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TAOIST IDEAS OF HUMAN ANATOMY

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THE White Cloud Temple, situated about half a mile outside the Hsi Pian Gate of Peking, contains by far the most complete library of Taoist medical and literary books, but to study them is no easy matter. It is necessary in the first place, to find a friend of the High Priest to act as go-between. Fortunately Mr. Ma Kiam, who has helped me throughout in the most generous way, was able to secure introduction through the kindness and courtesy of Mr. Hsu Seng Yu of the Department of Education. Nevertheless, when all was in readiness, a message was received saying that the High Priest was obliged to pay a visit to the Western Hills and could not see us; so the next Sunday plans were made to visit the temple in the afternoon. Another message came that there were services in the afternoon and that we must come in the morning or not at all. We secured a motor car, on a very few minutes notice, and set out.

With commendable foresight Mr. Hsu brought with him a fine old Chinese book eulogizing the memory of the first High Priest of the Temple who lived and died many hundred years ago. This tickled the fancy of the present incumbent mightily. When we came the second time, after going through the usual preliminaries of drinking tea with the junior priests and then with the Chief himself, we presented him with a photograph which pleased him still more, and for a very singular reason. The photograph is here shown (Fig. 1) and it will be seen that the sun is shining brightly upon the front of the black silk hat which he is wearing. This brightness he declares to be the fire of his own intellect ("his inward flame"), and we alone have thus far succeeded in photographing it. He has asked for many copies to send to his friends and we have risen so high in his estimation that he has ordered some of his priests to our hospital for medical treatment. He is indeed a fine old man, well

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beyond the average in height and with a beard containing just seventeen carefully cultivated hairs. He is of the opinion that to be healthy one must be happy and he lives up to it.

After about ten days, he returned our call and it was a pleasure to show him



FIG. 1. It will be seen that the sun is shining brightly upon the front of the High Priest's silk hat. This brightness he declares to be the fire of his own intellect and compliments us on our success in photographing it for the first time.

everything and to listen to his comments. He was pleased with the deference of our students and delivered himself of a little impromptu address, in the dissecting room, on his ideas of the circulation of semen up the back and through the three "burning-spaces" (approximately, thorax, upper and lower abdomen). It was indeed an interesting study in contrast, this courtly priest in his gorgeous blue silk robes surrounded by our white-clad students pressing close and pouring eager questions into his deaf old ears. We passed from building to building. The changes in the color of the chemical indicators in Miss Embrey's laboratory seemed like magic. He entered an elevator for the first time, saw something of the marvels of electricity and at the end of two hours was quite bewildered. But not once did he voice the usual comment of Chinese visitors: "How skillful are these Americans in devising new ways of wasting money!" He is a personage, calm and dignified, like the Lama in "Kim" and not poor in worldly goods. His temple is said to be the largest of its kind in China and was greatly enriched by the late Empress Dowager, through the Taoist, "Kow," whom she honored. In 1227 A.D., it was called the "Tai Chi Palace" and was made the official residence of the First High Priest (Chen Chu Chi) by the Emperor Gengis of the Yuan Dynasty. The buildings are truly regal and house two hundred priests, who, according to the canons of their faith, are allowed to marry and keep families. The High Priest claims not to avail himself of the privilege.

The father of Taoism, Lao Tzŭ, wrote his famous book, the "Tao Tê Ching," about six centuries before Christ. Some say that he was born of a virgin "who conceived him at the sight of a falling star." A few short quotations from Giles' translation[1] will indicate the simplicity of his message:

> There is something, chaotic yet complete, which existed before Heaven and Earth. Oh, how still it is and formless, standing alone without changing, reaching everywhere without suffering harm! It must be regarded as the Mother of the Universe. Its name I know not. To designate it, I call it Tao.
>
> Tao eludes the sense of sight, and is therefore called colorless. It eludes the sense of hearing, and is therefore called soundless. It eludes the

[1] Giles, Lionel. The Sayings of Lao Tzŭ. The Wisdom of the East Series. John Murray, London, 1917.

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sense of touch, and is therefore called incorporeal. These three qualities cannot be apprehended and hence may be merged into unity.

Tao produced Unity; Unity produced Duality; Duality produced Trinity; and Trinity produced all existing objects.

