

# **The Tract of the Quiet Way**

Teitaro Suzuki and Paul Carus



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# Yin Chih Wen

## The Tract of the Quiet Way

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**Introduction.**

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# INTRODUCTION.

THE *Yin Chih Wen* is a religio-ethical tract, which, in spite of its popularity all over the Middle Kingdom, has not as yet, so far as we know, been translated into any Western language. Next to the *Kan-Ying P'ien* it is read and studied and taught both in schools and at the home, and there is probably no family in China without it; but its contents are very little known in the Western world, and we have only once met with references to it by Professor Douglas in his *Confucianism and Taouism* under the title of "Book of Secret Blessings."



## YIN CHIH.

It is difficult to translate the title of the book. All we can say is that the rendering by Douglas, "Book of Secret Blessings," does not recommend itself; but the truth is that a—n exact translation which would be as terse and as expressive as is the Chinese, appears to be all but impossible.

We have long been in doubt as to what English words would best express the term *Yin Chih*, and we have seriously considered the following three possibilities: "secret virtue," "heaven's quiet dispensation," and "mysterious workings." None of these versions would be incorrect, but they do not sufficiently express the full meaning of the term. The first and second express two meanings which ought to be combined into one such as is the third, in order to serve as an equivalent of this peculiar expression; and we have finally decided to render our title *The Tract of the Quiet Way*, which, however, though it is sufficiently broad and brief, is not intelligible without further explanation.

The word *chih* is used both as verb and as noun. As a verb it means "to determine," "to raise"; as a noun it may be defined by "principle," "rule," "method," "dispensation," "way." The word *yin* means "in secret," either in the sense of "unheeded" or "unostentatious." It also conveys the idea of anything possessed with a deeper meaning, anything mysterious; and the two words together, *yin chih*, denote the quiet way of Heaven, which works out the ends of divine dispensation, invisibly yet unfailingly, to the awe and astonishment of every sapient observer, as says the Christian hymn:

"God moves in a mysterious way  
His wonders to perform."

If we had to translate these lines into Chinese, we might render the words "a mysterious way" very appropriately by *yin chih*.

It is an old maxim of the traditional wisdom of China which is most emphatically insisted upon by Lao Tze and all the sages of his school, that these quiet ways of Heaven should be imitated by man. As Heaven lets its sun shine upon good and evil, without discrimination and also without expecting reward or advantages; so man should do good to his fellows, perform acts of rectitude, of justice, and of mercy, show benevolence and kindness toward all in an impartial spirit without cherishing ulterior motives, without hope of reward, and without desire for praise. The man who thus imitates "Heaven's quiet way" in unostentatiously realizing the ideal of heavenly goodness is truly virtuous, and so *yin chih* has also come to denote a condition which may be characterized as, and translated by, "secret virtue," reminding us of Christ's injunction not to let our right hand know what the left hand is doing (Matt. vi. 1–4).

In the title of the book the words *Yin Chih* cover the general idea of the "secret ways" both as they are working in the divine dispensation and in human action, and if either meaning predominates we should say that it is certainly the former—the quiet ways of Heaven which determine the destiny of man and which are described by Shakespeare as

"A divinity that shapes our ends,  
Rough—hew them how we will."  
—Hamlet, VI, 1–4.

The word *chih* occurs for the first time in Chinese literature in the "Great Plan" of the *Shu King*, and there it is used in the verbal sense "to regulate, to rule, to determine." The commentator of the *Fin Chill Wen* explains the title in the following words:

"In the 'Great Plan,' a chapter of the *Shuh King*, we read: '*wei tien yin chih hsia min.*' [Only | Heaven | mysteriously | rules | below | the people] and a gloss explains the word *chih* by *ting*, 'to determine.'"

The quoted passage means that "Heaven alone, in a quiet or mysteriously unnoticeable way, directs the affairs of mankind living below on earth."

The commentator continues:

"The human soul is most intelligent and its essential nature is intrinsically good. All our moral relations and daily actions have their reasons why they should be so. When Heaven above created these beings it mysteriously endowed them with something to guide (*ting*) them, and this something appears when the people practise goodness. Indeed it is the guiding (*ting*) principle of creation that good men never lose an opportunity to do what

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is good. If you really practise it (i. e., the good) in your heart it is not necessary that others should know of it, for there is something in the unseen which fully regulates and determines (*ting*) your affairs. Those who deny this fact commit a secret (*yin*) sin (*o*) and their retribution will be speedy. Therefore this book is called *Yin Chih* ."

The words *Yin Chih* ("the quiet way," or more explicitly, "the mysterious dispensation of Heaven showing itself in man's unostentatious virtue") are opposed to *yin o*, i. e., "the hidden evil in the bad man's heart." The word *o* (a compound of "crookedness" and "heart") is the common term for evil or badness. The contrast in which *yin chih* stands to *yin o* explains title by how far it would be proper to translate our "secret virtue."

