



# Ancient Symbolism

Among the Chinese,

BY

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# Ancient Symbolism



**I**N the early stages of the history of mankind symbols were naturally very much used and language itself was a set of symbols. Words are symbols of thoughts and thoughts are symbols of things. The outside world is real; and man is real. The first men found themselves in contact with matter and when impressions were made on them through the senses they responded by sounds and acts which became the foundation of language. The sounds the first men uttered or caused by their actions became the first words when intellectual force had imparted to them a sufficiently distinctive meaning to ensure their permanence. Thus, the first symbols used by men were words and gestures. In those early times gestures would be of frequent use as signs of thoughts and of the will of the man making the gestures; and gestures and words together, few as words were at that time, constituted the entire working plant by which men could communicate thought to one another.

Gradually gestures were less used, and words were more used; and as this change took place, the vocal organs had to perform more work than before, while the hands and feet, the head and face, the eyes and shoulders, had less to do than formerly. Then the whole task of representing the

mind's changing states was thrown upon words, and as there was not sufficient opportunity yet afforded for forming many abstract words, the vocabulary in use was extremely pictorial and realistic. For example, when we say: "It is too salt for my taste," we mention the substantive "salt" and give it an adjective signification. At some unknown period to the long line of our forefathers the word "salt" assumed an adjective sense and our language thus became a little more abstract and lost a little of its early realism.

If we ask what is a *word*, we must answer that it consists of several elements, all of which separately, and unitedly, are of a representative character, and tell us what those who formerly used the word, and what those who now use it, were, and are, thinking of. It consists of a sound, or several sounds combined, and of one, or several, ideas, attached to that sound. Sound is essential, and meaning is essential and these component parts form the word; which is thus seen to be, not so much a single symbol, as a bundle of symbols.

Human speech consists of symbols of ideas, and ideas are symbols of objects taken notice of by the senses. The reason why the mind forms ideas, and afterwards forms words by the help of the organs of speech, is to make materials for easy communication with others, so that the mind may be able to refer to every object conversed upon by the sign.

When a vocabulary has been constructed by any people it will always be found that they connect the words by symbols of a grammatical kind: so that, as a rule, each nation has its own grammar, as well as its own vocabulary. After grammar originated, there came the art of writing. The mind, through social instincts, warmth of feeling, and the desire to attain certain ends, first constructed language, and then proceeded to invent writing, which is merely a continuation of the process of symbolization.

Writing we may suppose would begin by counters used to mark numbers. There is good reason to believe that the exigencies of trade led to the invention of signs of number

In the first instance, to be followed by signs of objects less important and less frequently occurring. The counters used were often pebbles or rods. Moses, and the magicians of Egypt used rods. The Chinese patriarchal emperor Fuhü used divining rods, first a few and afterwards a considerable number. The use of counters would be the foundation both of ancient writing and of arithmetic. It was customary to sit on the ground and strokes, long and short, made on sand, would mark numbers in the early intercourse of mankind. This may be illustrated by the signs for number used in Babylonian writing. These appear to shew that short counters which were placed horizontally, or perpendicularly, were used by the Babylonians. Thus 342 would be represented by  $\equiv ||| \equiv$ . In the writing as it appears on bricks the strokes take the form of wedges, and are thicker at one end than at the other, because the stamp which impressed the clay when soft, had this shape given it for elegance. These signs of number are used most extensively in astronomical records. After five there is a change, so that six differs from the others in being composed of two lines meeting at an angle. But the principle of this early symbolism was one stroke for unity. This stroke was repeated for two, and again for three. The addition was made on the right hand side as in our own numerals. This mode of writing numbers crept into China, as we know by the incident mentioned in the *Tso-chwen*, where it is said that the character *hai*, the last of the twelve hours, was used in the year 542 before Christ, by an old man of 73 years of age, who had lived accordingly 26,660 days and expressed this in writing by two strokes above and three sixes below. With this agrees the seal form of the character *hai*. Chinese, if we consider only the inside of the character, has always been written from left to right, as is the case with Hebrew also. It has also always been written from top to bottom. For this reason the character *hai*  $\text{𠄎}$  lends itself easily to this arithmetical use

Generally, the Chinese characters being composed of strokes, would naturally originate in a rude ciphering, and would to a large extent, in the first instance, be of foreign origin. The Chinese inventors would proceed on this double foundation to make what new characters they required just as the Greeks began to write with Phœnician letters and added what more they needed as a supplement to the alphabet.

