In the early decades of the twentieth century Chinese scholars who had been trained in Western methods of literary and historical criticism applied these methods to their study of the Chinese Classics which purported to have been written in pre-Han China. At the same time scientific archaeological investigation was taken up with great enthusiasm. The result of all this scholarly activity was momentous in that it led to a complete reappraisal of the origin and development of Chinese civilization.

Certain conclusions were accepted as almost axiomatic by all but the most conservative scholars, both Chinese and foreign. First, all the extant literature attributed to pre-Han China, in the form in which it has come down to us, was recognized as the work of Han dynasty scholars who collated, edited and rearranged the texts, supplementing or excising, in order to bring them into line with their own historical, philosophical and theological theories. By attributing the authorship of these Han dynasty compilations in their entirety to philosophers and thinkers who had lived centuries before they not only endued them with an authority which became sacrosanct, but they handed on to posterity a tendentious account of the teaching of these earlier thinkers, foisting on them ideas and beliefs which only developed much later.

Secondly, they presented a view of the origin and development of early Chinese civilization and a history of ancient times which, though providing a justification of their own ethical and political concepts, had little basis in fact. Their traditional "history" of ancient times was accepted almost without challenge from Han times onwards right down to the twentieth century.

The significance of this for the western student of ancient China is that the works of sinologists written before the results
of this critical scholarship became known, valuable as they are in many ways, have to be accepted with the utmost caution, because many of the documents on which they based their conclusions are now recognized as not emanating from their reputed authors but from writers who lived and wrote centuries later. Only by the most careful and diligent study is it possible to separate genuine ancient material from late forgeries, and make a reliable assessment of date and authorship, and this work is still in its infancy.

Before going on to discuss religious development prior to Confucius another important observation needs to be made. Confucianists, at least from the Sung dynasty onwards, have been predominantly humanistic in outlook. Many of the young and enthusiastic Chinese scholars in the early decades of this century, greatly influenced in their thinking by such western writers as Dewey and Bertrand Russell, grew up in an intellectual atmosphere which was predominantly humanistic, agnostic and even anti-religious. Their studies of Confucius and Confucianism led them to the conclusion that Confucianism is and always has been a socio-political and ethical system which cannot be called religious in any real sense of the word. This interpretation of Confucianism, which has influenced many western writers, and which in some circles was accepted as unquestionable, may be summed up by a quotation from Professor Liu Wu-chi of Yale University, where he writes: "Confucianism remains to this day a philosophy pure and simple. Perhaps it is also due to its non-religious nature that Confucianism is the least aggressive of all the doctrines. . . . It is a moral system . . . without any trace of the metaphysical and the supernatural." ¹

With this estimate of Confucianism I am in profound disagreement. Though ready to admit that the main emphasis in Confucianism has been ethical and humanistic, I believe it can be shown that throughout history Confucianism at its best has exerted a spiritual and religious influence on Chinese culture. I believe further that Confucius himself possessed a deep religious faith, that he accepted the deeper insights of the religion

of his own time, a religion which from the beginning of the Chou dynasty was rooted in the concept of a supreme God. This concept, though it cannot be described as an ethical monotheism, because along with the worship of a supreme God there existed a cult of ancestor worship and the worship of innumerable lesser deities, had nevertheless within it the seeds of ethical monotheism. This never came to full fruition because, after the time of Confucius and Mo Tzu, there was a growing tendency towards agnosticism and the explanation of the universe in terms of a purely naturalistic philosophy.

The purpose of this paper is to examine the religious ideas, beliefs and practices which developed in China in the period of the Chou dynasty prior to Confucius.

The extant literature which can be confidently ascribed to the period prior to Confucius is limited in extent. The inscriptions found on bronze sacrificial vessels, though trustworthy, seldom contain more than a few characters. Seven sections of the Book of History (Shu Ching) are deemed by scholars to be reliable contemporary evidence for the early years of the Chou dynasty. The poems of the Book of Odes (Shih Ching) are extremely valuable for the light which they shed on the religious beliefs and practices of those early times, yet, though the date of many of them can be determined with considerable accuracy from internal evidence, the majority of the poems are undatable, and all that can be said of them with certainty is that they are prior to the time of Confucius.¹ The remaining Confucian classics, though undoubtedly containing much material which originated in the early centuries of the Chou dynasty, are the products of post-Confucian times, and are in the main, in their present form, the compilations of Han dynasty scholars.

Using only such passages from the literature as bear the stamp of western Chou origin, we find that a remarkable and

¹ For a discussion of the authenticity of the Shu Ching, cf. H. G. Creel in the Yenching Journal of Chinese Studies, No. 18, December 1937; B. Karlgren, Book of Documents; Creel, Studies in Early Chinese Culture, 1937, pp. 55 ff. It is generally accepted by Chinese and Western scholars that the Shih Ching was used by Confucius and his followers for moral instruction, though doubt is expressed as to whether Confucius had a hand in forming the collection. See A Waley, The Book of Songs, London, 1937, p. 18.
even revolutionary change took place about 1000 B.C. in religious and ethical thinking. As has so often happened in history this change was to a large extent occasioned by political necessity.

