

Western Han Landlord Class Went From Opposing to Revering Confucianism

— Criticism of Tung Chung-shu who trumpeted the doctrines of Confucius and Mencius

by Hsueh Li-szu

FROM the very outset the doctrines of Confucius and Mencius were a reactionary ideological system for upholding and restoring the rule of the slave-owning aristocrats. A representative of the emerging landlord class, Chin Shih Huang (see "Chin Shih Huang — the First Ruler to Unify China," *Peking Review*, No. 50, 1974) put an end to the situation in which there were rival ducal states and founded the first autocratic centralized feudal state power in China's history. After that he handed the doctrines of Confucius and Mencius a powerful blow by determinedly carrying out the revolutionary measure of "burning books and burying Confucian scholars alive" so as to attack the restoration force of the slave-owners and consolidate the dictatorship of the landlord class. Deservedly an expert in laying more stress on the present than on the past, Chin Shih Huang upheld Legalism and opposed Confucianism and stood for reform and against a return to the ancients.

The Legalist school still held the dominant position in the early period of the Western Han Dynasty (206 B.C.-25 A.D.) founded after the Chin Dynasty. The first emperor of the Western Han, who reigned from 206 to 195 B.C., Emperor Kao Tsu did not believe in Confucianism and the six succeeding emperors also

basically carried out the Legalist line and adopted an attitude of repudiating what Confucianism preached. However, during the reign of Emperor Wu Ti who reigned from 140 to 87 B.C., there was a person called Tung Chung-shu (179?-104 B.C.) who feverishly worshipped Confucianism and opposed the Legalist school. Taking advantage of Emperor Wu Ti's decree to "seek the wise and virtuous men," he submitted to the emperor three proposals in succession extolling the doctrines of Confucius and Mencius heart and soul.

Tung Chung-shu wildly attacked Chin Shih Huang's action of "burning books and burying Confucian scholars alive" and alleged that it had destroyed the "teachings of the ancient kings" and had been responsible for the quick downfall of the Chin Dynasty. He further vilified the Western Han Dynasty's practices of following the Chin policy and continually relying on the Legalists, comparing these measures to rotten wood and mud walls which would collapse at a touch. At the same time he extensively elaborated the doctrines of Confucius and Mencius and spared no effort to stress their misleading traits, saying that these doctrines would become dykes holding back peasants in revolt and that "once the dykes are perfected, treason and evil will be put to an end." Therefore, he asked Emperor Wu Ti to

"only revere Confucianism and ban all other schools of thought." Emperor Wu Ti showed no interest in Tung Chung-shu's proposals and continued implementing the Legalist line. The emperor appointed many Legalists like Sang Hung-yang to important official posts (see "Debate at the Salt and Iron Conference — Contention between the Confucian and Legalist schools in the middle period of Western Han Dynasty," *Peking Review*, No. 29, 1975) and, setting no great store by Tung Chung-shu, gave him a post under a vassal prince.

On the throne from 48 to 33 B.C., Emperor Yuan Ti was the first Western Han ruler to really follow the Confucian doctrines. Once in power, he immediately revered Confucianism and opposed Legalism and gave Confucianists important posts. As a result, the political situation went from bad to worse. Thereafter, the doctrines of Confucius and Mencius elaborated by Tung Chung-shu became canons which the reactionary ruling classes forced the people to believe in and follow.

From the Spring and Autumn Period (770-476 B.C.) and the Warring States Period (475-221 B.C.) to the Western Han Dynasty, the same landlord class, politically and ideologically, went from worshipping Legalism and opposing Confucianism to worshipping Confucianism and opposing Legalism. What were the reasons?

Marx pointed out: The change in class relationships is a historical change. (*Moralizing Critique and Criticizing Morals*.) From the Spring and Autumn and Warring States Periods to 221 B.C. when Chin Shih Huang unified China, the ascendant landlord class, soon after stepping on to the stage of history, wanted to seize power from the slave-owning class and establish and consolidate the dictatorship of the feudal landlord class in an all-round way. Its main target of attack at that time was the declining slave-owning class and its activities for restoration. Hence the need to worship Legalism and oppose Confucianism.

The early Han Dynasty rulers were representatives of the landlord class which had just won ruling power. Since they still retained their vigour, they were able to advance along the trail blazed by Chin Shih Huang. Politically, they carried out the Legalist line because of the need to resist harassment by the Hsiung-nu (a nationality in northern China) slave-owners and eliminate the vestiges of the slave system and local separationist forces in the country. This not only consolidated the unified Han feudal empire but brought about an unprecedented flourishing situation during Emperor Wu Ti's reign.