#### THE SYMBOLISM OF THE STARS.

In modern education the names of the principal stars are early taught to children in the west. The annual motion of the sun among the fixed stars, and the revolution of the superior and inferior planets round the sun become known to the young and they are asked to notice that the self-evolved light of the hot and burning sun differs widely from the borrowed light of the pale moon. It is explained that the cause of the unchanging roundness of the sun is that he shines by his own light, just as the monthly phases of the moon are caused by her being a dark body. The laws of the winds are taught, and the causes of the rain and of drought become subjects of instruction. In China the absence of science led to superstition. Yet it is surprising how much science the early Chinese possessed, and in the first ages how little superstition beclouded their minds. As to the starry heavens, they were regarded as a great dial plate of time and destiny. The heavenly bodies moved backward or forward slowly or quickly, on this dial plate. The *Great Bear* was the index which like the pointer of a clock\* directed every hour the attention of the observer to a division of the horizon. The annual revolution of the sun is accompanied by the annual revolution of all the stars; so that the *Great Bear* pointers indicate a different part of the horizon on the first of each month at the same time of day. This is pointed out by *Ho-kwan-tsz*, who wrote about B.C. 300. The Greek names we know for the

\* See in Legge's *Shoo-king* Chalmers' article on the *Astronomy of the Ancient Chinese*, p. 94.

constellations were derived from older nations occupying the adjacent countries in Africa and Asia, and we have them in the Roman version which Latinizes the Greek names. The Chinese called the Great Bear the *Northern Teu* or peck measure and this name indicates that the early symbolism of star naming was agricultural, for the Teu is the peck measure for grain, and it has the shape of the four stars which form the wagon in King Charles' Wain. A very large proportion of the names of stars and constellations are derived from agriculture, and the customs and habits of the people in times long anterior to the Cheu dynasty.

One of the remarkable symbolizations of the Ancient Chinese is the division into four main groups of the stars belonging to the zodiac. What we regard as a scorpion was to them the main part of a dragon whose horn was Arcturus which is called Ta kio, "Great horn." The word "dragon" *lung*, means rising, increasing, and prospering. In the daily rotation of the heavens, the Scorpion is assigned to the eastern quarter and the word "East," *tung*, also means rising, and of course is applied to mean the East because the heavenly bodies all rise in that quarter. The dragon extended over nearly ninety degrees. It included Libra and Sagittarius. Here then we find quite a peculiar symbolism as compared with the 12 signs, or the 23 constellations which are arranged to suit the path of the sun from west to east. Opposite to Scorpio is Taurus with Aries, Orion and Gemini. At the same hour when the Scorpion was seen rising in the east, Taurus and Orion were seen setting in the west, and they appeared as a tiger to the ancient Chinese. The southern constellations were described as a red bird or phoenix and they embrace chiefly Cancer, Leo and Virgo. Another name is "the quail." A serpent or tortoise was supposed to be seen in the north, and it embraced Aquarius, Capricornus, and Pisces. The Red Bird was the constellation of summer, and the serpent of winter, as the dragon and tiger were of spring and autumn.

## THE DRAGON.

The dragon is an Indian animal, and in early times it may have been Chinese. At present the flying dragon of India leaps for a long distance in forest lands among trees, and is aided in its passage through the air by wings attached to its four feet. China probably had in ancient times a dragon allied to the Indian which became from its habit of rising in the air, a symbol for power, increase of wisdom and the influence gained either by knowledge or political authority. In the Book of Changes the dragon is the symbol of the sage and of the king. Especially is this symbol regarded as instructive, because the sage and king rise from insignificance and obscurity to popular eminence.

The path by which the early Chinese arrived at this symbol for national and imperial power was partly through their fondness for astronomical observations and partly by divination. They saw the dragon represented in the brilliant constellations of the eastern sky where every orb of heaven appears to rise. They saw it also in the symbolic groups of the mil-foil stalks used by ancient diviners to figure out the changes which occur in the aspects of nature. The alterations which take place in the straws are for instance from unity to division, from a low position to a high position, from the obscure to the bright, from the broken to the whole. The dragon is made symbolical of these changes, and the transformations of a sort of Jack Straw's castle are held to be a prophetic picture of the events that happen in the life of man. The great influence of the Book of Changes on the Chinese mind arises from the fact that it is thought to have this power of picturing out the fortunes of humanity. For long ages before the time of Confucius it was appealed to to foretell future events. In more recent times the reason why the dragon has been used as the symbol of imperial power thus becomes clear. It is because each dynastic family in its origin was like the dragon in rising from a low position to a high one.



## THE SYMBOLISM OF THE PA-KWA.

The book of which these are the basis, the Book of Changes, is full of symbolism, and necessarily so from its origin and purpose. When the diviner placed his forty-nine stalks of mil-foil on the ground, and proceeded to divine, he was dealing only with symbolism. The whole and broken lines of the Pa-kwa represented whatever he chose. He placed them one over the other in six lines, and decided that out of the six positions the second and the fifth should indicate prosperity. Thus in *Wen-wang's* arrangement, under the first of the 64 Kwa, or arrangements of the symbols in the *Yi-king*, the divining sentences are *kien lung tsai t'ien li kien ta jen*: "The dragon is seen in the fields. There will be good fortune in seeing the great man." This when deduced from the grouping of the rods in the second position was counted to be a most fortunate indication. But it was surpassed by the fifth position which denoted nobility of virtue, combined with the highest favour of fortune.