In the middle of the eleventh century B.C. the strong and virile Chou clans of the N.W. led by an able chieftain called Fa, known as King Wu, successfully rebelled against their Shang-Yin overlords. About the year 1027 B.C. the great capital city called Yin was captured and looted. The last king of the Yin dynasty was killed and King Wu established himself as head over the Chinese hegemony. He seems to have treated those who capitulated with unusual leniency. The son of the late Yin king was allowed to rule over the ancient Yin capital and its surrounding territory, but two of the new king’s brothers were assigned to neighbouring fiefs to act as watch-dogs. Whilst King Wu continued to exercise personal rule over the ancient Chou patrimony to the west, he placed a trustworthy cousin, the duke of Shao, as suzerain over the newly conquered territories to the east, and granted fiefs to his own eight younger brothers and to those who had assisted him in his campaigns. For a while all went well, but on the death of King Wu dissension broke out among the brothers. King Wu had followed the Chou custom of appointing his young son, Sung, to succeed him. The Yin had followed a system of fraternal inheritance, and of King Wu’s younger brothers, the next in seniority, Duke Hsien, considered that he had every right to succeed to the royal title. Winning over to his side another brother, and allying himself with the son of the deposed Yin king, and certain barbarian tribes to the east, Hsien raised the standard of rebellion. A period of bitter strife followed which finally ended in the defeat of Hsien and his confederates, the complete destruction of the Yin capital, and the pacification of the country under the able regency of the duke of Chou, the young king’s uncle.¹

The overthrow of the Yin dynasty and the pacification of the country had not been achieved without great difficulty. But even more difficult were the problems of government for the new

¹ The evidence for this rebellion is to be found in several of the authentic chapters of the Shu Ching; i.e. Chun Shih ; To Kao ; To Shih ; To Fang and Lo Kao. See Couvreur, Chou King, Sien Hsien, 1927, pp. 220 ff.
rulers. They could not hope to retain power unless they could persuade the nobles and the numerous officials and administrators who had formerly given their loyalty to the Yin that their title to the kingship was just and reasonable. This they did by enunciating a doctrine of kingship and a philosophy of history which have been generally attributed to the duke of Chou. This doctrine, which is clearly stated in the seven authentic chapters of the Shu Ching, was firmly based in morality and religion. It was this doctrine, which came to be generally accepted, which led to a remarkable revolution in religious thinking, and proved to be a significant step towards an ethical monotheism. The Chou, less civilized than the Yin whom they had overthrown, took over the Yin culture. They conserved the ancient clan structure, and the religious and ceremonial system of the conquered, but into that system they infused a new outlook and a new morality.

From the first the ruling principle of Chou administration was that government was founded in religion. All great matters of state, even the founding of the state itself, were related not only as with the Yin to the deified spirits of deceased ancestors but to a supreme God, whom they called T‘ien or Shang Ti. This God, who became the supreme object of worship, was no longer a primaeval ancestor spirit but a High God, independent and supreme, who graciously associated the ancestor spirits with Himself in heaven above.

How did this momentous change come about? The God, who had been the original clan ancestor of the Yin dynasty, which had ruled for some 500 years, could not be lightly thrust aside. For generations Ti had been worshipped as the most powerful of all the spirits and supreme over all other deities. The Chou kings could not hope to displace him from that supreme position by substituting for him the recently apotheosized founders of their own dynasty, the kings Wen and Wu. Nor could they allow his worship to continue unchanged as the founder-ancestor of the Yin clans, for in that case their rebellion was tantamount to rebellion against the supreme god. They could neither reject Ti altogether, not could they allow the concept of Ti and his worship to remain as it had been. Political necessity made a change imperative. They transformed the
concept of Ti from that of a primaeval ancestor spirit, having a blood relationship with his own clan, to that of a supreme High God whose concern was for the prosperity and well-being of the whole Chinese race. They emphasized the title Shang Ti, that is, the Ti above, and equated it with T'ien, a deity who seems to have been, along with Earth, a supreme object of worship in a primitive nature cult. They insisted, furthermore, that this supreme God demanded righteousness and good government, and for that reason the Yin had been overthrown. This God chose whom he would to be ruler, and deposed those who, like the last king of Yin, by licentiousness and misrule had rebelled against him. The importance of this change cannot be overemphasized. It was the supreme God who had appointed the Shang-Yin kings to rule in the first place, and so long as they had ruled well He had approved of them. But when they persistently failed in their appointment, Shang Ti rejected them and sought for a suitable substitute. This He had found in King Wu, to whom He transferred His mandate. If in their turn the Chou kings ceased to rule justly and wisely, T'ien would likewise depose them. Thus the belief in a supreme Deity carried with it strong ethical implications.

A few quotations from the authentic chapters of the Shu Ching will make this point quite clear.

I continually say to myself, "T'ien purposed to destroy Yin, as a husbandman (destroys weeds). How dare I neglect to complete the work of my fields. T'ien seeks in this way to bless me (by bringing to completion the work of the former pacifiers of the country)."

Tao Kao 14

His (King Wen) fame reached up to Shang Ti, who blessed him. T'ien thereupon bestowed its great command on King Wen to extirpate the dynasty of Yin, to receive the mandate, and take over its territories and people, that they might be well-governed.

K'ang Kao 4

The capital of Shang was full of crime. (The king) was not distressed that the country of Yin was ruined. Nor did he care that the fragrance of virtue should rise up from the sacrifices to plead with T'ien. Instead the complaint of the people and the rank odour of drunken orgies were felt on high. Therefore T'ien determined to destroy Yin. It loved Yin no more because of Yin's excesses. It is not T'ien that is cruel. It is people who bring evil on themselves.

