

Mirror of Auras:

Chen Tuan on Physiognomy

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“Gongsun Ao 公孫敖 had heard that Shu Fu 叔服 was a master of physiognomy and introduced his two sons to him. Shu Fu said: ‘Gu 穀 will feed you, No 難 will bury you. The lower part of Gu’s face is large, he will have posterity in the state of Lu 魯’ (*Zuozhuan*, Wen 1; Legge 1960, 229).

This record of the *Zuozhuan* 左傳 is one of the earliest known instances where the application of physiognomy by a professional soothsayer in China is mentioned. Many are the cases throughout Chinese history where the bounties or hazards of future occurrences were recognized early in a person’s features. Heirs apparent were nominated on the advice of the physiognomists, just as officials or nobles were reduced in rank or even killed on the basis of predictions made by prognostication specialists. Even the most notorious Empress Wu 吳太后 was recognized while still in her diapers:

When Empress Wu was in her infancy, the famous physiognomist Yuan Tiangang 袁天綱 happened to visit her house. He said to her mother: “Your bone structure shows that you will have noble children.” Thereupon she called all the children and had them examined by Tiangang. First he looked at Yuanjing 元慶 and Yuanshuang 元爽 and explained: “These two will become heads of great families, in office they may advance to the third rank.” Then he analyzed the later Lady Helan 河蘭: “This young lady certainly shows signs of great nobility, yet she will not act to the advantage of her husband.” Then the wet-nurse brought

in little Zetian 則天 who happened to wear boy's clothes at the time. Tiangang at once said: "This young lord has a spiritual color and radiates liveliness and high intelligence. But I can't distinguish the details, so please let me look a little closer!" He thus took a step towards the cradle and asked the nurse to hold the head up a little higher so that he could examine the eyes. Alas, he exclaimed with astonishment: "The young lord has dragon eyes and a phoenix neck, the highest possible indicators of nobility!" When he then continued to examine the child from the side, he was even more surprised: "Should this child be a girl, then her career would be beyond all estimation. She might well become ruler of the empire."¹

In the two stories quoted above one can already gain a glimpse of the system that underlay traditional Chinese physiognomy. Certain parts of the face are identified with specific periods of one's life so that a large chin section comes to indicate numerous descendants. Single features are isolated, analyzed in terms of their similarity to animal features and interpreted according to the quality commonly associated with the beast. Therefore dragon and phoenix features are considered most outstanding, while wolf and tiger characteristics show a cruel and dangerous disposition. In addition to the obvious patterns of one's features, the general "aura" (*feng* 風) is judged. The physiognomist then speaks about the client's energy (*qi* 氣) or his color (*se* 色), an expression used in a wider and more general sense as well as in the rather technical meaning of facial complexion, in which it is also found in the classics of traditional Chinese medicine.²

MANUALS OF PHYSIOGNOMY

The first systematic exposition or manual of the rules and principles of applied physiognomy in China, as extant today, is found among the Dunhuang manuscripts. Ascribed to Xu Fu 許負 of the Han dynasty, the *Xiangshu* 相書, "Physiognomy," has survived in three different manuscript versions (P. 2572, P. 2797, P. 3589). It gives a survey of the human body from top to bottom, explaining the significance of its different features (Hou 1979, 57; Kohn 1986, 249). From the tenth century onward physiognomic materials increase in number, while the systems presented grow in complexity. Yet one can identify a unified tradition of physiognomy from the early Song to the present day, a tradition which is still alive in Taiwan and Japan.³ This modern standard type of physiognomy is characterized by its emphasis on the theory of body-spirit interaction and by its frequent reliance on the model of the

five phases in the analysis of body forms and facial complexions. A variety of texts—each emphasizing a specific aspect of physiognomy—connect the early masters with their modern followers.

