doing this, he himself commits a dangerous act that pollutes him; he must expiate his triumph. He does this by dismembering a victim, human or animal, whose limbs are then thrown out the four gates of the square city: this victim is only a substitute for the chief himself.²⁰

This is why the sacrifice Fong was redoubtable for the emperor who offered it: his purpose was to announce to heaven the success of the dynasty and his taking possession of the empire, but at the same time it was an expiatory rite by which the sovereign offered himself as a sacrifice to the divinity. He had to be very sure of himself, the investiture of heaven must have been attested to by a series of prodigies, to hope that the god would consent to take a substitute victim.

²⁰ Granet, *Danses et Légendes*, pp. 213 ff.

The emperor Wou renewed these sacrifices every four years, but in every case the ceremonies must have had the same secret character, for the historians do not describe them. But after the emperor Wou the ceremony became a public solemnity about which we are well informed.²¹ This comprised: 1) the sacrifices offered to heaven and earth; 2) the deposition in two stone coffers, disposed on the place of the two sacrifices, of two texts engraved on tablets of jade, which were confided to the mountain so that it could transmit them to the divinities for whom they were destined. These writings announced the success of the dynasty and implored the protection of the divinities; but, in the case of the emperor Wou, the prayer certainly asked also for immortality, as is indicated by the proposals made to the emperor by one of his wise men, who counseled him as follows: 1) he should sacrifice in the alchemical furnace, which would permit him to enter into relations with the supernatural beings; 2) with the aid of the latter, gold should be made; 3) with this gold, a vessel should be constructed which would have a magic effect on food, thanks to which the emperor would acquire prolonged longevity; 4) this longevity would make it possible to enter into relations with the spirits of the marvellous isles; 5) "When you have seen these spirits and when you have made the sacrifices Fong and Chan, then you will not die." For the emperor Wou, the ceremonies Fong and Chan had a multiple efficacy: they sanctioned the glory of the Han, they eliminated the sins and bad influences of past eras, they prepared his own apotheosis.

These are the same mystic aspirations, it seems, which led to a noticeable change in the worship regularly rendered to heaven. Until that time, one sacrificed to the five Ti; now the *fang-che* suddenly proposed to the emperor Wou that he sacrifice to a triad formed by the three Ones, the One of Heaven (T'ien-yi), the One of Earth (Ti-yi) and the Supreme One (T'ai-yi). The latter also became the most eminent divinity of heaven. As for the Five Emperors, they were now no more than the assistants of T'ai-yi. The cult of the Three Ones, who are visibly identical (but under new names borrowed from the Taoist vocabulary) with the three Houang of Ts'in Che houang-ti, was instituted at almost the same

²¹ Chavannes, *Le T'ai chan*, ch. III: "Textes relatifs aux sacrifices Fong et Chan".

time as that of the sovereign earth. The sacrifices to T'ai-yi and to the Five Emperors were soon held in a building called Ming-t'ang (Hall of Illumination), the construction of which was linked with the emperor Wou's second celebration of the ceremony Fong in 106. Already in the time of the emperor Wen, and then at the accession of the emperor Wou, the question of the erection of the Ming-t'ang had been raised by the scholars. The latter attached great importance to the construction of this religious edifice which they said was an ancient institution and which they considered indispensable to the government. The Ming-t'ang was a temple which was the symbolic image of the world: the base was square like the earth, the roof a rounded thatch like heaven. Opinions differed as to the disposition of its interior, but the essential thing was that it should contain five or nine compartments disposed in a cross. Throughout the year, the sovereign had to circulate in the Ming-t'ang and, placing himself each month in the proper direction, clad in the corresponding color, to promulgate the "Monthly Ordinances." *Monthly Ordinances (Yue ling)* is the title of a work inserted in the classic collection *Mémoires sur les rites (Li-ki)*.²² For each month there is indicated in particular: astro-nomic and calendar information; the emperor above (Ti) and the tutelary spirit; the number, the flavor, the element, the color; what must be done and what not; the natural sanctions which would intervene if the sovereign promulgated co-signs proper to another season. Of course, the space which the emperor must occupy each month in the Ming-t'ang was also indicated. One remarkable point should be noted: at the end of the third month of summer, the emperor dressed in yellow, took his place at the center, thus giving both year and space a center.

This liturgy of the Ming-t'ang, as it appears in the *Yue-ling*, implies a series of spatio-temporal correspondences which make the cosmos a great organism containing everything.²³ Not only

²² There is a French translation of the *Li-ki* by S. Couvreur, S.J., Ho kien fou, 1913; the *Yue-ling* is described in Volume I, pp. 330 ff. of this translation.

²³ The frame of reference is naturally that of the Five Elements, but you will note that the system applied here is not reconcilable with the Five Virtues: 1) the latter succeed each other in the order of *triumph*, while the elements succeed each other in the order of the seasons, which is also the order of *generation*. 2) in one

must the sovereign circulate in this way in the interior of the temple—a circulation which is the equivalent of a displacement imitating the route of the sun into the diverse provinces of the empire²⁴—but he must submit his whole vital and dietetic rhythm to the seasonal order in conformity with the indications given by the *Yue-ling* and other works. It is in this way that the rituals, in according the organism of the sovereign with that of the cosmos, were intended to make him a saint. If this adaptation had been perfect, the emperor would have attained the ideal which consisted in governing while remaining immobile, sitting on the throne facing south, creating order by the sole power of his religious virtue, his Tao-tö.