However, the contradictory aspects within a thing can transform themselves into each other. As the feudal system became consolidated and the feudal economy developed, the contradiction and struggle between the landlord class and the peasants gradually grew acute. Though they followed the Legalist line, the early Western Han rulers also saw the threat of peasant uprisings in the downfall of the Chin Dynasty. On the basis of

implementing the Legalist line, they thought that using such ornaments as the Confucian "way of right" and "benevolent policy" would help them deceive the people and uphold the dictatorship of the landlord class. This showed that, as the opposite of the peasantry, the landlord class began gradually transforming from a revolutionary class into a counter-revolutionary class. These were the social and class causes for their partial use of Confucian things while implementing the Legalist line.

After the danger of restoring slave system was over at the time of Emperor Yuan Ti, the contradiction between the landlord class and the peasantry became increasingly acute and intensified and the Western Han political situation started going downward. It grew even worse in the 50 years from the time of Emperor Yuan Ti to the fall of the Western Han Dynasty. Peasant uprisings surged forward wave upon wave after Emperor Yuan Ti's reign until they converged into a big nationwide uprising which brought about the collapse of the Western Han Dynasty. The task confronting the landlord class in this period was no longer social change but suppressing the peasant struggle of resistance and upholding the dictatorship of the landlord class. Therefore, the Western Han rulers in this period took as their guiding thinking Confucian doctrines which stood for conservatism and retrogression, because their reactionary and deceitful character precisely suited the political needs of the landlord class who already had become decadent and reactionary.

Thus the reactionary proposal of "only revering Confucianism and banning all other schools of thought" put forth by Tung Chung-shu at the time of Emperor Wu Ti was made their guiding thinking by Emperor Yuan Ti and later representatives of the reactionary landlord class. Tung Chung-shu cleared the way for the doctrines of Confucius and Mencius to exercise their poisonous influence in China for more than 2,000 years. But things always develop in the manner of "one dividing into two." Under the impetus of peasant uprisings, there were also those in the landlord class who opted for reform and against retrogression, revered the Legalist ideology and opposed Confucianism. That explains why the struggle between the Confucian and Legalist schools lasted so long.

How did Tung Chung-shu elaborate the doctrines of Confucius and Mencius and turn them into an ideological weapon of the feudal landlord class?

"The Three Cardinal Guides and the Five Constant Virtues" That Upheld the Order of Feudal Rule

Tung Chung-shu inherited and developed such reactionary political ideas and ethical concepts in the doctrines of Confucius and Mencius as loyalty, sincerity, filial piety, brotherly duty, benevolence, righteousness, propriety and wisdom and turned them into the "three cardinal guides" and the "five constant virtues" that supported the order of feudal rule.

The "three cardinal guides" mean that the sovereign guides the ministers, the father guides the sons and

the husband guides the wife. These were the three absolute standards for maintaining feudal rule. The "five constant virtues" mean the five unchangeable principles — benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom and sincerity. Tung Chung-shu considered these principles best in the art of ruling and which "all rulers should study." Preaching this was aimed at restricting people's words and actions and preventing and suppressing all peasant uprisings against feudal rule.

To work out a theoretical basis, Tung Chung-shu fabricated the nonsense that "the *yang* is superior to the *yin*." "The relationship between sovereign and ministers, father and sons and husband and wife all follows that between *yang* and *yin*," he explained. There were *yang* and *yin* elements in nature, according to Tung Chung-shu, with *yang* being decisive and lofty and *yin* being subservient and low. The sovereign, the father and the husband belonged to the *yang* and therefore were lofty and played the leading role; while ministers, sons and wives belonged to the *yin* and therefore were the low and should unconditionally obey those in the *yang* category. Such preaching served to consolidate the feudal hierarchy so as to strengthen the landlord class' rule over the peasants.

To facilitate better implementation of "the three cardinal guides and the five constant virtues," Tung Chung-shu dressed them up in a religious and theological cloak. He said that the "three cardinal guides in the way of right can be attributed to heaven" and that "heaven" "is close to the *yang* and keeps its distance from the *yin*." The sovereign got his mandate from heaven while dukes, sons and wives in turn got their mandates from the sovereign, the father and the husband respectively. All must worship heaven. Thus, Tung Chung-shu described "the three cardinal guides and the five constant virtues" as an embodiment of the will of "heaven" and that they were decided by "heaven." The authority of the sovereign (political authority), the authority of the father (clan authority) and the authority of the husband were protected and controlled in this way by the religious authority which was expressed in the three other authorities. All four authorities were "the embodiment of the whole feudal-patriarchal system and ideology, and are the four thick ropes binding the Chinese people, particularly the peasants." (Mao Tsetung: *Report on an Investigation of the Peasant Movement in Hunan*.)