The diviners made, in the first instance, eight groups of three strokes each, whole or bisected. About B.C. 2800 Fu-hi divined with these eight diagrams, but he developed them into sixty-four by taking six strokes instead of three. A separate name was assigned to each of these diagrams, and these names constituted a sort of special language of divination. They are, in part, foreign it would seem; and, in part, native. They took their special meaning from their occurrence in successful divinations. Each of the *kwa* has a history and most of the names were the same previous to the 11th century before Christ. There never was a period from the beginning of Chinese classical tradition in the reign of Fu-hi downwards, when the king and people were without diviners, or without a guide book of divination, that is to say, an *Yi-king*.

The ancient Chinese divined by the tortoise and by the mil-foil, but of these the mil-foil seems to be the older, because the Scythian diviners mentioned by Herodotus had a

bundle of rods to divine with, and the Babylonian diviners mentioned in the Book of Ezekiel\* had arrows. On the other hand the divination by the tortoise is peculiar to China.

Books were kept to record all successful instances of divination, and so in the third and second millenniums before Christ, there was a state register of the 64 Kwa, the entries in which were in a certain diviner's dialect, or set of official phrases. These old Books of Changes existed along with that of Wen-wang down to the time of Confucius; and the historian Tso describes in a large number of instances the mode of procedure in state-divination, sometimes with the use of the Cheu dynasty *Yi-king*, and at other times with the use of the *Yi-king* of the older dynasties. When there was doubt of the meaning, or credibility, of the oracle, both books were appealed to; and they constituted a book of fate, by consulting which the future might be known at critical periods in the life of states, or of the individual.

In 1873, at the tomb of Confucius, I saw the mil-foil stalks used. They are 18 inches long; and about a fifth of an inch thick. The ordinary diagrams reduce the size of the strokes to suit the use of the Chinese pencil in drawing them. Such rods were apparently used far and wide, in the east and in the west, in the days of antiquity. Thus in the instance recorded by Ezekiel,\* the King of Babylon, the diviners of Babylon, and the army, all sincerely believed in the reality of the indication by rods, and Babylon would have her books of state-divination just as she had books of astrological indications, and of predictions derived from changes in the weather,

The rods formed symbolic groups, and in an age when scientific clearness of thought was rare, but when moral distinctions were plain enough, they assumed a predictive authority, which there was no one to question or dispute. Tso the historian places eloquent words in the mouths of the interlocutors in the divining scenes he records. His own

\* Ezek. xxi 21.

convictions are moral, and whether he believed or disbelieved in the Shang divination, or in the Chow divination. or both, he does not say; but his literary enthusiasm leads him to picture in an animated manner the warm feelings of the persons whose fate is foretold by the divination, just as Sophocles in *Antigone* describes in elevated language the feelings of Antigone herself, and other interlocutors in the play.

#### THE TORTOISE.

Something should be said here of the symbolism of the tortoise. The shell of one of these animals was scorched over a fire to make the marking distinct. But what is the marking? It is only during the present century that it has become known in the west that the lines on the tortoise, that reputedly wise and certainly long-lived creature, which the Chinese for long ages have supposed to carry on its shell the fate of empires and of individuals, in an occult symbolism, does really bear the marks of development contemporaneously with the mammalia and other vertebrata from some common type; so that each bone in the upper shell has its counterpart in the back-bone of the mammalia, and each bone in the lower shell has its counterpart in the breast-bone and ribs of the mammalia. The markings which the ancient Chinese took to be awful symbols of matters affecting man's happiness and misery, prove to be, under the clear torch-light of modern science, simply the joining of the bones, which under the superintending wisdom of GOD, have from separate ribs and vertebrae become united into a strong shield against the attacks of the enemies of the anima.

The tortoise now carries a monumental slab on its back. This is because of its age and strength. Some live to be a hundred years old. It is therefore in modern times a symbol of longevity. It is used, in consequence, to carry on its back imperial decrees, which it is supposed when once promulgated must never be abrogated. The Romans engraved the laws of the commonwealth on copper slabs set up in the

forum and Horace used the phrase *monumentum ære perennius* to denote the unchangeableness of anything which was certain to be well-remembered by mankind. Anything engraved on stone and set up on a tortoise is intended by the Chinese to attain a similar immortality. In ancient times tortoises were kept for use and this led to the discovery of their longevity.