Chiu Kao 11
The king said, "Ye numerous officers who survive from the dynasty of Yin, lament not that compassionate T'ien has sent down great destruction on Yin, and we, the princes of Chou, protected by the mandate and endowed with T'ien's bright terrors, have carried out the kingly task of punishment, and received (at T'ien's hand) Yin's mandate and accomplished the work of Ti."

To Shin 2

Our little country would not have dared to seize the mandate of Yin. It was T'ien who would not let it remain with them. Indeed it would not tolerate their misrule. It assisted us. How could we ourselves dare to aspire to the throne?

To Shih 3

I have heard it said, "Shang Ti leads men to tranquillity. But the sovereign of Hsia (Chieh) would not seek tranquillity, and so Ti sent down corrections to show his will to the Hsia by timely warnings. He would not be warned by Ti. He plunged into greater excesses and excused his conduct. Then T'ien refused to hear him, took away his appointment and inflicted extreme punishment.

"Then it (T'ien) charged your first ancestor, T'ang the victorious, to remove Hsia, and able men ruled the land.

"You yourselves know that your Yin forerunners had their annals and archives which related how Yin took the mandate from Hsia."

To Shih 5, 6, 19

Without pity T'ien has brought destruction on Yin, since Yin has lost its mandate to rule, which we of the house of Chou have received. I do not dare to affirm that what we have established will for ever continue in prosperity. Yet, if T'ien assists those who are sincere I would not dare to affirm that it will end in misfortune.

Chüen Shih 2

The mandate of T'ien is not easy to keep. It is difficult to trust in T'ien's constancy. He who loses the mandate does so because he is not able to continue in the illustrious virtue which characterised the men of old.

Chüen Shih 4

Even the wise by thoughtlessness become reckless, and the reckless by taking thought become wise. T'ien for five years left the descendant (of Yin) in peace to see if he would be a (true) ruler of the people. But he would not reflect or listen. Then T'ien sought throughout the numerous regions, rousing by its terrors to move someone who would look up to T'ien. But in all the numerous regions none were found. Only our king of Chou treated his people well and was able to bear the burden of practising virtue. He presided over (the sacrifices to) the spirits and to T'ien. T'ien therefore taught us, blessed us, and chose us to take over the mandate of Yin and govern the numerous regions.

To Fang 17-19
The people were God's concern. "God gave birth to all the people" (*Shih*, 3: 3. 6). It was because of his loving care for the people that God chose and appointed a man who was qualified to rule over them justly and wisely. When the early literature speaks of the king "receiving" (shou) the people and the land, it means receiving them as from the hand of God, by God's decree, or mandate. This word "Ming", which signifies an important concept of Chou religion, was derived from the symbol of the patents of office which was handed over to a feudal vassal in the ancestral temple of his lord upon appointment. Thus God was thought of as handing over to the ruler his authority to rule, an authority which could be recalled if necessary.

When contemporary literature speaks of the ancestors of the Chou dynasty, kings Wen and Wu, or of the original founder of the Chou clan (the god of the millet, Hou Chi) it speaks of them as associated with the supreme God on high, as descending with Him to partake of the sacrifices, and as having powers delegated from Him to bestow tranquillity and prosperity upon their filial descendants. The evidence from the *Book of Odes* is quite clear.

Sovereign T'ien conferred its mandate. The two rulers (Wen and Wu) received it. King Ch'eng dared not remain idle, but day and night laboured to establish his charge.

*Shih*. 4: 1. 6

At the appropriate time King Wu toured the states. Sovereign T'ien regarded him as its son. T'ien raised the house of Chou above all princely families... King Wu drew to himself a host of spiritual beings, the gods of the rivers and mountains, and thus was sovereign ruler over all the land.

*Shih*. 4: 1. 8

Accomplished art thou, Hou Chi (the primaeval ancestor of the Chou clan), worthy to associate with T'ien. Owing to thy great bounty our people possess the grain. Thou hast bestowed the wheat and the barley which T'ien destined for all. Without considering territorial boundaries, thou hast taught and caused to be observed man's social duties.

*Shih*. 4: 1. 10

Throughout the states there is peace. Year by year the harvest is plentiful. T'ien's mandate does not cease. The valorous king Wu keeps the confidence of
I bring and present my offering, a bullock and a ram. May T'ien descend and accept them. I faithfully observe the statutes of king Wen, maintaining tranquility throughout the realm. From king Wen come great blessings. He descends and partakes of my sacrifice. Day and night I reverence T'ien's majesty, thus constantly preserving the favour bestowed upon Chou.

Shih. 4: 1.7

In the third section of the *Book of Odes*, the *Ta Ya*, the poems relating to king Wen are sacrificial odes in which the distinction is always made between God, "T'ien or Shang Ti", and the apotheosized ancestor King Wen, although the latter is conceived of as living on high with God.

King Wen is on high, brilliant in Heaven. Though Chou is an ancient state, its mandate to rule is new. Are not the kings of Chou illustrious? Was not Ti's mandate timely? King Wen ascends and descends, accompanying Ti to the sacrifices.

Shih. 3: 1.1

This close association of the deceased ancestor spirits with the supreme God, together with a refusal to identify them with God, is a mark of Chou religion.

