

天の思想史

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A History of T'ien

Hiroshi ARAKAWA

The concept of T'ien (Heaven) has been basically important in the worldview of the Chinese from the remote past to the present. Chinese science and philosophy seem to be the interpretations of T'ien. However, its meaning was not always definite. The aim of this paper is to give a historical survey of the concept of T'ien and to endeavor to clarify its meaning.

First, we treat T'ien which occurred in the text of the pre-Han period. In the early Chou times, T'ien was conceived as the purposeful, apparently anthropomorphic god. Politically, T'ien was the source of the legitimacy of the king, conferring T'ien-ming (Heaven's mandate) upon the most virtuous man. In the same period, it was used as the meaning of the physical space where celestial bodies move and birds fly.

Following this tradition, Kung-tzu glorified T'ien as great and august. But, he believed in its divine power, although he did not conceive it as an anthropomorphic deity. Meng-tzu who philosophized about T'ien of Kung-tzu, asserted that we are all born with the innate goodness in us by T'ien. Lao-tzu and Chuang-tzu who urged to obey Tsu-jan (Naturalness), denied even the divine power. T'ien was conceived to be simply physical body. Nevertheless, they used it as a synonym for Tsu-jan.

Secondly, we discuss the science and philosophy which developed in the Han period. The most important science was an astronomical cosmology. The Huai-nan-tzu stated the theories of Heaven and Earth, namely cosmography and cosmogony. Here, the property and the formation of T'ien which was regarded as physical body, was interpreted by the concept of chi (Ether). Tung Chung-shu, a leading Confucian, gave a theory of the relation between T'ien and human. In this theory also, chi played an essential role. But, the Chinese philosophers did not abandon the anthropomorphic T'ien. Even Chu-tzu who built the Neo-Confucianism, did not deny it.