#### THE STORK.

This is a long-lived animal which began to grow famous in the days of the early Tauists. From the time of the expeditions in search of the medicine of immortality in the third century before Christ, close observation was directed to all living things which had long life, whether plants or animals, because it was thought that they would reveal the secret of longevity. Storks of metal, or carved in wood, or painted on silk, are good as gifts to friends, as indicating the wish that they may attain longevity, and in some mysterious way assist them in attaining it. The son of the emperor LING-WANG before the days of Confucius is said to have mounted to heaven on a stork. But this is a later embellishment of which nothing occurs in the histories of the time.

#### SYMBOLISM OF THE PHŒNIX OR FENG-HWANG.

As a symbol the phœnix is usually embroidered on the robes of the empress, and anciently was regarded as a sign of good luck. It was not long before the Confucian age that the legend about the *Feng-hwang* made its appearance. The bird, the male *Feng* and female *Hwang* was, it has been said, the argus-pheasant. This is suggested by Dr. Williams and if that bird sings sweetly it would be probable. In the odes of the 12th century before Christ this bird's voice was heard as he flew about on sunny knolls in the neighbourhood of the Wu-tung tree. The cry of these pheasants, if such they are, and the rustling of their wings are mentioned by the poet. Their beautiful colours are not alluded to. They are said in the Shanhai king to be as large as a stork and to have five colours. The same book says, "It alights only on

“the Wu-tung tree, and eats only the fruit of the bamboo. Its voice has five notes. It appears only when reason rules mankind. When it flies all the birds follow it.”

This was the state of the legend regarding this bird in the time of Mencius, and with it agrees nearly the idea Confucius had of it. He says, “The phœnix does not come. The Yellow River sends forth no mystic diagram. All is ended with me. I am without nope.” To him the arrival of the phoenix would have been a happy omen.

This bird was the harbinger of prosperous times, when goodness and justice prevail among men, and honied words drop from the lips of sages. In another part of the *Lun-yü*, a snatch of a song is introduced. It is sung by the madman of Ch u, who saw Confucius passing in his carriage, and sang:

“The phoenix, the phoenix,

Its virtue is decayed.

As to the past, reproof is useless,

For the future, it may be provided for.

Give up your scheming.

Those who now rule the state are in danger of calamities.”

In the *Li-ki*, which passes for one of the classics, we read that the unicorn, the phoenix, the tortoise and dragon, are styled the four marvellous animals, *See ling* 四靈. This was probably added by some Han dynasty writer; for parts of the *Li-ki*, it is admitted, do not belong to the classical period. This was near the Christian era. It affords us information on the tendency of symbolical objects to grow with age. Between B.C. 1100 and B.C. 500, the original pheasant had become a symbol for good fortune. After the age of Confucius every time it is mentioned, there seems to be an addition already made to its symbolical signification. This is usually the case with symbolical animals and other objects. They begin as real animals, but as moss and ivy growing on stone soon give it quite a different appearance, lending to it many a weird and fantastic feature, so it is with the moss and ivy of legend. They so wrap up and conceal

real objects that the original bird or quadruped is lost sight of, and the myth is allowed to cover up history and cause it to be forgotten. This is quite as true of persons as it is of animals. Thus the ancient emperors Fu-hi and Shen-mung are by many regarded as purely mythical beings. Yet we find that in the oldest Chinese books they are mentioned as real persons. When these names occur in the classics, the Four Books, and the history of Tso, there are no mythical additions. But in later works Fu-hi is clothed with leaves, and has a snake's tail, while Shen-mung is also hopelessly disguised.

With the phoenix should be mentioned the *Wan* which Williams supposes to be the male of the argus pheasant. The *Wan* is the bird of a bridegroom, as the phoenix is the bird of a bride. It is first mentioned in the *Shan-hai-ching*, and in the poetry of the Han period. It cannot then be traced back beyond the third Century before Christ, and it was after this the property of the poets till it entered into history in the *Hen Han-shu*, the author of which died A.D. 445. Historians rivalled each other in introducing romantic phraseology and poetic passages into biographies, and aided much in extending the use in literature of the symbolical animals.

In the Han dynasty unheard of wealth and prosperity fell to the emperors after six centuries of division and anarchy. The emperors surrounded themselves with eloquent writers, who composed, for the delight of the imperial ear, the most charming pieces in prose and poetry. It was then that the zoological symbolism of China rapidly grew to the proportions it has ever since retained. It was made to serve an æsthetic purpose, in the embroidery of imperial dresses, and in the adornment of the walls of the palaces. In sculpture and in painting they constituted the materials with which the artists of those times worked. Among the people of China the existence of these animals is neither believed in rationally, nor denied categorically. They are retained for æsthetic use.

## THE CHI-LIN.

The *Chi-lin* is a symbolical animal. This animal belongs to the class of deer. It first occurs in the Book of Odes in poetry made about 1100 B.C. as I suppose. The poems belong to the south part of the province of SHEN-SI. The foot, the forehead, and the horn, of the animal are singled out as beautiful features, and made use of to extol the noble appearance of the duke's sons. It is a popular song. The next use of the word is in the poem ascribed to Confucius, the finding of the Lin:

“In the age of T'ang and Yü the Lin and the  
Feng walked abroad  
Now when it is not their time they come:  
And what do they seek?  
The Lin—The Lin—My heart is sad.”