The *Mirror of Auras* (*Fengjian* 風鑑) is the first of the manuals of the modern tradition. It is ascribed to Chen Tuan 陳搏, the famous Taoist saint and philosopher of the tenth century.⁴ He is praised by the tradition as the founder of modern standard physiognomy and is also claimed as the original author of its foremost textbook, the *Shenxiang quanbian* 神相全編 (“Complete Guide to Spirit Physiognomy”). As I pointed out in an earlier article (Kohn 1986), this book was compiled by Yuan Zhongche 袁忠徹, *zi* Gongda 公達 or Jingsi 靜思 of the early Ming 明 dynasty (1367–1458), who was a well-known physiognomist at the imperial court. It is now extant in a late Ming edition preserved in the National Central Library in Taipei, Taiwan. In addition, it has been reprinted in its entirety in the great Chinese encyclopedia *Gujin tushu jicheng* 古今圖書集成 (ch.s 631–644). This latter text in turn served as a basis for modern Taiwanese pocketbook editions such as the one prepared by Liang Xiangrun 梁湘潤 (Liang 1980).

There is an abridged Japanese translation of the *Shenxiang quanbian* by the Tokyo Shrine Administration which is used today as the standard physiognomic manual of Japan (Jingūkan 1982). In English we have a summarizing account of the major methods outlined in the text (Lessa 1968) and a discussion of its alleged tradition based on an analysis of the materials quoted (Kohn 1986).

The standard modern type of physiognomy as represented by the *Shenxiang quanbian* does indeed go back to the tenth century. The earliest textbook that can be considered a direct forerunner of the *Shenxiang quanbian* is the *Yuguan zhaoshen ju* 玉管照神局, (“Jade Office Instructions on How to Clarify Spirit”) allegedly by Song Qiqiu 宋齊邱 of the Southern Tang, but probably dating from the early Song period. Besides the *Yuguan zhaoshen ju*, materials of the *Shenxiang quanbian* could be traced to the *Renlun datongfu* 人倫大通賦 (“Comprehensive Rhapsody on Human Relations”) of the Jin and the *Taiqing shenjian* 太清神鑑 (“Great Clarity Mirror of Spirit”) dated to the late Song.

The *Mirror of Auras* ascribed to Chen Tuan is contained in the *Yuguan zhaoshen ju* of the early Song (*Yuguan*, 1,4b-9b). It is also found in the *Shenxiang quanbian* under the title *Fengjian ge* 風鑑歌 (“Song of the Mirror of Auras”) (ch. 6; Liang 1980, 178–181) and in the *Taiqing shenjian* of the late Song under the title *Shenbi lun* 神秘論 (“On the Secrets of Spirits”). More than that, it is quoted frequently in commentary sections of the *Shenxiang quanbian* and in other physiognomic texts.

We can distinguish two major editions of the *Mirror of Auras*, an

older one in the *Yuguan zhaoshen ju* and a later version found both in the *Shenxiang quanbian* and in the *Taiqing shenjian*. Whereas the older text is in prose, the more recent version is rhymed. Although in content the editions are rather similar, giving a general survey of the theory and practice of physiognomy, they are not at all alike in structure and phrasing.

The *Mirror of Auras* proposes a theory on the interaction of body and spirit; it gives detailed rules and examples for analysis of body types and features according to the theory of the five phases as well as according to animal types; it uses facial complexion analysis, again in accordance with five-phases theory (Kohn 1986).

However, the *Fengjian* does not give an exhaustive survey of physiognomy. Rather it exemplifies the basic principles and main methods of analysis by discussing specific types, such as the "wood type" with its different developments and the "thin type" with its main character evaluations. Edited already in the early Song in the *Yuguan zhaoshen ju*, the *Fengjian* might actually go back to the teachings of Chen Tuan. The fact that it is extensively quoted in most manuals after the tenth century, moreover, shows the importance attributed to Chen Tuan and his work in modern standard physiognomy.

CHEN TUAN AS AN AUTHOR OF PHYSIOGNOMIC TEXTS

In the *Tushu jicheng* edition of the *Shenxiang quanbian*, Chen Tuan is credited with the *Dongxuan jing* 洞玄經 ("Scripture of Pervading Mystery") (Liang 1980, 257–259). In the Ming edition of the text, however, this text is cited without any author's name under the title *Dongxuan jing xing you qixiang* 洞玄經形有七相 ("Seven Types of Bodies According to the Scripture of Pervading Mystery"). Under the title *Dongxuan jing zaduan ge* 洞玄經雜斷歌 ("Song Containing Miscellaneous Fragments of the Scripture of Pervading Mustery") a completely different text is found in the *Yuguan zhaoshen ju* (1,11b-12b). It is not ascribed to anybody.