Considering the fact that the word "way" in English is as broad as the meaning of *chih* in Chinese, and that the former is widely used with a deep religious significance, we have finally chosen as a translation of our title the term "the quiet way." We are fully conscious of the shortcomings of our rendering, but our readers will bear in mind the original sense and become accustomed to our translation by associating it with its right interpretation.

## WEN CH'ANG TI CHÜN.

Our frontispiece, drawn by Shen Chin–Ching, represents Wen Ch'ang Ti Chün, one of the highest divinities of China, revealing himself to the author of the tract. Wen Ch'ang is the name of the god, and Ti Chün his title.

The picture represents the god as accompanied by two attendants. The white charger on which he has come down from heaven stands in the foreground. The god is seated on a stool and the scribe of the book reverently kneels before him holding the *Yin Chih Wen* in his hands.

The inscription of the picture reads *Ti tze Shen Chin–Ching hui*, which means "the humble disciple Shen Chin–Ching pinxit." *Ti* means "younger brother," and *tze* "child," here used as a diminutive. "Little Younger brother" is the usual term meaning "disciple," or "devotee," by which title the artist here calls himself to indicate that he is a follower of the religious doctrines taught in the *Yin Chih Wen*. Wen Ch'ang means "scripture glory."

The word *wen* is the same character which occurs in the last word of the title of our book. It denotes writing in general, and is especially applied to short exhortations of a religious nature such as are commonly called in Western terminology "tracts." Hence we translate "The Tract of the Quiet Way," not "the book," as Douglas has it. With reference to the god's name, we translate *wen* by "scripture," because in English the term scripture refers mainly to religious literature and is similar to the Chinese original in so far as it has a devotional ring.

*Ch'ang* means "glory" or "radiance," the character being composed of two suns, indicating an intensified brightness of light.

To characterize the god Wen Ch'ang or "scripture glory" as god of literature (as is sometimes done) is, to say the least, misleading. He is the god of learning in general, and in Chinese high schools a hall is dedicated to him as the patron saint of education, refinement, and especially moral instruction through religious books. *Belles lettres* form only one and in fact an insignificant branch of his department. He is, above all, the god of divine revelation through scripture.

The rank of Wen Ch'ang in the world of gods, is "Emperor" or "Ti," and the word Ti Chün, "the higher emperor," is commonly translated by "lord superior."

The word *chün* means "superior," or "master" and so "Ti Chün" (Lord Superior) might also be translated "imperial master." Chün is the term by which *chün tze* the "higher man" is denoted in Lao Tze's *Tao Teh King*, an anticipation of Nietzsche's "superman," only with this difference that Lao Tze's "higher man" bears a great resemblance to Christ and Buddha, while Nietzsche's "superman" is more like Kubla Khan, or Attila, or Napoleon. The term *chün* is commonly applied also to leading thinkers such as Lao Tze and Confucius.

## **KWAN TI AND WEN CH'ANG.**

The title Ti, "emperor," is also borne by the god of war, Kwan Ti, and if the latter is compared to the archangel Michael, the former, Wen Ch'ang, should be likened to Gabriel. In fact, we cannot deny that there is a strong probability of historical connection between these highest princes among the angels, for the conception of both may have been derived from Babylonian prototypes, Michael being represented by Marduk and Gabriel by Nebo.

Michael means literally "who is like God," and seems to designate that divine presence (viz. the ineffable name) which is believed to be equal to God; but in the classical period of Jewish monotheism the word Michael was explained not as a characterization of the archangel as being like God, but as expressing faith in monotheism, implying the proposition that there is no second to God. Michael, according to the angel lore of the Hebrews, is the representative of God, and so he is identified with God's cause. He is the guardian angel of Israel, the chosen people, and also commander-in-chief of the angelic hosts. As Marduk fought with Tiamat, so Michael wages war against the dragon (Rev. xii. 7).

Gabriel is as different in character from Michael as Wen Ch'ang is from Kwan Ti. Gabriel means "the man of God." He is deemed superior to all other angels except Michael and is generally represented as the angel of God's special revelation and the interpreter of God's intentions. Thus, it is Gabriel who explains Daniel's vision; nor can we doubt that the angel with an inkhorn by his side, mentioned in Ezekiel x. 2-3, was Gabriel, the scribe of God. Old Testament scholars have pointed out his resemblance to the Babylonian god Nebo, who in the monuments is depicted in human form with an inkhorn at his side, differently from the Cherubim (the human-headed winged bulls), which fact throws light on the vision of Ezekiel, alluded to above, and shows that there is a specific meaning in the name "man of God."