This was in the year B.C. 480. It was, says tradition, at Chia Siang-hsien that the animal was caught; and Confucius was asked to look at it. He exclaimed: “For whom have you come? For whom have you come?” He added: “The course of my teaching is ended.” This statement is found in the comment of *Kung-yang* upon the Spring and Autumn annals of Confucius.

If this was a hymn of Confucius at all, and it does not occur in the *Lun yü*, it contains no fabulous features. It is merely a lament over the evil times in which he lived as compared with the golden age of the past, when two animals, the phoenix and chi-lin, which portend prosperity, made their appearance.

The symbolism of the Chi-lin in the early CHOW period was that of nobleness and gentleness, and it was not very different from the notion of the White Doe of Rylstone presented by Wordsworth in his poem with that name. He describes the doe as “most beautiful, most clearly white. A radiant creature, silver bright.”

“Then she advanced with stealth-like pace,  
Drew softly near her—and more near,

“Stopp'd once again : but as no trace  
 Was found of anything to fear,  
 Even to her feet the creature came,  
 And laid its head upon her knee ;  
 And looked into the lady's face,  
 A look of pure benignity,  
 And fond unclouded memory.”

At the beginning of the poem she is described as walking into the churchyard at Rylstone while the congregation is assembled for worship in the church. The poet says :

“Ye multitude pursue your prayers,  
 And blame not me if my heart and sight  
 Are occupied with one delight ;  
 'Tis a work for Sabbath hours  
 If I with this bright creature go  
 Whether she be of forest bowers,  
 From the bowers of earth below ;  
 Or a spirit for one day given,  
 A gift of grace from purest heaven.”

To Wordsworth the white doe exhibited benignity and sympathy with human sorrow : and was a symbol of these sentiments. In China the Chi-lin was early regarded as a benignant creature also. On this account it is called *Jen-shen*, the animal of benevolence. A few centuries later, it had come to be looked on, with the phoenix, as the companion of sages. In the *Er-ya* it is further said to have a cow's tail, but still it belongs to the class of deer, and the difference of the tail is not great between a cow and a deer. It has, however, but one horn in the account of it given in the *Er-ya*, a work we must place before Confucius.

Probably the reason why Confucius regarded the appearance of the Chi-lin as portending his death, was the decay of public morality in his time. He did not interpret its appearance as a sign that he was a sage, or that his teaching disagreed with that of sages, but that the creature felt with him sorrow for the decadence of the times. If Confucius had seen indications of a return shortly to the early prosperity of the Chow dynasty, he would have welcomed the Chi-lin, as a sign in correspondence with the political condition of the empire.



This would have been in harmony with the action taken by the emperor Hau Wu-ti in the second century before Christ. A Chi-lin quite white was found; and the emperor in consequence, built a gallery in the vicinity of his palace to which he gave the name *Chi-lin-ko*. Thinking afterwards of the virtues and wisdom of his counsellors he ordered their portraits to be painted and hung on the walls of this gallery, because he regarded their prudent advice as a main element in the prosperity of his reign. We may, therefore, consider the Chi-lin as having become a symbol for national prosperity, before the time of Confucius, and must conclude that Confucius also viewed it as such. The wolf's forehead and horse's hoof were later additions, which do not occur before the Han dynasty.

The poetical use of the leopard and wolf in the Hebrew prophets in prediction of the millenium which was to be brought about by the spread of religious knowledge may be compared with the allusions to the Chi-lin in the Book of Odes. The Hebrew statement, that 'the wolf shall dwell with the lamb', and the 'leopard lie down with the kid' is predictive while the Chinese poet is merely descriptive.

It is very plain that Chinese legends grow like moss upon a stone. After a landslide the surface of rocks is clean cut without vegetation. Exposure to the weather causes moss and other plants to grow. Then the rock becomes dark and fantastic, and is more beautiful than formerly. So with Chinese legends. Real animals and real events become changed into monstrous animals and fictions.

#### THE SYMBOLISM OF TREES.

IN the garden of Eden a tree gave the power of distinguishing good and evil, and another conferred immortality. The one was moral and the other prophetic. They were the signs and seals of the first revelation made to man. They belonged to paradise, and were intended for the teaching of primeval man in moral duty, and in his anticipation of the world to come. The leaves of the tree of life were, we are

told in the Book of Revelation, intended for "the healing of the nations." In the same book the tree of life is said to be planted by the banks of the water of life to bear twelve manner of fruits, and to have yielded its fruit every month.