It is possible and indeed probable that originally Shang Ti and T'ien were two quite different deities, for it is interesting to note that early Chinese religion centred around two foci, the ancestral temple within the home where the ancestral spirits were given prominence, and the earth altars in the suburbs where the gods who controlled land and grain, mountains and rivers, and the whole host of nature gods were worshipped. By the time of the Western Chou the concepts of Shang Ti and T'ien were fused to form one supreme Deity. In process of time the term Shang Ti was used less frequently to designate this supreme Being, and when we come to the *Analects* of Confucius we find that the character T'ien is invariably used. Right down to the time of Confucius and Mo Tzu this God is thought of anthropomorphically as a personal God who stood at the head of a hierarchical structure in the spiritual world, omniscient and omnipotent. As such, He demanded implicit obedience, was swift to punish and to bless, and delighted in the sacrifices which
were offered to Him in costly and elaborate rites. Yet it was recognized that the most sumptuous sacrifices and the loudest protestations of innocence could not divert Him from the chastisement of the wicked. Above all He loved virtue so that the virtue of the ruler became in large measure the guarantee of the peace and prosperity of the land. The following texts will illustrate the character and attributes of God as He was worshipped in pre-Confucian China.

(a) T'ien sees and hears; is clear-sighted and cannot be deceived.

T'ien sees as my people see;
T'ien hears as my people hear.

Shu: T'ai Shih Chung 7

T'ien sees and hears as our people see and hear.
T'ien displays his majesty as our people display their reverence.

Shu: Kao Yao Mu 7

T'ien sees and hears everything. The sage-king takes it as his pattern. His ministers respectfully follow his example, and the people are well-governed.

Shu: Shuo Ming Chung 3

August T'ien is most clear-sighted.

Shih 3: 3, 2, 11

How bright is T'ien above, looking down with care and concern upon the earth below!

Shih 2: 6, 3

T'ien inspects the people below, keeping account of their righteousness, and regulating accordingly their span of life. It is not T'ien who destroys men. They, by their evil-doing, cut short their own lives.

Shu: Kao Tsung 3

(b) T'ien is omniscient and omnipresent.

Fear the anger of T'ien and do not dare to give way to dissipation. Fear lest T'ien changes towards you, and do not dare to rush into evil ways. Majestic T'ien is clear-sighted, and extends to wherever you go. Majestic T'ien is all-seeing as the rising sun, and reaches you in all your licentious wanderings.

Shih. 3: 2, 10, 8

Be reverent! Be reverent! T'ien has revealed its will. Its mandate is not easy to preserve. Do not say that T'ien is far distant above. It ascends and descends, concerning Itself with our affairs, and daily examines all our doings.

Shih. 4: 3; 3, 1
(c) T'ien blesses and protects and sends happiness.
May T'ien protect and settle you, making you perfectly secure. That you may be truly virtuous what happiness does It withhold? It causes you to receive many blessings. They are indeed numerous.

Shih. 2: 1; 6, 1

(d) T'ien punishes the wicked.
How all-embracing is T'ien above, sovereign over all the people below! How arrayed in terrors is T'ien above! It decrees many punishments.

Shih. 3: 3; 1

(e) T'ien gave birth to the people and gave them their dispositions.
In giving birth to all the people T'ien ordained that their natures should be undependable. There are some who begin well, but few remain good till death.

Shih. 3: 3; 1

When T'ien gave birth to all the people, to every constitutive faculty it annexed its law. It was their natural disposition to love admirable virtue.

Shih. 3: 3; 6

Towards the end of the Western Chou period, in the eighth century B.C., the misgovernment and licentiousness of the Chou rulers plunged the country into anarchy and ruin. Poems written about this time reflect the sense of bewilderment over the fact that T'ien seemed to be unconcerned for the welfare of the people. Was T'ien impotent, or was it indifferent to men's sufferings? Why did T'ien allow calamities and sufferings to fall on innocent people? Why did the frequent and costly sacrifices made to T'ien and the multitude of ancestor spirits prove of no avail? It was questions of this nature, which occur over and over again in the writings of the Ch'un Ch'iu period prior to Confucius, which led many thoughtful minds towards agnosticism, and finally to the belief that T'ien was a purely naturalistic principle, indifferent alike to good and evil.

Oh vast, far-spreading T'ien, whom we all call parent! I am innocent and blameless, yet I suffer from such great disorders. Majestic T'ien, you are too stern; for truly I am innocent. Majestic T'ien, you are too cruel, for truly I am blameless.

Shih. 2: 5; 4

The proud rejoice. The troubled are in great distress. Oh, azure T'ien! Oh, azure T'ien! Look upon these proud men and have pity on the troubled. Those slanderous men, who was it who devised their plans? I would take those slanderous men and throw them to the wolves and tigers. If wolves and tigers refused
to devour them, I would throw them into the Northlands. If the Northlands refused to receive them, I would throw them into the hands of August T’ien.

Shih. 2: 5; 6, 5-6

I gaze up to August T’ien, but It does not favour us. For long these cruel afflictions which It has sent down have greatly distressed us. The state is unsettled. Officers and people suffer.

Shih. 3: 3; 10

Now the people in their peril look to T’ien, but find no clear guidance. But let T’ien once decide, and there is none that It cannot overcome. This August Shang Ti above, can He hate anyone?

Shih. 2: 4; 8

The net which T’ien lets down is full of calamities. Good men are perishing and my heart is grieved.

Shih. 3: 3; 10, 6

Overshadowing T’ien is angered. T’ien is indeed sending down destruction, distressing us with famine. The people are all perishing. Settled lands and border fields are all lying waste.

