



Book Review

Ku Hung-Ming, *The Spirit of the Chinese People* (Penang, Malaysia, 1915)

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Chinese civilization, with its millennia-old history, cultural heritage, and deep philosophical roots, holds a unique place in the world. This rich cultural fabric has often been viewed with interest by the Western world, but it has also been misunderstood and superficially evaluated under the influence of Orientalist perspectives. In this regard, Ku Hung-Ming's "The Spirit of the Chinese People" stands out as a significant work contributing to a deeper understanding of Chinese society. The book offers a comprehensive examination through various themes to understand the mindset and cultural values of the Chinese people. Ku Hung-Ming explores topics such as the "Good Citizenship Religion", the mindset of the Chinese people, the social role of Chinese women, the Chinese language, and Western perspectives on China, providing a broad perspective for foreigners to explore Chinese culture and society in an engaging way.

Written in 1915, this work presents us with the ability to read from the perspective of a Chinese individual, which sinologists and missionaries, as external observers, often miss. Furthermore, Ku's unique background, being the son of a Chinese father and a Portuguese mother, and his education in

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England, Germany, and France, allows him to offer a comparative and unique perspective on Chinese culture and ethos. Although some have classified Ku's ideas as reactionary, his work is noteworthy for its deep analysis of the impact of Confucian values on individuals and society in China, and how these values shape the social structure.

This book is an essential resource for anyone who wants to understand the social and cultural structure of China. The first three chapters focus on the Chinese people, Chinese women, and the Chinese language. The following two essays attempt to show why and how some foreign authorities have misunderstood the Chinese people and the Chinese language. The additional section addresses the social and political situations in Europe, the roots of war, and solutions from a Chinese perspective. In the introduction, Ku Hung-Ming emphasizes that the spiritual power of Chinese civilization, or the "Good Citizenship Religion," unlike the West, makes militarism unnecessary. According to Ku, individuals in China do not need to use physical force to protect themselves because it is accepted that justice and fairness are superior to physical force. This belief plays a critical role in maintaining social harmony and peace in Chinese society. Ku argues that the fundamental illness of European society is its misunderstanding of human nature, which leads to a social structure based on power and the assumption that human nature is inherently bad.

In the first chapter, Ku Hung-Ming details the main elements that shape the mindset of the Chinese people. According to him, Confucian values, moral and spiritual principles, traditions, and social harmony are the cornerstones of Chinese society. Confucianism is not a personal or Church religion, as in the West, but a social or state religion. Thus, politics in China has been considered a religion since the time of Confucius. Ku states that the core of Confucian teaching includes loyalty to the emperor and filial piety to parents, which play an essential role in maintaining social harmony and peace in China.

In the second chapter, Ku Hung-Ming examines the place and role of women in Chinese society. He notes that women in China have significant roles within the family and in social life, emphasizing their duties and responsibilities. According to Ku, the primary aim of a Chinese woman is to live as a "good daughter, good wife, and good mother (93)." This chapter also addresses Western misconceptions and prejudices about Chinese women. Ku argues that a Chinese gentleman who takes care of the women he lives with is more moral than a Western man, highlighting Chinese attitudes toward polygamy and marriage. Additionally, he points out that

marriages in China are seen as social and civil contracts between families, rather than just a bond of love between two individuals as in the West.

In the third chapter, Ku Hung-Ming discusses the differences between the spoken and written forms of the Chinese language. He states that “the spoken language in China is the language of the uneducated, while the written language is the language of the well-educated (108).” Thus, there is no semi-literacy in China. Ku argues that Chinese is not a complex but a profound language, designed to express deep emotions with simple words, making it challenging for Westerners to understand. He criticizes Western experts, saying, “How many foreigners who claim to be experts have the slightest idea of the great cultural treasures in what I call the classical literature of China? (110)”.

In the fourth chapter, Ku criticizes the views of John Smith, a typical representative of the English bourgeoisie in China, on the Chinese people. This critique extends to the general misconceptions and prejudices of Western writers about Chinese culture and language. Ku’s main message is that the Western perspective often evaluates Chinese culture superficially and with bias. In the fifth chapter, Ku Hung-Ming critiques Western sinologists like Dr. Giles for their inability to understand Chinese culture and language. He questions the quality and value of Dr. Giles’s works, arguing that despite his literary talent, Dr. Giles lacks philosophical understanding and fails to grasp Chinese thought. Ku emphasizes the depth of Confucian moral understanding and criticizes Western sinologists for not comprehending this depth.

In the sixth chapter, Ku Hung-Ming critiques the works of Western missionaries and sinologists on the Chinese language and literature. He argues that these studies are generally inadequate and superficial. Ku finds it ridiculous that missionaries proclaim themselves as famous scholars (129). He states that Westerners struggle to understand Chinese literature and language, often misinterpreting Chinese culture. Ku discusses the current state of these studies and how they should be conducted in the future, advocating for a research approach that begins with the individual, then the family, and finally the government. In an additional section, Ku Hung-Ming discusses the social and political conditions in Europe, the roots of war, and solutions. Notably, Ku argues that ordinary people, rather than leaders, soldiers, or politicians, are responsible for war. He believes that European leaders have been rendered ineffective by constitutions and charters of freedom.

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Ku claims that the fundamental cause of war and anarchy is the worship of the lower classes in Europe. His solution for Europe is to replace constitutions and charters of freedom with a “Great Charter of Loyalty” and adopt the Good Citizenship Religion practiced by the Chinese. In conclusion, Ku Hung-Ming’s “The Spirit of the Chinese People” is an enlightening and engaging exploration of Chinese culture and society, offering valuable insights into its spiritual and moral foundations. This work is an indispensable resource for anyone seeking to understand the depth and richness of Chinese civilization.