In the traditions of the Jews in Honan it is said that the seven holy men and seven holy women mentioned in the ancient scriptures sit now under the tree of life in the paradise of God. When the Jews came from Bokhara to Kai-feng fu, in the tenth and eleventh centuries they brought with them this tradition, which was preserved in their smaller books. Here we see the use of a symbol as the shrine of truth. It is a matter of great interest to trace the tree of life in ancient Chinese tradition. We have it in the *Ling chi* which is spoken of in Chinese books for the first time in the works of the philosopher *Lie-tsz*, who lived about B.C. 450. He also says that to the south of HU-NAN there is a tree which has a spring of 500 years and an autumn of 500 years. He adds that in ancient times there was a tree called the "spring tree:" *ch'ün shu*. Its spring and autumn each lasted for 8000 years. On a thoroughly decayed soil is often seen the *Ch'ün chi* 菌之 fungus, (now called the *Polyporus lucidus*), which grows up in the morning and dies in the evening. The *C'hun* tree of North China is the *Cedrela Odorata* 香椿 "Fragrant spring" or the *Ailanthus glandulosa* 臭椿 "Ill smelling spring tree." Silk worms feed on both and the young leaves of the fragrant *c'hun* are cooked for food. In the near neighbourhood of these allusions to trees *Lie ts'i* speaks of the fairy islands, five in number in the Eastern Ocean. He is the first author who alludes to them. "The palaces in these islands are of gold and jade; the birds and beasts are all of beauteous aspect; trees producing pearls grow thickly on the land, and their fruit has a charming taste. Those who eat that fruit never grow old, never die. The inhabitants of those islands are all immortal and wise as sages." Such is the description given. We are in these times obliged to connect the early

chapters of Genesis with the old beliefs of Babylonia. We also know from the account given in the Epistle to the Hebrews of Abel and Enoch, that the apostles regarded these ancient saints as men who were favoured with special divine revelations, and we learn from Jude that Enoch preached that the Lord cometh with ten thousand of his saints. There was a pre-Mosaic teaching of the Four last things and with this teaching the tree of life in Paradise was associated. The tree of life of the Assyrians appears to have been connected with this, and, if so, then the *Ming kap*, a Chinese plant which is fabled to produce a leaf each day from the 1st of the month to the 15th and to drop one each day from the 15th to the end of the month, may also be connected. The reason of a tree being chosen to represent immortality is in part that it has in itself the power of reproducing life; and in part that it has healing virtue.

Another early allusion to the elixir of immortality is in the year B.C. 274, when a traveller came to the capital of the *Chu* country at *King chen* in the province of HU-PEI, to offer the medicine of immortality to the king. But the medicine in this case was probably mercury. This is mentioned in the *Chan kwo ts'e*, a work of the third century before Christ.

#### TREE OF LIFE OR CALENDAR TREE

The 蓂莢 *Ming kap* tree is represented in Chinese old sculptures with fifteen buds on the right of the central stem and fifteen on the left. Tradition says that this plant was a lucky plant of the time of Yau. From the 1st of each month one bud grew each day. On the 16th the first bud fell, and on the 17th a second and so on. When there were 29 days in a month, one of the buds remained on the trunk. Thus the emperor could by observing this plant, decide the length of the months and the time of new and full moon. The Assyrian tree shews seven branches or buds on one short stem. In the sculptures, as represented in woodcuts in Canon Rawlinson and other writers on Assyria as in the "Ancient

Monarchies" of Rawlinson, there are eleven florets or branches, on each side, and, above, a twelfth or terminal bud or floret. Under this last, there are seven buds, making with the others thirty in all. This is, therefore, like the Chinese, a calendaric tree. The Chinese tree has seven buds on each side, in the work *Chin shī so* 金石索. On the whole, the symbolism of the Assyrian tree is rather connected with the number seven, representing the week and the days of creation. This is indicated by the seven buds on each side, and by the seven florets without stalks above, under the terminal bud. The calendaric symbolism of the month is limited to the composite number thirty, made up as above stated of  $11+1+11+7$ . In Chinese the symbolism is more in connection with the month, and less with the week. But the Chinese are not deficient in the symbolism of the week in their calendar, for they have, for instance, the seven days of creation 天地初闢. The first day is that of the fowl, the 2nd of the dog, the 3rd of the pig, the 4th of the sheep, the 5th of the cow, the 6th of the horse, the 7th of man. It is on account of this distorted relic of creation that the 7th of the first Chinese month is often called the *day of man*. The *Lu shī* gives this note from a lost work called 譚藪 *T'an seu*. See in *Lu shī* 2, 10. This notion of the 7th day being the day of man came into China about A.D. 500. See *Pei wen yün fu*.

The conclusion is obvious that the Assyrian and Chinese tree of life have in them an indication of the seven days of creation, and of the month of thirty days.