Thus it is that Tao, engendering all things, nourishes them, develops them, and fosters them; perfects them, ripens them, tends them and protects them.

Tao is the sanctuary where all things find refuge, the good man's priceless treasure, the guardian and savior of him who is not good.

Why was it that the men of old esteemed this Tao so highly? Is it not because it may be daily sought and found, and can remit the sins of the guilty?

It is the Way of Heaven to take from those who have too much, and to give to those who have too little.

He who exalts himself does not rise high.

He who overcomes others is strong, but he who overcomes himself is mightier still.

Good words shall gain you honor in the market-place, but good deeds shall gain you friends among men.

To the good I would be good; to the not-good I would also be good, in order to make them good.

Requite injury with kindness.

Keep behind, and you shall be put in front; keep out, and you shall be kept in.

What makes a kingdom great is its being like a down-flowing river. . .or like the female throughout the world, who by quiescence always overcomes the male. And quiescence is a form of humility.

This gospel of kindliness soon underwent the most unspeakable degradation so that Kublai Khan ordered all Taoist books, with the exception of the "Tao Te Ching," to be burnt. I like to think of the old High Priest as an exception proving that there is a little good in everything. But Lao Tzŭ's "*laissez-faire*" philosophy still lingers and forms the stumbling block of the whole Chinese nation. It may be expressed in the words of Giles' translation as follows:

Who is there that can make muddy water clean? But if allowed to remain still, it will gradually become clear itself.

Keep the mouth shut, close the gateways of sense, and as long as you live you will have no trouble.

Practice inaction, occupy yourself with doing nothing.



FIG. 2. The books are kept in a series of Chinese chests behind large images. Some are shown on the extreme right in the photograph.

Leave all things to take their natural course, and do not interfere.

Every assistance was given to us in the examination of the library with its record of this philosophy. According to the High Priest, we were the first foreigners to be admitted. The statement should, however, be taken with a grain of salt; it may have been made to please us, or he may have been misinformed. The library contains 5,485 volumes printed during the reign of the Emperor Cheng Tung (1436–1449 A.D.). Some of them are copies of old Chinese classics without Taoist tendencies. All the books are kept in Chinese chests sealed up with strips of paper because the library is a secret one and is not open to the public. Some of these chests may be seen behind the images in the illustration (Fig. 2). They are bound quite differently

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from those in the library of the Boy Emperor, being arranged so that each volume will unfold to a length of fifty or an hundred feet like a sort of scroll. Old type used in printing the catalogue of the library, which was done quite recently under Mr.



FIG. 3. Old type used in printing the catalogue of the library is piled up between the minor shrines.

Hsu's supervision, is piled up between the minor shrines (Fig. 3). The books are unique and of great value, but no special care is taken to guard them. They are kept on the second floor of a building constructed almost entirely of wood. Perhaps the reason why they have lasted so long is that they have been so completely forgotten. Certainly the foreign troops who looted Peking in 1900 would have paid a visit to the White Cloud Temple had they known of the treasures that it contains.

The High Priest (Chen Yu Kuen) fully appreciates the desirability of having the books reprinted; but he is a wise old man and declined the offer of the Commercial Press in Shanghai because he knew that if the books ever left Peking he would never see them again. The Commercial Press is now opening an office in Peking and President Hsu is reported to be taking an active interest in the negotiations. The idea is to print one hundred copies of each of the books at a total cost of about $400,000, Mexican, or, at the present rate



FIG. 4. A white tiger inhabits the lungs.



FIG. 5. A turtle and snake reside in the gall-bladder.

of exchange (March, 1921), of $180,000, United States currency. But plans miscarry in China and we shall have reason to be thankful if the library continues to be spared from looting and from fire, and remains accessible to those who really care to use it.