In the New Testament Gabriel continues to represent God's revelation. It is he who announces the birth of John the Baptist and of Jesus. There is no figure in Christian tradition which would resemble Wen Ch'ang more closely than Gabriel.

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### **CHANG-O.**

As Kwan Ti, the god of war, was represented to have lived on earth as a man, so Wen Ch'ang, or "scripture glory," is said to have been an ancient Chinese sage, but little is known of the man to whom the Chinese tradition refers.

According to the commentator, "he lived during the T'ang dynasty (620-950 A. D.), and his secular name was Chang-O. Yüeh was his native province, but later he moved to Tzu T'ung in the district of Shu. We are told that his personality was distinguished by nobility and piety. His writings were clear, luminous, and forcible. He began to exercise a moral power over the people, who unconsciously felt his spirituality. He entered for a while upon an official career, but, not satisfied with the course of politics, he resigned his government position and lived as a saintly recluse. The people of Shu showed great affection for him. and, when he died, built a temple in his honor calling it 'Temple of the Sage of Tzu T'ung.' People far and near came to offer prayers which were remarkably well responded to by the sage. Everybody, then, said, 'There is in the heavens a star called Wen Ch'ang; the sage [i. e., Chang-O] must have been its incarnation.'"

Our tract bears the name of the god Wen Ch'ang, and accordingly he is regarded as its author, or at least as the divinity who has guided the pen of the man who composed it; but (unless we assume that Chang-O was the author which is not positively impossible) the name of the scribe who made himself the mouthpiece of Wen Ch'ang and who in human consideration ought to be regarded as its author, is not recorded.

**THE CHINESE TITLE.**

We reproduce the complete title of the Tract of the Quiet Way in its original Chinese characters on the fly leaf preceding our translation, and there it reads: "*Wen-Chang Ti-Chün Yin Chih Wen Shih-Hsün.*" This means in a verbatim translation, "[Of] Scripture Glory, [the] Imperial Master, [the] Quiet-Way-tract, normal instruction." The last two words form one idea which might be translated "educational." *Shih* means "model," "norm" or "pattern"; and *hsün*, "instruction." In their combination the two denote that the present book is intended to serve educational purposes, and that it contains the established or orthodox standard of conduct.

## THE AGE OF THE YIN CHIH WEN.

The date of the Yin Chih Wen can only approximately be determined. It appears that it cannot be older than Chang-O and must not therefore be dated earlier than the time of the T'ang dynasty. In the days of Kang-Hi, however, the pamphlet was not only well known, but commented upon and supplied with explanatory stories. Accordingly we cannot stray far from truth when we look upon the *Yin Chih Wen* as approximately simultaneous with the *Kan-Ying P'ien* which in many respects it greatly resembles, and so we would say that we should certainly not set the date of its composition later than about 1600 A. D.

Specialists of Chinese literature will probably be able to ascertain the age of the *Yin Chih Wen* more accurately by pointing out quotations from it in other books whose date of composition is unquestionable.

The original *Yin Chih Wen* consists (1) of the tract itself which is here translated, (2) of glosses added by commentators, and finally (3) of a great many stories which are similar to the stories of the *Kan-Ying P'ien*, except that they are more rational and appear to avoid all reference to miracles and superstitious agencies. The book has apparently appealed more to the rationalistic Confucianists or literati, who, while upon the whole agnostic, exhibit at the same time due respect for the officially recognized religions.

## EDITORIAL COMMENTS.

The sinological part of the present version is more exclusively the work of Mr. Teitaro Suzuki than in our edition of the *Kan-Ying P'ien* ; and in our own version of terms and other details we have not been satisfied until we had his assent.

In addition to the text of the *Yin Chih Wen*, the editor has picked out from the Notes of the Chinese Commentator those passages that appealed to him, and has abstained from publishing any one of the stories, because he thought that Western readers would not take a great interest in them. The general tenor of these moralizing tales is sufficiently indicated in the stories of the *Kan-Ying P'ien*.



## L'ENVOI.

We hope that the publication of this book will help Western readers to understand better the Chinese character and especially its undeniable fervor for moral ideals. Though the Chinese mind, especially among the uneducated classes, is filled with superstitious notions, we cannot help granting that the character of their moral maxims ranges very high; and we must confess that among all the nations of the world there is perhaps none other so seriously determined to live up to the highest standard of ethical culture.

An appreciation of the virtues of the Chinese will help Western people to treat them with more consideration, and so we contribute our interpretation of this treatise as a mite towards a better understanding between the East and the West, between the white races of Europe and America and the natives of Asia. We hope that the day will come when the mutual distrust will disappear, and when both in reciprocal appreciation of their natural good qualities, will be anxious to treat each other with fairness and brotherly kindness.