In addition, the *Shenxiang quanbian* contains a text "On Energy and Complexion," *Qise lun* 氣色論, attributed to Xiyizi 希夷子 (Liang 1980, 325–326). Chen Tuan might be referred to by this name, as he was commonly known as Xiyi xiansheng 希夷先生, the title given to him by Song Taizong in 984. However, as the *Yuguan zhaoshen ju* does not contain any similar text, the ascription to Xiyizi might also intend a different personage.

The *Yuguan zhaoshen ju*, on the other hand, cites Chen Tuan as the author of two other texts which are not contained in any of the later collections. There is first the *Xiuli jin* 袖裏金, ("Gold Up the Sleeve")

(1,9a-11a), and then there is the *Xiang ge* 相歌, (“ Song on Physiognomy ”) (1, 11ab). The teaching of these two texts is quite similar to the concepts set forth in the *Fengjian*, yet as they are not usually quoted in later texts and are otherwise unconnected with Chen Tuan, we will not discuss them in further detail.

All in all one may say that although Chen Tuan has been credited with quite a number of physiognomic texts, yet evidence gained from the tradition of physiognomy itself is spurious. We cannot be sure that he really was involved in physiognomy and/or wrote anything on the subject at all. We only know that he occupied an important position in the estimate of the later tradition: the *Mirror of Auras* is quoted frequently in later texts. The early date of its older edition in the *Yuguan* together with the mention of Chen Tuan as an outstanding master might be an indication of some historical fact. Yet one would wish for some more substantial link of Chen Tuan with the art of physiognomy. Let us therefore take a look at his life and legend.

PHYSIOGNOMY IN CHEN TUAN LEGENDS

In legends concerning Chen Tuan we do find quite a number of anecdotes telling how he skillfully predicted a person's fate by merely looking at his or her facial features. There is, e.g., his spontaneous recognition of Zhang Yong's 張詠 outstanding military talent and of his future chances to apply it in the service of the empire, despite the fact that Zhang had failed to pass the official examination:

While Zhang Yong was still a commoner he once visited Chen Tuan and asked his permission to come and study with him on Mount Hua 華山. Chen refused steadfastly, but when Zhang departed he gave him a slip of paper with a poem in which he foretold Zhang's career, mentioning to him: “ Your wish to study with me would entangle me too much in secular duties.” He then handed him the poem:

You will pacify Wu 吳 and go to Shu 蜀, striving for universal order;
In the middle of the party while food's in the pot and singing is going on you will save all from the outbreaking fire.
You will apply for appointment in the Southeast, as it's marvellous there,
And you will end up feeling grateful to an ulcer on your head.⁵

Needless to say, Zhang Yong was very successful in his career and very much involved in the world. He was sent to pacify various parts of the

empire and in the end was excused from official service due to an ulcer he developed.

According to another story, Chen Tuan evaluated the future of Qian Ruoshui 錢若水 together with the Hempclad Taoist, Mayi dao zhe 麻衣道者, telling him that he would end his career prematurely (see below). Another official, Wang Shize 王世則 who came to him in the guise of a humble servant was at once recognized for his true position and asked to occupy the seat of the right of everybody else, i.e., the seat of honor. Chen Tuan told him: "In the future you will be higher than all the others!" Only a year after this incident Wang Shize did indeed pass the official examination ahead of everyone else.⁶

The practice of seating people according to their future rank on the basis of physiognomic analysis is also mentioned in another episode:

When Song Taizu 太祖 and Taizong 太宗 were not yet emperors, they once went to Chang'an in the company of Zhao Pu 趙普. Chen Tuan met them and together they visited a winehouse. Zhao unintentionally seated himself on the mat to the right. Chen Tuan reproved him: "You are merely a minor star in the constellation of the Emperor of Purple Tenuity (Ziwei 紫微, the highest agency governing the universe). How dare you take the seat of honor?"⁷

Again, when he was at the imperial court in 984, Taizong requested his help in the nomination of the heir apparent. He had only to look at the attendants of the future Zhenzong 真宗 to know that he would be the emperor:

Although Taizong had already thought of the later Zhenzong as a good candidate for heir apparent, he yet wanted Chen Tuan to have a look at all the princes . . . He went to the various residences of the princes and upon returning handed in the following memorandum: "Shouwang 壽王 is truly the future ruler of the empire! When I first approached his residence, I saw two men at the gate. I asked their names which they gave as Zhang Qi 張耆 and Yang Chongxun 楊崇勳. Both were in the service of the prince. As far as I can judge these two, they will both become prime ministers eventually. Thus I had no problems judging the qualities of their master." Taizong was very happy . . .⁸

Chen Tuan also practised his skill with less illustrious persons and used his insights into the future to do them a good turn. One example for this is the magical drug he gave to a local magistrate near his home

on Mount Hua who was thereby saved from death by drowning (Knaul 1981, 73); in another instance he warned a youngster serving at his hermitage that his mother was seriously ill and got him to save her in time (Knaul 1981, 92); in yet a different case he knew from his appearance that Jia Xiufu 賈休復 had come to him not for company's sake, but only because he desired Chen's huge gourd. He graciously let him have it (Knaul 1981, 91).

CHEN TUAN IN PHYSIOGNOMIC LEGENDS

Within physiognomic literature there is mainly one anecdote concerning the skill of Chen Tuan. It runs as follows:

Formerly Wang Kezheng 王克正 died without a male heir. The family were devout Buddhists and at the time of his funeral his only daughter—then about ten years old—knelt before his image presenting the incense burner.

Chen Tuan entered the hall to mourn the dead man and upon coming out again he said to the other guests: "I could not see the face of Mr Wang's daughter, but only had a glance at her hands holding up the incense burner. Their physiognomy reveals outstanding nobility. If she were a man she would certainly earn the white robe and enter the Hanlin Academy. As it is, she will marry to be the first lady of a region."

Later Chen Jingong 陳晉公 was appointed second privy counselor. He was as yet unmarried. Taizong told him: "There is the old Jiangnan family of Wang Kezheng. His only daughter is pure and virtuous, she would be the right match for you."

When Taizong repeated his advice, Chen made her his wife. A few days later she was given the title Lady of a Prefecture.⁹

A more explicit description of of Chen Tuan's role in the modern standard tradition of physiognomy is found in the *Shenyi fu* 神異賦, ("Rhapsody on the Marvels of Spirit") a physiognomic treatise which is listed as the first as well as the longest of the theoretical treatises contained in the central part of the *Shenxiang quanbian*. Here Chen Tuan is described as receiving the physiognomic tradition from the Hemp-clad Taoist: "In mid-winter [they were] sitting round the fire set up in a raised mound of earth in Mayi's grotto on Mount Hua . . . There were no words used in the transmission of the teaching. Mayi gave it to him in secrecy." The transmission was in fact effected, as the commentator explains, "by using glowing sticks of wood and writing characters in the ashes of the fire" (Liang 1980, 125). The text

Shenyi fu then consists of the these very instructions first given to Chen Tuan with so much secrecy.

This text is divided in 250 lines with short commentary. It deals with general principles and methods of physiognomy. The introduction mentions that Chen Tuan was a famous sage of the Five Dynasties' period, on whom Song Taizong bestowed the title Xiyi xiansheng, and who served the Hemp-clad Taoist as his teacher (Liang 1980, 125). The commentary to the introduction supplements legendary information on Chen Tuan, such as his early recognition of the first Song emperor and his later knowledge that the empire would be at peace when Taizu ascended the throne. A probably fictitious audience with Taizu is mentioned.

The particular story dealing with the secret transmission of the teachings of physiognomy from Mayi to Chen Tuan ties in well with the legends surrounding him, especially with one story which extolls his skill as a practising physiognomist. The story runs as follows:

When he was a *jushi* 舉士, Qian Ruoshui once visited Chen Xiyi on Mount Hua. Xiyi told him to come back on the next day. When Ruoshui arrived at the appointed time, he saw an old monk had joined Xiyi. They were sitting close to the fire set up in a raised mound of earth. The monk stared intensely at Ruoshui, but he did not speak for a long time.