We examined the books in the dim light of the temple on one of the altars before the images. None of the drawings is intended as acupuncture charts or as guides for the application of moxa. The central idea of this perverted Taoism is demoniac. Great attention is paid to animals. The White Cloud Temple is, in fact, an asylum for old and decrepit pigs and for certain kinds of birds which are kept in comfort

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until they die. Each of the six organs of the human body is thought to be inhabited by a certain animal as illustrated in a book of the Sung Dynasty, whose author has chosen to remain anonymous. A white tiger inhabits the lungs (Fig. 4), a turtle and a snake reside in the gall-bladder (Fig. 5), a dragon has its home in the liver (Fig. 6), a phoenix lives in the spleen (Fig. 7), a red bird in the heart (Fig. 8), and a deer with two heads in the kidneys (Fig. 9).



FIG. 6. A dragon has its home in the liver.



FIG. 7. A phœnix lives in the spleen.

The "Nan Ching," written by Li Chung in the fifth year of the Emperor Hsien Sung (1269 A.D.), is, from our point of view, the most valuable book in the collection. It contains diagrams of the viscera viewed from the front (Fig. 10) and from behind (Fig. 11). The anterior view shows the liver in black on the left side (of the body), the lobulated lungs above, the stomach in the middle and the spleen on the extreme right. The other diagram shows the same arrangement and, in addition (as one would expect in a posterior view), the kidneys connecting with the spinal cord. Why the author has transposed everything, placing the liver on the left side and the spleen on the right, it is difficult to say. The drawings have probably never been examined critic-



FIG. 8. A red bird lives in the heart.

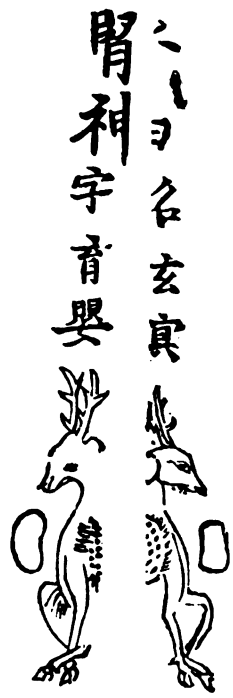

FIG. 9. A deer with two heads lives in the kidneys.



FIG. 10. Viscera from the front.

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ally enough in the last six hundred years to detect the mistake.

Fig. 12 is a composite drawing indicating how elaborate are the relations of the various spirits and genii. Fig. 13 directs attention to the exact place where the pulse should be felt during the twenty-four seasons of the year (in the summer nearer the fingers, and in the winter, farther up the arm). Fig. 14 is designed to illustrate differences in temperature in different parts of the body. At the head is a broken line between two solid lines, which means fire, and at the feet is a solid line between two broken ones, which means water. Going upward toward the head the temperature of the body increases, which is thought to explain the circumstance that clothing is not needed to protect the head from cold. The other signs indicate combinations of male and female principles. The pure male principle (not here shown) is represented by three solid lines which also indicate Heaven; the pure female principle by three broken lines which also signify Earth. A proper association of these principles is essential for life and happiness.



Fig. 11. Viscera from the back.

The "Nan Ching" contains many other diagrams and an interesting picture of a disciple worshipping three Buddhas in the familiar storm-cloud setting (Fig. 15). It closes with a representation of the spirit which is held responsible for its protection, who is likewise surrounded with billowy storm-clouds and is armed with a double headed axe (Fig. 16).

These ideas of anatomy have a strong flavor of Buddhism. They have been handed down from antiquity, originating perhaps in the study of animals with occasional verification at executions by the method of "a thousand cuts" (slicing process).[2] With each transference the diagrams have become less and less like the organs which they are supposed to represent so that all (Figs. 4–9), except the lungs and kidneys, are quite unrecognizable without the help of the Chinese text.

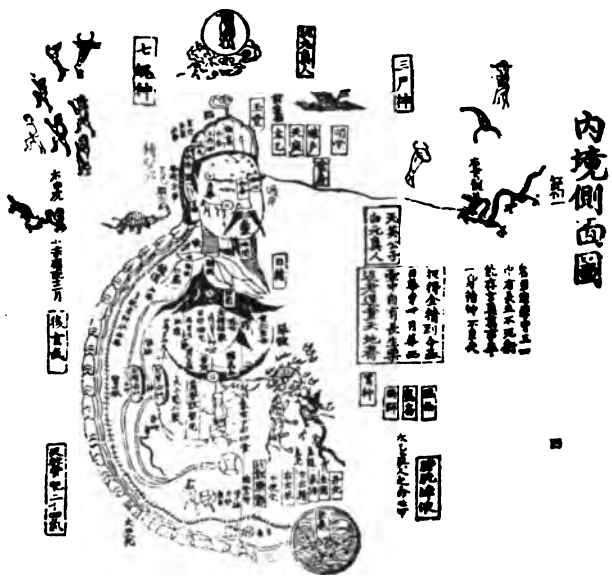

Fig. 12. A composite drawing indicating how elaborate are the relations of the various spirits and genii.