Suiting the needs of the landlord class for consolidating the order of feudal rule, Tung Chung-shu's reactionary theory was consistently supported by the reactionary and decadent exploiting classes for a long time and became the spiritual chains they imposed on the working people. With these shackles, the reactionary ruling classes tortured and ruined countless numbers of working people.

The bourgeois careerist Lin Piao spared no effort to trumpet the Confucian concepts of "loyalty, filial

piety, chastity and righteousness" and clamoured for "using their essence." His purpose was to inherit the cannibalistic ethical code represented by "the three cardinal guides and the five constant virtues." Apart from using it to deceive and benumb the revolutionary people, he also used it as the counter-revolutionary canon for training his loyal henchmen, subverting the dictatorship of the proletariat and establishing a Lin family feudal fascist dynasty.

"Consonance Between Heaven and Man"

By developing the "heavenly mandate" concept advocated by Confucius and Mencius, Tung Chung-shu established a mystical idealist system that included "consonance between heaven and man" and the concept that "the authority of the monarch is the mandate of heaven."

To defend the decadent slave system, Confucius loudly proclaimed that "life and death are preordained; wealth and honour come from heaven." Taking over this idea and carrying it forward, Tung Chung-shu first imposed the will of the feudal landlord class on "heaven" which he described as a personified god who knew, created and mastered everything. Thus Tung Chung-shu's "heaven" was even more mystical than that of Confucius. "Heaven," according to the former, was the "ruler of all spirits" and "ancestor of all things" and had its will as well as its pleasure, anger, sorrow and joy. Sunny and warm days expressed its pleasure, storms and tempests its sorrow and the scorching sun its joy. He alleged that everything in the world, including the rule of feudal monarchs, was arranged by "heaven" and decided by its will. From this he fabricated a religious theology of "consonance between heaven and man" or mutual reaction between "heaven" and man. If bad things contrary to the heavenly way occurred in managing state affairs, heaven would give warnings in the form of natural disasters. Peasant rebellions went against the will of heaven and therefore would be punished by heaven. In this way he attempted to hoodwink and threaten the people not to rise up against feudal rule by the theory of religious authority.

Sanctifying heaven meant sanctifying man. In extolling "heaven" as the supreme god, Tung Chung-shu's political goal was to establish the inviolability of the authority of the monarch. To connect "heaven" with the "ruler," he propagated the trinity of heaven, earth and man. "Heaven" not only created nature but gave human society a ruler with the highest authority. In other words, the emperor's right to rule was handed down by heaven and his rule had the mandate of heaven and therefore was absolutely authoritative. Thus divine right from heaven was linked with the authority of the monarch on the earth. If someone violated the interests of the emperor or acted against his will, this person also defied "heaven" and would be severely punished by it.

Why did "heaven" give right only to the emperor and the "sage" and let them exercise rule? Tung

Chung-shu advocated the theory of the "three grades of nature." Human "nature" given by "heaven," he asserted, was divided into high, medium and low grades; that is, the "nature of the sage," the "nature of the intermediate man" and the "nature of bushel and pail" (meaning limited talent and wisdom). To a few exploiting-class rulers, "heaven" bestowed on them the "nature of the sage." Born with a good nature, these so-called "sages" are endowed by "heaven" with exceptional talent and wisdom and absolute authority. Only they could be the rulers who expressed the will of heaven and educated the people. "Heaven" gave the masses of working people only the low-grade "nature of bushel and pail" and these people, born with all evil but no nature that was good, were hopelessly stupid. They could only be oppressed and enslaved by the "sages."

In blaring the idealist apriorism of Confucius and Mencius, Tung Chung-shu wanted to prove from the theory of knowledge that the order of feudal rule was absolutely rational and therefore could not be violated. This fallacious theory that "the authority of the monarch is the mandate of heaven" became a very important spiritual weapon for later feudal rulers to oppress and enslave the working people.

Picking up the mantle of the theory of the "heavenly mandate" and the theory of "genius" from Confucius and Mencius, Lin Piao compared himself to the "heavenly horse," styled himself the "noblest of men" and a superman and described himself as the natural ruler "endowed by heaven." At the same time he slandered the working people as an ignorant and foolish "mob." This nonsense is the same kind of stuff as "the highest are the wise and the lowest are the stupid" advocated by Confucius and the sovereign's divine right and the "three grades of nature" put forth by Tung Chung-shu. Reactionary rulers in the past often styled themselves "heavenly horses," meaning they were born differently from the common people, endowed with outstanding talent and ability and invested with the "mandate of heaven." Therefore, they were entitled to act arbitrarily and become rulers. Comparing himself to a "heavenly horse," Lin Piao tried to "have everything under his command and everything at his disposal" and relied on his handful of henchmen to engage in conspiratorial activities so as to turn back the wheel of history. However, a man who ignores the great strength of the masses and dreams of ruling the people as an "autocrat" inevitably will knock his head against the wall.