Shih. 3: 3; 11, 1

A characteristic of Western Chou religion was the elaborate sacrificial and ceremonial cult, which was closely bound up with all that appertained to the government of the country and the well-being and prosperity of each individual clan. This cult had in large measure been inherited from the previous Shang-Yin dynasty, and it was to remain as one of the main features of Chinese religion, with appropriate modifications, right down to the abolition of the monarchy in 1912.¹ The chief ministrant at the great sacrifices was the ruler himself. But the relationship between the spiritual world and the world of men was so important that the great sacrifices demanded the participation of all the feudal lords or their representatives. It was so complicated

¹ In this connection, cf. Chinese Culture, vol. 3, no. 1, October 1960. “A Manifesto on the Reappraisal of Chinese Culture.” “China’s ancient classics emit a profound sense of reverence towards God and true faith in Heaven. Jesuit missionaries, who visited China three hundred years ago, noticed this in the solemn rites paying tributes to Heaven and Earth held to be of ultimate significance by later Confucian scholars. Rituals such as these were reverently observed by all Chinese rulers throughout various dynasties, even till the early years of the new Republic.”
that the services of ritual specialists were required. Four types of religious specialists should be noted, for they were the precursors of the "scholar class" which played such an important role throughout Chinese history. The "chu" represented the official sacrificer in petitioning the gods and spirits. Deemed to possess special powers and wisdom in spiritual matters, he prepared and recited the prayers which were ceremonially written, recited and then burnt. The "tsung" managed all the affairs of the ancestral temple, and had detailed knowledge of everything that appertained to the regulation of the clan. The "pu" was a diviner, able to prognosticate concerning good and evil, and to interpret the will of the gods and their answers to the petitions addressed to them by means of the tortoise shell and the stalks of the "divining plant". The "shih" looked after the official records, but was also versed in astrology. He was called upon to interpret unusual events which occurred either in nature or in the life and actions of the ruler.

The sacrificial feasts at which the clan ancestors were honoured followed a prescribed pattern of which certain features might be noted: (a) an auspicious day was chosen with the help of expert diviners, (b) the participants underwent a previous purification and fast, (c) all the oblations were carefully selected and prepared, the sacrificial victims having to be of one colour and without blemish, (d) the ancestors were represented at the feast by "living personators". These were chosen, if possible, from the sons of the head of the clan, who himself acted as chief petitioner and sacrificer. These "personators" were conducted with great ceremony to the seats of honour reserved for the ancestral spirits and they were treated as if, for the time being, the ancestor spirits had taken up their abode in them, (e) thus the clan feast was a feast at which the living and the dead all shared together in a common meal.

You choose an auspicious day, and having made the prescribed purifications you prepare the sacrifices to be made to your ancestors. In spring, summer, autumn and winter you make the appropriate offerings to the former rulers of your family. Your ancestors (through their representatives) promise you long life, life without end. The spirits of your ancestors are present, and obtain for you many blessings.

Shih. 2:1:6
RELIGIOUS DEVELOPMENTS

The following texts, chosen from a large number of poems which have as their theme the great sacrificial feasts, illustrate the central position of the cult of ancestors in the religion of Western Chou:

Within the temple, solemn and serene, in full accord and reverently the assisting nobles and numerous officers uphold the virtue of King Wen, and make their response to him in Heaven. Attentively they hasten (to perform their service) in the temple.

Shih. 4: 1; 1

I bring my offerings, a ram and a bullock. May T'ien receive them! I take the statutes of King Wen as my rule, and maintain constant tranquillity throughout my realm. King Wen bestows on us prosperity, and descends upon the right hand to partake of our sacrifice.

Shih. 4: 1; 7

A bounteous harvest, millet and rice in abundance! The granaries are piled high with measureless stacks of grain. We make fermented liquor to offer to our ancestors, both male and female. We carry out all our ceremonies so that they will send down blessings upon us.

Shih. 4: 2; 4

The feudal lords gather in full concord, assembled reverently to assist the Son of T'ien, solemn and majestic. He offers a noble bullock, and they assist in setting forth the sacrifice. Oh, thou great kingly ancestor, give thine aid to thy filial son! He (the ancestor King Wen) was a man of comprehensive wisdom, a prince in peace and war. The tranquillity which he gives reaches even to August T'ien, and ensures prosperity to his descendants. He (the present king) gains for us long life and many blessings, since thus he honours his august father and his accomplished mother.

Shih. 4: 2; 7

We proceed to make fermented liquor and to prepare viands for the offering and for sacrifice. We seat the representatives of the dead and urge them to eat. Thus we seek to increase our bright happiness. With grave looks and reverent attitude we choose our sacrificial victims without blemish, oxen and sheep, to serve in the autumn and winter sacrifices. Some slay the animals; others attend to the cooking; some put the meat on stands; some arrange it for sacrifice. The master of ceremony (chu) stands at the temple gate to await the arrival of the ancestor spirits. The sacrifice is all ready in brilliant array. The ancestor spirits arrive and accept our offerings. Their filial descendant receives their blessing. The spirits reward him with happiness and long life. Some reverently tend the fires, whilst others place in position the great stands (for the meat). The queen reverently sets out a large number of smaller dishes. The guests and visitors draw near and the toast is drunk. All the ceremonies are meticulously observed; each smile, each word, in perfect decorum. The personators of the ancestor spirits arrive and promise every blessing and ten thousand years of life.
We have done all within our power and performed the rites without error. The master of ceremonies (chu) conveys the message of the ancestors to their filial descendant. "Your sacrifice has filled the air with fragrance. The spirits have enjoyed your pious offerings. They reward you with many blessings suited to your desires. You have been respectful, prompt, meticulous and obedient. The spirits will bestow on you signal favours throughout a myriad years."