Taoists do not carry on any active instruction in anatomy. Ideas are merely traditional and diffused from the priests to the laity in garbled form. Apparently no

[2] Hsieh, E. T. A Review of Ancient Chinese Anatomy. *Anat. Rec.*, Phila., 1921, xx, 97.

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new books are written. How different it is with the conceptions of anatomy which underlie the art of needling (or acupuncture)! These are actively taught by the apprentice method, and in small schools, to students throughout the great Republic. It is the old and familiar doctrine of the circulation of humors over again. Life is thought to depend upon an appropriate adjustment between circulating male and female principles. In disease, the malicious excess of one or the other is removed by inserting needles of great variety into the body in certain very definite localities. It is recognized in the office of Imperial Physicians, where the official text book, called the "Golden Mirror," published under the patronage of the illustrious Emperor K'ang Hsi (1661–1722 A.D.), may be seen. The anatomical drawings contained in this book are a considerable improvement since most of them can be identified without reading the text. It is unsafe to go very far in an attempt to specify Taoist ideas of anatomy because the religions of China are such a wonderful mixture.

We are told that forty different sects of Taoists can be counted in Peking and its vicinity, but they become less powerful as one travels toward the south of China. They all, however, have fundamentally the same ideas and constitute a large and important element in the population. They are not supposed to believe in healing by relieving the body of the "malicious excess" of male or female principles through needling, though they may sometimes practice it. The Taoist pharmacopeia is restricted entirely to mineral preparations, all the animal excreta, "spirit pills," made of tapeworms soaked in children's urine, finger nails, etc., being omitted. They have not tried to devise concoctions which would be so disgusting that the offending demons would flee in terror. The priests sometimes attempt to distill mercury. When the dis-

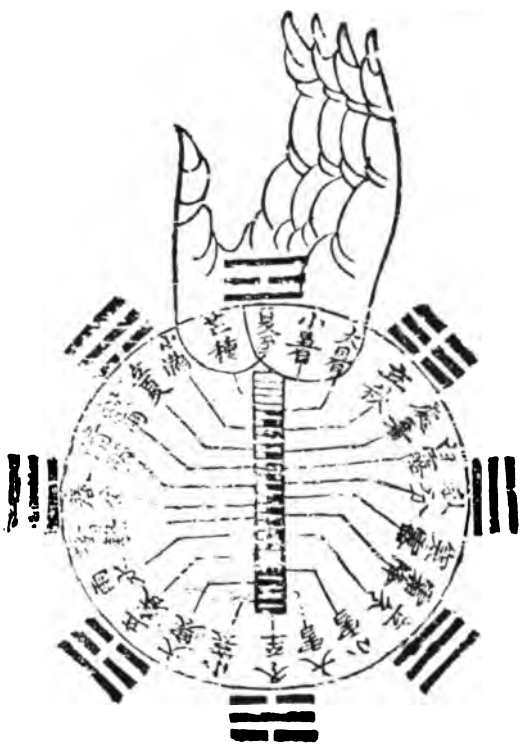

FIG. 13. Attention is directed to the exact place where the pulse should be felt during the twenty-four seasons of the year.