"Heaven Changeth Not, Likewise The Tao Changeth Not"

While propagating theological idealism, Tung Chung-shu also did his utmost to sell the metaphysical world outlook, shouting that "the fundamental origin of Tao comes from Heaven; Heaven changeth not, likewise the Tao changeth not." His Tao meant the fundamental law of all things. What he said was that everything in the human world, especially "the three cardinal

guides and the five constant virtues," were deliberately arranged by heaven, and that since heaven never changed, so were all things in the human world.

Everything in the world, according to Tung Chung-shu, was created and controlled by heaven. In the natural world the movement of the sun, the moon and stars and the succession of the four seasons expressed the will of heaven and were unchangeable. The "three cardinal guides and the five constant virtues" in feudal society were formulated by heaven with the sovereign, the father and the husband always in the position of the rulers, and ministers, sons and wives always in the position of being ruled. Like the movement of the sun, the moon and stars, this relationship of subservience could never be changed. As Tung Chung-shu saw it, the social position of the ruling classes and the ruled classes could neither be changed nor transformed into each other. In advocating this idealist metaphysical world outlook, he wanted to prove the eternity of the feudal-patriarchal system and ideology and also that the feudal exploitative system was unchangeable and would exist for ever.

Tung Chung-shu denied the development of history. In his eyes, changes in social system and succession of dynasties in history were nothing but the orderly repetition of a prescribed cycle. In spite of some superficial changes, the things he propagated like "the three cardinal guides and the five constant virtues" would remain unchanged eternally. He prattled that "the ancient world was also the present world; the present world is also the ancient world," there being no difference at all. From all this he concluded that it was necessary to "follow heaven and learn from ancient examples." Thus he stood for conservatism, a return to the ancient way and retrogression, and opposed reform, revolution and the movement for social advance. This clearly revealed the essence of Tung Chung-shu's metaphysical world outlook which was nothing but a philosophical summing up of the retrogressive and restorationist line of "learning from ancient kings" advocated by Confucius and Mencius. Chairman Mao penetratingly criticized this reactionary metaphysical ideology by pointing out in *On Contradiction*: "In China, there was the metaphysical thinking exemplified in the saying 'Heaven changeth not, likewise the Tao changeth not,' and it was supported by the decadent feudal ruling classes for a long time."

* * *

Tung Chung-shu was an active exponent of the doctrines of Confucius and Mencius in China's feudal period. By lauding Confucius to the skies, he tried to use the feudal state machinery—this violent force—to spread these doctrines and unify people's thinking, and thereby strengthened feudal landlord class rule over the peasants. His reactionary theory was inherited by the later feudal ruling classes. All reactionaries and their agents not only gave Confucius the titles of "the most holy sage and foremost teacher" and the "model teacher for all generations," but showered pro-

found thanks on Tung Chung-shu by calling him a "leading Confucian."

P Meeting the counter-revolutionary needs of imperialism, revisionism and reaction, Lin Piao, the agent of the landlord and capitalist classes who wormed his way into our Party, attempted a counter-revolutionary restoration in our country. Therefore, he not only revered Confucius as a god but admired Tung Chung-shu without reservation. With ulterior motives, Lin Piao once said: "The Han Dynasty only revered Confucianism and banned all other schools of thought. There was a man called Tung Chung-shu. I hope each of you will learn to be a Tung Chung-shu." By frantically extolling Tung Chung-shu and advocating the doctrines of Confucius and Mencius, this political swindler wanted to inherit Tung Chung-shu's thinking of worshipping Confucianism and opposing Legalism, change the theoretical basis guiding our Party's thinking

— Marxism-Leninism-Mao Tsetung Thought — with the doctrines of Confucius and Mencius, tamper with the Party's basic line and policies for the entire historical period of socialism, subvert the dictatorship of the proletariat and establish a feudal hereditary Lin dynasty. It seemed to Lin Piao that only the trash of Confucius and Tung Chung-shu could help him first establish in his anti-Party clique a kind of feudal relationship characterized by "the three cardinal guides and the five constant virtues" and absolute loyalty to him and his son, and then realize his daydream of restoring capitalism. By "hoping each of you will learn to be a Tung Chung-shu," Lin Piao wanted all people, acting like Tung Chung-shu in extolling Confucius and advocating "only revering Confucianism," to recognize him and his son as "geniuses" and "only revere" his absolute authority, be subservient under their "command" and at their "disposal" and become loyal subjects of a feudal fascist Lin dynasty.