P. C.

The Lord says:

For seventeen generations I have been incarnated as a high mandarin, and I have never oppressed my people nor maltreated my subordinates. I have helped them in misfortune; I have rescued them from poverty; I have taken compassion on their orphans; I have forgiven their transgressions; I have extensively practised secret virtue (*yin chih*) which is attuned to heaven above. If you are able to keep your hearts as I have kept mine, Heaven will surely bestow upon you blessings. Therefore, these are the instructions I declare unto mankind:

He who wants to expand the field of happiness, let him lay the foundation of it on the bottom of his heart.

Practise benevolence wherever you find an opportunity, and let your deeds of merit be unheeded (*yin*).

Benefit all creatures ; benefit the people.

Practise goodness: acquire merit.

Be honest like Heaven in conducting your affairs.

Compassionate and auspicious, the state government must be devoted to the salvation of the people.

Let your heart be impartial and wide of range.

Fulfil the four obligations ; impartially observe the three doctrines.

Be faithful and reverential to the ruler. Be filial and obedient to parents. Be congenial and friendly to brothers. Be sincere in your intercourse with friends.

Let some worship the Truthful One, and revere the Northern Constellation, while others bow before the Buddha and recite sutras.

By discoursing on morality and righteousness, convert both the cunning and the dull. By preaching on the canonical books and histories, enlighten the ignorant and the benighted.

Relieve people in distress as speedily as you must release a fish from a dry rill [lest he die]. Deliver people from danger as quickly as you must free a sparrow from a tight noose.

Be compassionate to orphans and relieve widows. Respect the old and help the poor. Promote the good and recommend the wise. Be lenient with others and exacting with yourself.

Save your clothing and provisions that ye may befriend the hungry and cold on the road.

Give away coffins and cases lest the dead of the poor be exposed.

Build charitable graveyards for unclaimed corpses.

Establish philanthropic institutions for the education of children.

If your own family is well provided, extend a helping hand to your relatives. If the harvest fails, provide for

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and relieve your neighbors and friends.

Let measures and scales be accurate; and be neither chary in selling nor exacting in buying.

Treat your servants with generosity and consideration. Do not expect perfection nor be too strict in your demands.

Publish and make known sutras and tracts. Build and repair temples and shrines.

Distribute medicine to alleviate the suffering of the sick. With tea or water relieve the distress of the thirsty.

Light lanterns in the night to illuminate where people walk. Keep boats on rivers to ferry people across. Buy captive animals and give them freedom.

How commendable is abstinence that dispenses with the butcher!

While walking be mindful of worms and ants.

Be cautious with fire and do not set mountain woods or forests ablaze.

Do not go into the mountain to catch birds in nets, nor to the water to poison fishes and minnows.

Do not butcher the ox that plows thy field.

Do not throw away paper that is written on.

Do not scheme for others' property.

Do not envy others' accomplishments.

Do not approach thy neighbor's wife or maids.

Do not stir thy neighbors to litigation.

Do not injure thy neighbor's reputation or interest.

Do not meddle with thy neighbor's conjugal affairs.

Set not, for personal malice, brothers at variance with one another.

Set not father and son at variance for trifles.

Never take advantage of your power, nor disgrace the good and law-abiding. Presume not, ye that are rich; nor deceive the needy and suffering.

While attending to your duty, be humble and modest.

Live in concord with your relatives and clansmen.

Let go hatred and forgive malice.

Those that are good, seek ye for friends; that will help you to practise virtue with body and soul. Those that are wicked, keep at a distance; it will prevent evil from approaching you.

Pass in silence over things wicked, but promulgate all that is good.

Do not assert with your mouth what your heart denies.

Always have in mind helpful sayings.

Do not use improper language.

Cut the brambles and thorns that obstruct the highway. Remove bricks and stones that lie in the path.

Repair the defiles though for many hundred years they have remained unimproved.

Build bridges to be traversed by thousands and ten thousands of people. Expound moral maxims to correct the people's faults.

Supply the means to give instruction to people of talent.

Let your work conform to Heaven's reason, and let your speech express humaneness.

Keep the ancient sages before your eyes even when at supper or while looking over the fence.

Be mindful when you are alone in the shadow of your coverlet.

Anything evil refrain ye from doing; all good deeds do! So will you be released forever from the influence of evil stars, and always be encompassed by good guardian angels.

Rewards may be immediate, and you will receive them in person, or rewards may be remote, and will devolve upon your posterity.

Blessings come a hundredfold in loads as if drawn by horses; good fortune is piled up a thousandfold like a mass of clouds.

Do not all these things accrue to the heart of the quiet way?