The ceremonies are ended. Drums and bells proclaim the fact. The filial descendant returns to his seat. The master of ceremonies (chu) informs him that the spirits have all drunk to satisfaction. The personators of the spirits arise and leave to the accompaniment of bells and drums. The queen and all the servitors hasten to remove the sacrificial offerings. Then all the male relatives take part in a special feast.

Shih. 2: 6; 5, 1-5

A pure libation is poured out, and then a red bullock is taken to offer to my ancestors. With a knife, adorned round the haft with little bells, I make a cut through the hair, and take away the blood and fat of the intestines. Then I present the offerings which exhale a fragrant odour. How brilliant is the sacrifice! The ancestors come and recompense me with great blessings and long life.

Shih. 2: 6; 6, 5-6

From the above passages we see how the cult of ancestors and the worship of the Supreme God and a host of spiritual beings found expression in a highly developed ritualism and ceremonial in which meticulous observance of appropriate rites was of paramount importance. The gods and ancestors demanded service and sacrifice, and so long as these were offered reverently and respectfully and with careful observance of the prescribed etiquette the spirits worshipped were obligated to fulfil their side of the bargain and bestow long life and happiness on the worshippers. Nevertheless, the ethical demands of T'ien and the ancestors are never lost sight of.

The king stood in relation to T'ien in much the same way as the eldest living male in the clan to his deceased ancestors. The title given to him was T'ien Tzu, that is "Son of Heaven"; and his attitude to T'ien must be one of respectful obedience. It is significant that from the beginning of the Chou dynasty the reign titles by which the kings became known were titles with an ethical connotation.

From a study of many passages in the Shu and the Shih we see that the quality which made it possible for the early kings...
to receive and hold T'ien's mandate, by which they were deemed worthy to take their place on high with God, the quality which was in fact the basis of T'ien's majesty, was "Te". This character in its earliest usage signified "power", the power of personality which gods invariably possess, and with which some persons were endowed to an extraordinary degree. It was a quality somewhat like "mana" or "baraka", which all gods and spirits possess in some measure, which in a great man causes him to subdue his enemies, attract a following, gain authority and influence over his fellows. This "power" or "force" might work alike for good or evil; it might manifest itself in benevolence or wrath. Undoubtedly this older concept of "Te" was not entirely superseded, but during this period it was charged with a new ethical meaning. "Te" was virtue. It was divine or kingly power used for the good of people and land. It was above all what made the king acceptable and worthy in the sight of T'ien. It flowed out from the king throughout all his territories, bringing peace, prosperity and blessing. Only by maintaining his "virtue" could a king hope to retain his mandate to rule.

Your illustrious and distinguished father, King Wen, in displaying his "Te", was careful in the use of punishments. . . . His fame reached Shang Ti, and Shang Ti approved of him. T'ien gave him the mandate to exterminate the Yin and to receive the appointment.

Shu. K'ang Kao 3-4

The king said, "Oh, Feng, be reverent. Do nothing to excite grievances. Do not follow evil counsels or iniquitous ways. With constant care imitate the 'Te' of the ancestors, that your heart may be at peace. Set your heart on 'Te', plan well ahead, let your benevolence bring repose to the people. Do nothing to merit blame or degradation."

Shu. K'ang Kao 22

Let the young listen with attention to the instruction of their fathers and ancestors, and let them practise "Te" in things both great and small.

Shu. Chiu Kao 5

T'ien itself will approve of your great "Te", and you will never be forgotten in the royal house.

Shu. Chiu Kao 7

Do you, O king, by the sole exercise of your "Te" bring harmony to the deluded people, and thus please the former kings who received the mandate to rule.

Shu. Tzu Ts'ai. 7
Since your occupation of this new city your majesty has sedulously practised " Te ". Let your majesty continue in the cultivation of " Te ", thus seeking the abiding mandate of T'ien.

Shu. Chao Kao 20

Another concept of great ethical significance came into frequent use; the concept of filial piety or " hsiao ". This character is not found on the oracle bones, but is used on the early bronzes from the Chou dynasty, and also in the Shu and the Shih to designate that attitude of respectful obedience which a son owes to his parents and ancestors. Kings Wen and Wu, the founders of the dynasty, were held up as models of filial piety.

The king said, " Great criminals should be detested, but how much more those who lack filial piety and brotherly affection; the son who does not reverently attend to his father's needs, and wounds the heart of the ancestors."

Shu. K'ang Kao 16

I offer this noble bull, assisted by the nobles in setting out the sacrifices. Oh, august father, bless your filial son.

Shih. 4: 2; 7, 2

Oh, my august father, throughout all your life you practised filial piety.

Shih. 4: 3; 1, 1

He gained the people's confidence, and was an example to all below. Ever pondering how to be filial, his filial piety was a pattern.