The superstitions of the middle ages in Europe teach us that *truth* appears in the world before *superstition*, and that false science is very often distorted truth. So it is in China; and so it was in Babylonia. Truth was known before error, and error is too frequently the mangled and transmogrified image of truth, once known but forgotten. This is the case with the doctrine of lucky days, now spread over all the nations, from Japan to Asia Minor. It formerly prevailed

In the Roman calendar where the *dies fastus* and *nefastus* have in the ecclesiastical calendar of Western Europe been exchanged for fasts and festivals. For the origin of this distinction in days we must look to those early ages, when GOD first spoke to man, and blessed and sanctified one particular day.

#### NUMERICAL SYMBOLISM.

The successive supplements to the Yi-king of the Chow dynasty appear to have been made in part before the time of Confucius. Among these pre-Confucian portions may be those passages which treat of the Great Extreme, of the Yellow River diagram, and that of the river Lo. The first of these, the *T'ai chi*, is the source of numerical evolution. It produces the distinctions Yin and Yang. The divining rods manipulated by the rules in use first became separated into the general division of light and darkness, or good fortune and ill fortune. These again were each divisible into two, making the *Si SIANG*, or "four forms," and these further into the *PA KWA* or "eight diagrams." The mil-foil rods reveal great destinies, make a picture of heaven and earth in their widest extent, and embrace the four seasons in all their variety of development. There is nothing of cosmogony in this *Tai chi*. It appears as the primal unity only in the universe, which the diviner pictures by means of the mil-foil stalks. The mil-foil and tortoise are the "divine" implements which the sage uses to discover good and ill fortune. The *Ho tu* and *Lo shu* next mentioned are according to *Shau yau fu*, magic squares of an entirely numerical character. Others think the *Ho tu* "Yellow river diagram" and *Lo shu* "Lo river diagram" are both lost. On the whole there is in the Supplements to the *Yi king*, no cosmogony, and *T'ai chi* here used as a divining symbol is the ultimate unit of development in divination. The *Yi king* does not treat of the origin of the world at all. It has a numerical symbolism. Odd numbers belong to heaven and even numbers to earth. Heaven is 25, Earth is 70.

The united numbers of heaven and earth are 55. Heaven has the number 210, earth the number 216. Four times 76 gives 144 and  $76 \times 720 = 11520$ . This is the arithmetical form to which the diviners of those times reduced their speculations on the universe. The *Yi king* goes no farther than this into the philosophy of nature.

#### PHILOSOPHICAL SYMBOLISM.

The great extreme or *T'ai chi* is a symbol for the ultimate source of matter, life, force, and motion. It had already been used in divination for primal unity in the evolution of numbers. Finding it in the supplements to the Book of Changes it was taken by the philosophers to express the conception of the ultimate origin of nature. In *Lie tsz* it is employed in the form *T'ai shī* or *T'ai ch'u* the great beginning and *T'ai su* the great past. He distinguishes between matter, vapour and form. These three elements are developed from chaos.

In *Lau Tsī* we find the first statement of the Chinese cosmogonical philosophy. He takes the *Yi king* philosophy as his basis and founds on it a fuller system intended to account for the beginning of things. He was not, like Confucius, a transmitter of ancient wisdom. He prepared to search for the sources of the universe. He was the first Chinese author to state that TAU was the foundation of the world, and that before TAU there was nothing. The trinitarian cosmogony of Babylon which had then reached China he was the first to adopt and teach. His symbols were 道 tau for primal force, 德 te for moral activity, one, two and three for steps in the evolution of the universe, 帝 ti for God 無 wn or "nothing" for the source of tau. The conception of chaos which is essentially Babylonian, is found in the early Tauist writers, and not previously. This shows that the ideas of *Lau tsī* are, in part, derived from a foreign source. Indeed his system is essentially Babylonian, but tinged with Hindoo thought, just as the ideas of Plato and of Philo were Babylonian, but tinged with the thinking

of Egypt, Greece and Asia Minor. It was because Lau tsz seized on the scattered rays of Western thought and boldly adopted them, that he became the greatest of Chinese philosophers. Plato by doing the same a century later with all the resources of his rich and powerful mind also became the greatest of the Greek philosophers.

#### SYMBOLISM IN SACRIFICES.

The Chinese in their ancient sacrifices symbolised their reverent spirit, their submission, their filial piety and their desire for certain benefits which they hoped the beings to whom the sacrifices were presented would confer on them. The faith of the old Chinese may have been either a belief in universal moral fate which bestows retribution on mankind according to their deserts, or it may have been faith in the power of the beings prayed to, to protect, guide and bless. It does not seem quite clear which. There was something of both perhaps.

But why did they offer a burnt-sacrifice? There is in this ancient ceremony a remarkable similarity to the customs of the west in high antiquity. Especially is there a similarity to the customs of the Hebrews, and before them of the antediluvian patriarchs. It is necessary therefore to compare the burnt sacrifices of the Books of Moses with those of the old Chinese Books.