Finally he used a glowing stick of wood and wrote into the ashes of the fire. But before he had written three characters he said abruptly: "He will withdraw from the most rapid flow of events, from the excitement at the center of affairs." Ruoshui bade farewell and left Xiyi never to stay with him again. Later he climbed the official ladder and reached the position of an assistant commissioner of military affairs. But he withdrew from official service at the early age of forty.

Xiyi had originally thought that Ruoshui possessed the radiance of immortality and the bones of the Tao. At that time his fate had not yet been decided by his conscious intentions.

But then the old monk had looked at Ruoshui and told him that a Taoist career was impossible. It was because of this that Ruoshui had never come back to Xiyi again. Yet, withdrawing from involvement in society in the midst of ongoing activities is quite close to being a spirit immortal.—The old monk was the Hemp-clad Taoist. Chen Tuan is supposed to have been his disciple.¹⁰

In three points this anecdote on Chen Tuan's physiognomic talents

is very similar to the transmission legend cited above:

1. Chen Tuan is described as being closely related to Mayi, his senior and his teacher.
2. The story is set in a grotto on Mount Hua where a fire is glowing on a mound of earth.
3. Higher insights are communicated non-verbally by using parts of the fire.

According to a variant version of the story, Mayi uses physiognomy to foretell Ruoshui's future (*Guier ji* 貴耳記 29).

Chen Tuan's renown as a physiognomist must therefore be understood as originating from both sources—from the stories about his skillful practice of the art as much as from his authorship of physiognomic manuals, notably the *Fengjian*. The isomorphic nature of the two stories shows how closely the legend surrounding its alleged founder is related to the transmission of physiognomy. Moreover it becomes clear how much Chen Tuan's popular fame owes to his skillful practice of physiognomy.

To sum up, both aspects of Chen Tuan's relation to physiognomy—anecdotes and authorship—seem to be not entirely without historical substantiation. The prognostication for Qian Ruoshui, certainly one of the more important stories of this type, is mentioned in his official biography in ch. 266 of the *Songshi* 宋史, "History of the Song." The *Mirror of Auras*, the main physiognomic work going back to him, is already contained in early Song manual *Yuguan zhaoshen ju*. Chen Tuan's outstanding skill as a physiognomist is amply documented in a variety of sources. The *Mirror of Auras* might well be considered as a document of his physiognomic teaching.

CONTENTS OF THE *MIRROR OF AURAS*

The text can roughly be divided into eighteen sections:

1. Definitions of main terms. Human life is made up from energy (*qi* 氣) and physical form (*xing* 形), i.e., water and fire. These in turn correspond to essence (*jing* 精) and spirit (*shen* 神), to the will (*zhi* 志) and the mind (*xin* 心). Human beings come to life according to the following evolution: essence, spirit, physical form, complexion (*se* 色). Analysis proceeds in the reverse order.

2. Physical appearance according to the five phases (*wuxing* 五行). Here correspondences are given between "metal" and angular appearance, "wood" and slimness, "water" and obesity, "fire" and sharply-cut features, "earth" and coarse, solid looks. In addition certain psychological dispositions are associated with the five types. They are in the above order: deep resolution, wealth, literary talent, courage, and

caution.

3. Types of bodies according to animal morphology. The main distinction here is between bird-types, who are usually slim, and beast-types, who tend to be fat. Fat birds, it is said, cannot fly, meager beasts do not possess enough strength. The phoenix, the rhinoceros, and the tiger are explained in some detail.

4. The appearance of the wood-type. A person who belongs to the phase "wood" is usually slim in body and fresh in complexion. Yet one cannot be sure of his or her inner qualities, since the person might resemble a rather coarse kind of tree or might be like a tree with a hollow stem.

5. Impure or mixed types. For instance, wood-types often have some features typical for the phase "metal," water-types have some affinities toward "earth," fire-types tend to encompass some characteristics of "water," and earth-types will be found to show some "wood" features.

6. Mixtures according to the dynamics of phases. Generally in mixed types it is auspicious when the two phases are in a producing rather than overcoming relationship. The phases turn up in a person in a certain order; however, it is not clear from the text whether the phases succeed each other are 1) physically within the same person from top to bottom, 2) chronologically in the course of the person's life, or 3) practically while the analysis proceeds toward subtler levels. Someone might first be a wood-type, but there may be some "metal" features. Or someone tends to get fat and looks like "earth." In the first instance we speak of an obstruction (*zhi* 滯), in the second of a development (*fa* 發).