This ideal of non-intervention (*wou-wei*) was not exclusively Taoist property, but these believed in it more than the Confucians and taught that it could and should be taught by all. Nonetheless, it is above all the emperor whom they had to try to convince. That the Taoists who are considered individualists and mystics were no less interested in the problems of government than other thinkers is affirmed by the bibliographic chapter of the *History of the Han*. Under the rubric of the Taoist school, the authors of this catalogue have noted that which in their opinion characterized these philosophers: the school of Tao, they write, comes from the seigneurial archivists, whose function was to note chronologically the ancient and modern examples illustrating the law (Tao) of successes and failures, of life and death, of fortune and misfortune; it is in meditating on these lessons of the past that one learns to value the essential, the root of all phenomena, that one understands, consequently, the necessity for realizing in oneself a perfect vacuity, for abasing and humiliating oneself in order to be able to survive. And the authors add: These are the precepts (to be exact: the recipes) concerning the prince who reigns facing south.

case, the color of the ritual ornaments of the emperor is determined once and for all by the dynastic virtue, while in the other he changes ornaments with each season.

²⁴ Tradition had it that the emperor undertook a tour of the empire every five years, beginning with the East and following the route of the sun. Cf. Granet, *La Pensée chinoise*, pp. 102 ff.

Religion and Politics in the China of the T's'in and the Han

The Taoist philosophy was conceived not as an amusement for dreamers and metaphysicians, but as an efficacious and valuable technique for the government of the world. This is why works like the *Lu-che-tch'ouen-ts'ieou* or the *Houai-nan-tseou*, which both discuss essentially questions concerning government, which both contain *Monthly Ordinances*²⁵ and attach great importance to the ritual of the Ming-t'ang, present the Taoist mystique as definitive and as the only method worthy of the saint. For them, the Supreme One (T'ai-yi) is not a divinity whose protection may be assured through sacrifices, it is none other than the Tao, the unique principle of natural order. The role of the sovereign is not to substitute himself for this supreme virtue, but on the contrary to identify himself with it. If the kings of high antiquity wore head-covers with pearl fringes covering their eyes and ears, this was to assure their inner purity. The saint carefully watches over his sensual organs, openings through which his vital spirits could escape, because the desires and temptations are only so many occasions for the loss of the soul. If the inner life is preserved in its original purity, then intimate and permanent communication is established with heaven. Now, this vertical communication is the condition for the horizontal shining of the virtue of the saint, and makes his influence reach the ends of the world. This is why the supreme art of government does not consist in the making of laws, but in exercising this spiritual influence, infinitely more efficacious than any physical action.

The chief who has known how to achieve perfect communion with heaven, either by the ceremonies of the cult, or by asceticism, acquires a mystic power of attraction which is verified when his vassals come to give him homage in the Ming-t'ang at the same time that faraway peoples pour in to bring him tribute. It is then that the Son of Heaven appears in all his glory, seated immobile on a throne in the center of the temple, facing south, surrounded by lords disposed in a square around the platform and oriented according to their ranks; but, it is above all, the presence of the barbarians come from the frontiers of the empire who bear witness

²⁵ In addition to the *Li-ki*, the *Yue-ling* occurs as well, but with some textual differences in these two works. The *Houai-nan-tseu* was edited under the reign of the emperor Wou.

to the power of the splendor of perfect saintliness. This is why the Ming-t'ang, the temple of the government, is defined by the *Li-ki* as the place where the hierarchy of the vassals is manifest (*ming*): the order created by saintliness is an hierarchic order of men and things.

It is not to be doubted that in the beginning of the imperial era the Chinese monarchy had a theocratic character. The emperor was the representative of heaven and governed in its name; more, he united in his person the combined virtues of heaven and earth and those of all sacred powers, the Five Emperors above, the sun, the moon, the stars, the mountains and the rivers.

However, this character was soon tempered by various factors: in the first place, the ideal moderators of Confucianism; but also the theory of the Five Virtues linked to that of the Celestial Mandate, the responsibility for natural or social disorders, the right of censure reserved for the scholars, and finally the asceticism which Taoism imposed on the candidates for immortality. All these constituted efficacious brakes on the pride and desire for power of the potentates. On the other hand, from the end of the Han Dynasty, the religious character of the monarchy becomes tenuous and takes a more moral aspect: there again, it is the Confucian influence that is decisive. However, this transformation which turned a god living on earth into "the father and the mother of the people" is the doing of the intellectuals, of the scholars, and is valid for them; but it is clear that among the peasant masses the myth of the Son of Heaven remained, sustained by the representatives of the court as well as by the chiefs of secret societies where volunteers were recruited, in times of trouble, for pretenders believing themselves invested with the Mandate. And it is impossible to see how, without the integrating power of this myth, the cohesion of so vast an empire could have been maintained, or reconstituted after periods of dissolution. For the people, the emperor remained a mysterious and faraway personage, the unique intercessor between the world of men and the supreme divinity.