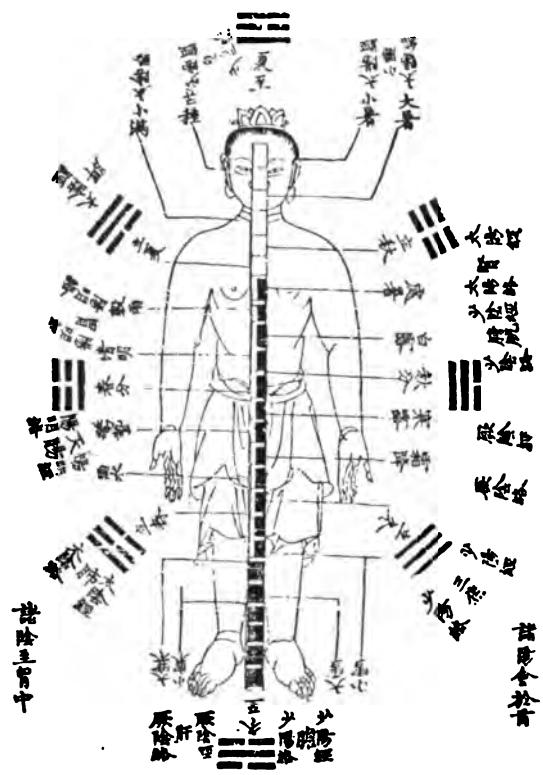

FIG. 14. Diagram indicating increases in body temperature as one passes toward the head.

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tilling has been successfully repeated nine times, the resulting substance will be the "Elixir of Life." One of the priests of the White Cloud Temple is said to have been killed by an explosion during the sixth distillation. Their panacea for all ills is to make the mind absolutely blank and to remain motionless in accordance with the Master's teaching; but no cures have recently been reported.



FIG. 15. A disciple worshipping three Buddhas in the familiar stormcloud setting.

Evidently one of the prerequisites to the introduction of modern medicine into China is a readjustment of the habit of mind of the people, whether they be Taoists, Buddhists or Confucianists. It is safe to say that the average Chinese, in order to be quite on the safe side, espouses all three faiths in a half-hearted way, and has no really serious conviction regarding any one of them. On the Chinese New Year and other festal occasions he takes a long holiday, goes through the ceremonial and buys a few coppers' worth of cheap incense. Foreigners are quick to notice the absence of any expression of reverence. The priests speak in loud tones and do not act as if they were treading upon holy ground. In the sanctuary of the Taoist Temple of the Universe, Christian Bibles, printed in Chinese, are quite openly offered for sale. Stacks of them may be seen in a cloud of incense upon one of the sacrificial tables immediately before the largest image. If Roman Catholic priests were to sell Chinese idols under the dome of St. Peter's, we should be inclined to accuse them of insincerity. About five hundred years before Christ, Confucius begged the nation to be sincere

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and to refrain from contemplation of the supernatural:[3]

Be sincere and men will trust you.

Make conscientiousness and sincerity your main object.

I do not see how a man without sincerity can be good for anything.



FIG. 16. The spirit which is held responsible for protecting the "Nan Ching."

Before we are able to do our study by the living, how can we do it by the spirits of the dead?

Before we know what life is, how can we know what death is?

Absorption in the study of the supernatural is most harmful.

Why, it may then be asked, do the people fly right in the face of the Master's teaching? The ignorant are perhaps inspired by fear, the educated by a reluctance to lose face. Their forefathers have bent the knee and offered incense for forty centuries. It would be presumptuous for them to fail in the practice and thus to repudiate the actions of their long line of ancestors. More perhaps than any other nation on Earth, the Chinese treasure their past. In the Office of Imperial Physicians,[4] an image of Huangti, the mythical father of Chinese medicine, is worshipped twice a year and the practice condoned by Chinese who have taken their medical degrees in the United States and who apparently see nothing incongruous in it. For them it is merely an appropriate memorial to the glorious past, sanctioned by custom.

Very little progress can be made before the people of the nation learn to look forward as well as backward and to realize that the most appropriate offering they can make to their ancestors is to be perfectly sincere in all their dealings, to have done with blind ceremonial and to use the brains which have been handed down to them to the very best advantage, reasoning out the simpler facts of existence for themselves. "Young man know thyself"—is a command the utilitarian value of which is certainly not appreciated in China. Illiterate children at home know more of their bodily makeup than the most venerable of Chinese sages. But with knowledge of anatomy, a persistent yet unwelcome visitor, superstition, with its cast-iron limitations is bound to become less powerful.

[3] Giles, Lionel. The Sayings of Confucius. The Wisdom of the East Series. John Murray, London, 1912.

[4] Cowdry, E. V. The Office of Imperial Physicians, Peking.

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