7. Spirit as deep or shallow. The deeper the spirit the better for the person, because then he or she will have much wisdom for guidance in life. Much spirit will make the eyes sparkle and radiate with power. A weak spirit is revealed in dull eyes.

8. Energy as pure or turbid. The purer the energy, the stronger and clearer one's voice will be. This in turn shows the sincerity and power of one's will. Energy might either be of one kind or it might be mixed. It tends to develop according to the climate of one's home country.

9. Complexion as full or transparent. Although only skindeep, complexion should be full and deep, it is not only related to the healthy functioning of the five orbes (*wuzang* 五臟) but also to one's radiance of spirit. The more radiance there is the better one feels, "glowing" with joy.

10. Complexion as young or old. Getting older and having a "young" complexion means there is some obstruction, while "old"

is used to refer to a look corresponding to one's real age.

11. Physical form and spirit in terms of surplus and deficiency. The more one has of physical form and spirit the more one will be liked by others. One who is insufficient in both will inspire immediate loathing.

12. Interaction patterns of the various constituent parts. All the basic constituents of human beings, form and spirit, energy and complexion, should be in harmony, they should be whole and full. Of all the constituents, spirit is the strongest and most basic, followed by energy which is responsible for complexion. Form only gives a framework for the working of the others.

13. Thin appearance. It is not good to be thin. Thin people tend to be nervous and hectic, they easily fall ill and usually do not live very long. In nature the weakest are usually thin, a thin earth cannot support any life. Thin people are nasty and treacherous, unkind to their elders, of a frivolous and unreliable nature. They tend to give themselves airs and show off their positions.

14. Signs of long life. People with a powerful physique and steady eyes live longest. Imposing looks reveal a harmonious interaction of physical form and energy, while steady eyes show the strength of the spirit. In addition, certain bones of the skull are reliable indicators of long life inasmuch as the bones themselves are made from solidified energy.

15. The importance of the mind. All physical typology is qualified when someone develops goodness of heart and an inner psychological stability in accordance with fate. Frequently people who are judged unfavorably at first turn out to be quite selfless and agreeable upon closer inspection. Despite their obvious disadvantages they have found "freedom of mind."

16. Obstruction. Already a short period of obstruction can do permanent harm to the constituents of an individual. When someone, e.g., develops too much *yin* energy, he or she will be weak and the spirit will be distressed.

17. *Yin* and *yang*. Men should be strong and not effeminate, women should be soft and obedient in due accordance with their station in life.

18. Noble and humble. More than anything else, the cheek bones and the jaws tell about one's inherent nobility. Their form can reveal exactly the position one is likely to attain in life. In addition, the pupils of the eyes will show the nature of one's attitude toward life. Far-seeing eyes express a far-sighted attitude, slanted eyes mean that one's wisdom is poisoned.

Most of the eighteen sections found in the Song dynasty version of the *Mirror of Auras* have survived in the later editions. However, no trace could be found of sections 4, 5, 12, 13, and 14. That is to say, the more detailed and personal descriptions given especially of the wood-type and the “thin” character are lost in the *Shenxiang quanbian* and the *Taiqing shenjian* editions of the text. On the other hand, there are some minor additions found in these texts, such as e.g., a typology of man according to seven types (Liang 1980, 180; also found in *Taiqing shenjian* 8a):

“Clear” (*qing* 清) without spirit is deeply obstructed;
 “slated” (*qi* 奇) without spirit will never hold office;
 “old” (*gu* 古) without spirit is really common;
 “strange” (*guai* 怪) without spirit will end in disgrace;
 “elegant” (*xiu* 秀) without spirit is called the thin type;
 “unusual” (*yi* 異) without spirit, such a one is weak;
 “pointed” (*duan* 端) without spirit is truly coarse.
 Yet all of these with spirit would be extraordinary indeed.

