



Origin of Man (Gen-Nin-Ron)

Kwei Fung Tsung Mih

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TSUNG MIH (SHU-MITSU, A.D. 774-841), the author of Yuen Jan Lun ('Origin of Man'), one of the greatest scholars that China ever produced, was born in a Confucianist family of the State of Kwo Cheu. Having been converted by Tao Yuen (Do-yen), a noted priest of the Zen Sect, he was known at the age of twenty-nine as a prominent member of that sect, and became the Eleventh Patriarch after Bodhidharma, the First Patriarch of the sect, who had come over to China from India about A.D. 520. Some years after he studied under Chino, Kwan (Cho-kwan) the philosophical doctrine of the Avatamsaka School, now known in Japan as the Kegon Sect, and distinguished himself as the Seventh Patriarch of that school. In A.D. 835 he was received in audience by the Emperor Wan Tsung, who questioned him in a general way about the Buddhist doctrines, and bestowed upon him the honourable title of Great Virtuous Teacher, together with abundant gifts. The author produced over ninety volumes of books, which include a commentary on Avatamsaka-sutra, one on Purnabuddha-sutra-prasannartha-sutra, and many others. Yuen Jan Lun is one of the shortest of his essays, but it contains all the essential doctrines, respecting the origin of life and of the universe, which are found in Taoism, Confucianism, Hinayanism, and Mahayanism. How important a position it holds among the Buddhist books can be well imagined from the fact that over twenty commentaries were written on it both by the Chinese and the Japanese Buddhist scholars. It is said that a short essay under the same title by a noted contemporary Confucianist scholar, Han Tui Chi (Kan-tai-shi, who flourished 803-823), suggested to him to write a book in order to make clear to the public the Buddhist view on the same subject. Thus he entitled the book 'Origin of Man,' in spite of his treating of the origin of life and of the universe. Throughout the whole book occur coupled sentences, consisting mostly of the same number of Chinese characters, and consequently while one sentence is too laconic, the other is overladen with superfluous words, put in to make the right number in the balanced group of characters. In addition to this, the text is full of too concise phrases, and often of ambiguous ones, as it is intended to state as briefly as possible all the important doctrines of the Buddhist as well as of the outside schools. On this account the author himself wrote a few notes on the passages that he thought it necessary to explain. The reader will find these notes beginning with 'A' put by the translator to distinguish them from his own.

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