The burnt offering of Abel is the first instance recorded in the Bible of an expiatory sacrifice. We are told that Abel offered a more excellent sacrifice than Cain. On account of the repentance faith and obedience which accompanied the offering God was pleased with Abel\* and testified of his gifts that he was righteous. The inference to be drawn is that the sacrifice of this righteous man was substitutionary and that Abel actually had this thought in offering the sacrifice. It was then a most fruitful germ. All propitiatory sacrifices sprang from this first example. Among the early

\* *Shanga*, "looked towards him with favour"

racés of man, before the Jews became a separate people, this symbolism existed to typify the forgiveness of sins which is bestowed on account of a propitiatory sacrifice. When Noah came out of the ark he offered burnt offerings and it is said that "the Lord smelled a sweet savour, and resolved not again to curse the ground any more for man's sake." The sacrifice was accompanied by prayer and an answer to the prayer was granted in the regular succession of the seasons, and the peaceful life of Noah and his descendants on the earth with no more fear of a deluge. In Abraham's offering of a ram burnt on the altar in the room of his son we are informed that God was pleased with his obedience and made to him promises which included a blessing on all mankind through his posterity. In the sacrifices of the law of Moses there was life for life, and life as a ransom for the life of the offerer who brought the victim to the altar. But there were other ideas combined. Obedience, faith, and penitence, were all there. There was thanksgiving. There was recognition of the divine sovereignty, bounty, justice, and truth. There was also in the mind of the sacrificer the thought that he and all his possessions belonged to God as the supreme LORD and Judge. The Jew under the teaching of the law of Moses learned to see in the sacrifice a sin offering, a sign of moral evil. The victim deserved death, on account of sin, and was put to death in the place of the sinner. The Book of Leviticus is a system of symbols, and the ideas connected with sacrifices in the Mosaic law are there patent to the careful reader. For fear also lest the Jew should mistake the symbolic sense the Christian explanation is given in the epistle to the Hebrews. The scriptures are a book of gradual divine teaching, and the symbols of the old law have their perfect meaning realized in CHRIST. The writers of the Bible have left us a golden chain of celestial instruction; and in nothing is the succession of thought more remarkable than in the symbolism of the sacrifices, beginning with Abel, and ending with the death of Christ.



This being so, it is an interesting question what place in the development of the ideas linked with burnt-sacrifices is occupied by the burnt-sacrifices of the Chinese? Sacrifices are symbols of the sentiments of the worshipper. That feeling may be filial piety or gratitude or reverence, or penitence, or strong confidence. The victim may be a thank offering, a peace offering, a sin offering, a ransom for a life forfeited. In ancient times the Persians insisted on the inhabitants of the countries over which they claimed sovereignty bringing earth and water as signs of willing submission and of the recognition of the Persian claim to universal sovereignty. Those who brought earth and water indicated subjection to Persia by these symbols.

About twenty years ago Dr. Martin invited me to meet at the Tung-wen College eight or ten good native scholars, at that time holding positions in the college. As a subject of conversation, I made allusion to the Chinese burnt-sacrifices, still retained from a fathomless antiquity in the worship of the temple of heaven. The first mention of the Chinese burnt-sacrifices is in the Book of History, in the account there preserved of the emperor *Shun*. I asked them to give me their opinion as to the signification of the burnt-sacrifice. They said that the smoke and flame went upwards to heaven and reached farther in the direction of the Being worshipped than an unburnt sacrifice. Their idea seemed to be that the smoke and odour of the sacrifice ascended so as to be perceived by the Being adored, by the Supreme Ruler. To them, this explanation seemed satisfactory, but to us, knowing as we do that burnt-sacrifices were offered by very many ancient nations, the primeval burnt sacrifices of the Chinese assume a very different character. They are one of the most certain links that bind the east to the west. The symbolical meaning of the burnt-offering in China has been lost by lapse of time. It was a remnant of the western usages the Chinese brought with them to their country, and its signification must be sought in western ideas regarding sacrifices.

Inquiries of this kind afford us distant glimpses into the history of the ancient world. We learn how men in the early ages of time comforted their minds with visions of the past. We also learn how divine instruction was given by type and shadow, and how the thoughts of the Israelitish people were directed to the future, as a glorious age when the divine purposes of favour to mankind would be fully realised. The symbolism of China was an effort to preserve the past and to keep the picture of bygone times bright and fresh. The symbolism of the Hebrew writings was intended to prefigure with colours still more glowingly bright and fascinating the coming GOLDEN AGE when mankind shall be united in a happy brother-hood, when peace and piety shall prevail, and when war, slavery, crime and poverty shall be banished for ever from human society.



*Among the subjects not touched on in this lecture are Buddhism which is modern in China, and architectural Symbolism which needs fuller treatment than there was space for in this lecture.*

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