Similarly the edition of the *Mirror of Auras* found in the *Shenxiang quanbian* (Liang 1980, 181) goes into some more detail about one’s family circumstances in life: When the lachrymal bags (*leitang* 淚堂) are deeply sunk in, one will never stop crying in one’s youth. Troubles with one’s family are recognized by the height of the bones above the eyebrows. No brothers and sisters are shown in short and bushy eyebrows, the lack of a rim around the ears is a sign that one will not find a wife.

The version contained in the *Taiqing shenjian*, in turn, has certain sections not found in the other versions of the *Mirror of Auras*. e.g., it says (p. 7b):

The ears should be white, the mouth should be red, the eyebrows clear, the eyes elegant, and the nose very straight;
 Moreover, the six departments should be in harmony. Then one will certainly be noble all one’s life.

In contrast to the earlier version of the *Fengjian*, later editions appear to place a stronger emphasis on the role of the spirit. Also, they seem to favor a higher appraisal of practical application and a more descriptive form of physiognomic teaching. These differences do not, however, imply the development of new traditions, they only indicate a shift in emphasis.

CHEN TUAN'S SYSTEM OF PHYSIOGNOMY

The *Mirror of Auras* is organized along the same lines as later texts on the theory and practice of physiognomy. That is to say, it begins with an outline of the principles of human origination and explains the basic physical and psychological constituents of people. It then goes on to outline the basic principles of analysis, viz., the five phases and animal morphology or theriology. Only then the text describes certain types in detail. At this point it appears to stop being systematic, because it does not list all the combinations and variants possible. The text rather limits itself to the elucidation of certain telling examples. The tree motif is very strong in the text, the comparison of a human being to a tree comes up again and again, much more so than in later systematic physiognomic manuals. Again, one is confronted with the particular prejudices of the author in the description of thin people, not found in such frightful openness in later texts. Also, there is the emphasis on the importance of the mind or spirit which in a way goes against the very basic *raison d'être* of physiognomy: if spirit can cause all analysis of outward features to be invalid, what good is the analysis after all?

Despite these individual specialties of the *Mirror of Auras*, it generally follows the fundamental principles of physiognomy in China. As Lessa has pointed out, divination in China is based on the laws of coordinate or correlative thinking, formulated in the principles of the interrelation between macrocosm and microcosm, yin and yang, the five phases, the eight trigrams of the *Yijing* 易經, as well as in the systems of analysis according to animal morphology, numerology, and the overall harmony of things (Lessa 1968, 16–33).

The system presented in the *Mirror of Auras* allows a deeper insight into the underlying principles and world view of physiognomy as conceived by the Chinese themselves. Human beings thought of as “an assemblance of energy” already in ancient China (*Zhuangzi* 莊子, ch. 22), are here described as consisting of spirit, essence, and energy. They come to life only through the positive interaction of fire and water, i.e., the trigrams *li* 離☲ and *kan* 坎☵ of the *Yijing*. As these trigrams, human beings consist of a combination of the basic energies *yin* and *yang*. They are formed through the coming together of spirit and physical form.

Though common to all Chinese thinking, the concepts found in physiognomy are also described very explicitly in Taoist texts. Du Guangting 杜光庭, almost Chen Tuan's contemporary (850–933), puts them in the following manner:

All human life comes from spirit. When spirit assembles there

is life, when it disperses there is death. Concentrated energy turns into essence. Concentrated essence turns into spirit. Only when spirit is concentrated will there be long life (*Yongcheng jixian lu* 壙城集仙錄 “Record of the Host of Immortals of the Walled City,” *Daozang*, hereafter abbreviated DZ, no. 783; 1.6a).

The origination of humanity according to Taoist literature can be depicted as in diagram 1 (based on the *Xisheng jing* 西昇經 (“Scripture of Western Ascension,” DZ 726; 4.14b):