Shih. 3: 1; 9, 3

The two concepts " Te " and " hsiao " were brought into close relationship, and formed the moral principles for the control of society. " Te " was usually thought of in relation to T'ien; " hsiao " in relation to the ancestors. Two short extracts, taken from poems written when the power of the Chou had declined and the country was disrupted by political and economic disorder, reveal the strength of filial piety and family affection:
Oh, my father, who begat me!
Oh, my mother, who nourished me!
You petted me, you fed me,
You developed me, you nourished me.
You cared for me. You could not leave me.
But everywhere you bore me in your arms.
Oh, that I could requite such kindness!
It is like Great T'ien, illimitable.

Of all men in the world there are none equal to brothers. On the dreaded occasions of death and burial, it is brothers who most sympathise. When the fugitives gather together on the heights or in the low grounds, it is brothers who will seek one-another out.

The belief in divination, auspicious days, the influence on human affairs of eclipses of the sun and strange prodigies of nature, inherited from the distant past, was still an important element in Chou religion, and was to continue to have a strong hold over the people right down to modern times, in spite of the scorn and ridicule poured upon it by sceptical and rationalistic philosophers. For purposes of divination the stalks of the milfoil, or divining plant came into common use in place of the scapula bones of sheep and oxen. On great and important occasions, and for those who could afford the cost, the shell of the tortoise was used.

The transport wagons did not come. Great was the distress of my sorrowing heart. For he did not arrive when the time was due, so that I am full of grief. Yet I have divined by tortoise shell and by the stalks; and they agree in saying that he is near. My soldier (husband) is at hand.

A lucky day was Mao, and we sacrificed to the ancestor of horses and prayed.

Divine for me my dreams. What dreams are lucky? I dreamt of bears and snakes. The chief diviner divines thereon. The bears are omens of male children. The snakes are omens of female children.

The king deliberated and divined as to whether he should dwell in the capital of Hao. (The site) was determined by the tortoise shell. So King Wu completed the city.
In the tenth month, at the conjuration (of sun and moon), on the day Hsin Mao, the first of the month, the sun was eclipsed. It was an event of great evil. On former occasions the moon has been eclipsed. But now the sun is eclipsed, and great will be the suffering of the people.

Shih. 2: 4; 9, 1

The sun and moon announce evil tidings. They do not follow their ordained paths. Throughout all the kingdom government fails because worthy men are not employed. For yon moon to be eclipsed is but an ordinary affair; but for the sun to be eclipsed, how lamentable it is!

Shih. 2: 4; 9, 2

We have seen how that, during the early prosperous period of the Western Chou, religion was centred in the concept of an over-ruling, all-powerful God, called T'ien or Shang Ti, whose care and solicitude for the people and the land was evidenced in the "mandate of T'ien", bestowed upon powerful, wise and virtuous rulers. Associated with T'ien were powerful and beneficent ancestor-spirits who presided over the life and destiny of their own clans. Religion was thus closely linked to government and to clan organization. How was religion to be affected when the king lost his power and authority and became a mere puppet in the hands of powerful nobles, and when, through internecine strife, ancient families crashed to ruin and the land was filled with violence? In early Chou religion there were the seeds of an ethical monotheism which might have developed along lines comparable in some respects to those followed in the prophetic religion of the Old Testament. Yet such a development was not to be. Instead, the tendency of Chinese thought throughout the whole period of the Ch'ün Ch'iu (c. 720-481 B.C.) was more and more towards agnosticism and the naturalistic and materialistic philosophies which were to characterize in later times both Confucianism and Taoism. The early signs of this attitude to religion are to be observed in many of the Ya poems of the Shih Ching, the products of an age of social anarchy and despair. God is not only blamed for the troubles which fell on rich and poor alike, but doubts concerning him almost approach to a denial of him. This God who brought evil was an opponent to be cursed. From this position it was not a long step to denial of him altogether. The most passionate appeals fell on deaf ears; the most lavish sacrifices failed to bring
RELIGIOUS DEVELOPMENTS

Relief. No help in the midst of a distressful situation could be obtained from the spirit-world. Man must help himself, and in doing so brute force was all powerful.

I raise my eyes to August T'ien, but it does not pity us. It sends down great afflictions without respite. There is no stability in the land. Officers and people alike suffer.

Shih. 3:3; 10, 1

Compassionate T'ien rages in fury, sending down death, and afflicting with famine. The people wander about and perish. Everywhere destruction reigns.

Shih. 3:3; 11, 1

Oh, great far-spreading T'ien, whom we call father and mother! Though guiltless, on me these troubles fall. Great T'ien, you are too stern. I have examined myself and am without fault. Great T'ien, you send afflictions, but I am blameless.

Shih. 2:5; 4, 1

T'ien is sending down calamities to put an end to the country.

Shih. 3:3; 2, 12

Vast, far-spreading T'ien does not extend its virtue (Te), but sends down death and famine to destroy the land. Pitiful T'ien now strikes with terror without rhyme or reason. It is right that sinners should be punished for their crimes, but why should innocent people be overwhelmed with ruin?

Shih. 2:4; 10, 1

August T'ien is not just in sending down these troubles. August T'ien has no pity in sending down these evils. . . . August T'ien is unpitying. Disorders have no end. Month by month they grow and men have no response.

Shih. 2:4; 7, 5-6

The period known as the Ch'un Ch'iu witnessed the decline of centralized authority. The lineal descendants of the great house of Chou became mere figureheads, retaining their titles, a semblance of authority, and their religious functions. Even these latter were often usurped by powerful feudal lords who "did what was right in their own eyes", and regarded the wealth and splendour of their sacrifices and ceremonial worship in their own ancestral temples and at their own Earth altars as indications of their strength. The destruction of a weaker state by a stronger was signalized by the desecration of its ancestral temple and the covering over of its Earth altars.
The form of the ancient religion was meticulously observed as of political necessity, but was in large measure shorn of spiritual and ethical content. On the surface religion seemed to play a large part in the life of the nobility. Military engagements began with a solemn sacrifice and the services of an expert diviner. Alliances were ratified by a solemn oath before the gods and spirits, with the sacrifice of an animal over which the contracting parties appealed to the gods that anyone violating the terms of the agreement should suffer the fate of the slain animal. Besides the regular sacrifices at the ancestral temples and Earth altars, every eclipse, every unusual natural event, every sign of calamity, was an occasion for sacrifices to be made. The belief was universally held that there was an intimate relationship and interaction between nature and the affairs of human society, and every feudal court had its specialists to observe and interpret celestial and terrestrial phenomena, and discern by magical arts and divination the will of the spirits. The following quotations illustrate the religious beliefs and practices of the Ch'un Ch'iu period:

(Chi Liang said), "What I call the Way (for a prince to follow) is to be faithful to the people, and devoted to the spirits. The ruler is faithful when he thinks how best to benefit his people. The invoker at the sacrifices is devoted when his words are true. At the present time the people starve, while princes indulge themselves, and the ministrants at the sacrifices dissemble. Your servant does not know how such a state of affairs will bring success." The duke said, "My sacrificial animals are fat and sleek, and the grain is piled up abundantly in the vessels. How then can there be a lack of devotion?" Chi Liang replied, "It is the people who are of greater concern than the spirits. That is why the sage-kings first satisfied the people, and only then exerted themselves in service of the spirits."


In the sixth month, on the day Hsin Wei, the first day of the moon, the sun was eclipsed. We beat drums and offered sacrifices on the altars of the land. Legge, ibid. p. 109

In the third year (of Duke Hsuan) in the spring, in the king's first month, the mouth of the ox to be used at the border sacrifice received injury. It was changed and the oracle consulted. The ox died, and so the border sacrifice was cancelled. Ibid. pp. 291-2
Towards the end of the sixth century B.C. Tzu Ch’an, the prime minister of the state of Cheng, had laws inscribed on newly cast bronzes. This event raised considerable opposition because it was felt to strike at the basis of feudal society. No longer would the people be content to accept the arbitrary rule of those above them. They would appeal to the laws, and seek to find proof and justification for their point of view in the written code. This, it was argued, would lead to weaker government and the further decadence of society.

In the third month (Tzu Ch’an for) the people of Cheng had a penal code cast in bronze. Shu Liang sent a message to Tzu Ch’an saying, “At first I esteemed you greatly but now can no longer do so. Formerly the ancient kings judged each case on its merits, and had no penal code because they feared that such would lead to strife among the people. Yet as they could not hinder (crime) altogether, they controlled the people by righteousness, corrected them by administration, led them by propriety, held them by good faith, and served them with benevolence. They instituted rewards to encourage them to follow, and severe penalties to intimidate them from committing excesses. Fearing that their methods were still not sufficient they instructed them in loyalty, incited them by good character, taught them their obligations, used them peacefully, approached them respectfully, governed them with strength, and made decisions with firmness. Moreover they sought to have the good and wise in the highest positions, gave office to men of discrimination, made the loyal and true into elders, and the kind and gentle into teachers. In this manner the people performed their duties without any disaster or disorder arising.

But when the people come to know these laws they will have no fear of those above them. Contention will arise as they seek justification from the written code, airing their grievances as they find proof for their point of view. This is not the way to act.

Legge, ibid. p. 607.

In Tzu Ch’an, who was prime minister of Cheng when Confucius was growing up to manhood in the nearby state of Lu, we see evidence of the growing tendency towards humanism and rationalism. In the year 524 B.C., the central plain of China was struck by a typhoon of great violence, and this was followed by destructive fires which raged in four of the states. The master of divination of the state of Cheng, who claimed to have predicted the fire in the previous year from astronomical indications, urged Tzu Ch’an to seek to avert calamity by means of sacrifices. Tzu Ch’an ignored his advice. “Heaven’s Way”, he said, “is far removed; it is man’s way that is near to us. We cannot reach the former; what means have we of knowing
it?" (Legge, ibid. p. 607). Here, in Tzu Ch'an's attitude we do not have a denial of the existence of a "Way of Heaven", but rather the belief that an understanding of T'ien is beyond man's competence. The influences which come from the spiritual world are unpredictable. Man will be best employed in controlling and regulating those matters which directly affect the people's happiness and well-being. This same attitude is revealed in Confucius, where he says, "respect the spirits, but keep them at a distance" (Ana. 6: 20), and again, when asked by a disciple questions regarding the service of the spirits and the state of the dead, Confucius replied: "Till you have learned to serve men, how can you serve the spirits? Till you know about the living, how can you know about the dead?" (Ana. 11: 11).

In spite of a growing tendency towards a humanistic and rationalistic interpretation of man's place in the universe, both Confucius and Mo Tzu accepted the deeper insights of the Chou religion which they had inherited, and in particular a profound belief in and reverence for T'ien, as the omnipotent and omniscient ruler of the universe, and the author of its moral order. Only in obedience to the Will of T'ien and the decrees of T'ien could man hope to find his own true Way of Life.