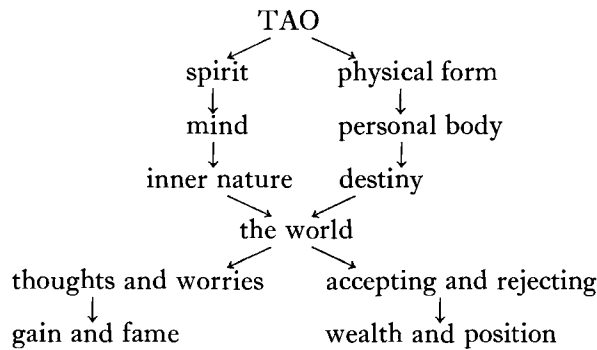


Diagram 1. The Origination of Humanity

The interest that the Taoists have in the physical and psychological development of human beings, however, is fundamentally different from that of the physiognomists. They do not want to find out why people are what they are or what they should be in the world according to their heaven-given inner nature and destiny. Rather, they strive to understand how they can get out of worldly defilements, how they can become what they should be as part of the Tao, i.e., pure and energetic, long-lived and utterly at-one with the universe. In this context, however, the Taoists warn against developments that would lead in the opposite direction, i.e., that cause human beings to get deeper into mundane strife and lose purity forever:

When one hankers after life and loathes death, resisting the natural transformations, one's spirit-consciousness will be confused and led into error. It will consequently lose its proper role. The result will be that when one is entrusted to life again [after death] and receives the constituting energy, one will not lean toward the pure and refined, but end up with a lot of turbid and coarse energy. Generally all the stupid and dull, the dumb and greedy come into being like this (*Zuowang lun* 坐忘論, “Treatise on Sitting in Obli-

vion," DZ 1036, 11ab; Kohn 1987, 102).

In addition, the Taoists provide a typology of character so that people know what they are up against in the struggle for the purity of the Tao:

People are born between heaven and earth. Thus they are endowed with energy that might be pure or turbid, soft or hard A person of pure energy is clever, alert, wise, and intelligent. One of turbid energy is unlucky, harsh, dumb, and foolish. Someone endowed with hard energy is haughty, strong, vigorous, and violent. One who has mostly soft energy is compassionate, benevolent, honest, and magnanimous. In the same sense, a wood-type character (*xing* 性) tends to be energetic and impulsive. An earth-type is benevolent and harmonious. A water-type tends to be modest and cautious. A fire-type is fierce and violent. And a metal-type is severe and abrupt (*Yongcheng jixian lu* 1.5b).

But while the Taoists emphasize that "an intelligent person will restrain and suppress these inborn characteristics and thereby prolong his life" (*Yongcheng jixian lu* 1.5b), the physiognomists try to find out what people can and should do in accordance with their inner natures. People cannot help being what they are—but while according to the Taoists, they are at-one with the Tao, according to the physiognomists, they are determined by destiny. Nevertheless Chen Tuan emphasizes the importance of the mind, he allows for the possibility of the individual to go beyond his heaven-given fate, to overrule all adverse circumstances apparent in his physical body through the power of the spiritual force within. Here he meets with the Taoists' contention by saying, "those whose spirit and energy are at peace and tranquil within are unconcerned and enjoy freedom at heart" (section 15).

The structure of the individual's body is entirely determined by the quality of his constituents, i.e., of spirit, essence, and energy. The bones develop directly from pure essence, whereas the blood consists basically of energy. Thus one can judge the quality of a person's essence from the structure and shape of the bones. Likewise, one can recognize the nature of someone's energy from the complexion, i.e., the outside counterpart of the blood. In the analysis of the bones, the five fundamental types of pure wood, metal, fire, water, and earth can be distinguished together with the various mixtures of the five phases.

In addition, one can describe the body structure by applying an analogy to animal-types, the most noble of which are the phoenix, dragon, tiger, and rhinoceros, but which also include a large variety of household

圖 停 三 才 三 府 六



Fig. 1. Chart of the Six Departments and the Three Agents As Signified in the Three Pavilions

1. Upper Pavilion of Heaven
 2. Middle Pavilion of Humanity
 3. Lower Pavilion of Earth
 4. Upper Department of the Temples
 5. Middle Department of the Cheeks
 6. Lower Department of the Chin
- (*Shenxiang quanbian*, Liang 1980, 64)

animals, wild beasts and birds (Lessa 1968, 59).

More subtly, the bones of the face will reveal the length of one's live, one's position, and one's material wealth. Here the three major bones are the forehead, i.e., the part of heaven, the cheeks and the nose,

i.e., the part of humanity, and the jaws and the chin, i.e., the part of earth. The forms which these bones take to the right and the left are also called the *liufu* 六府, six departments (Fig. 1). A well-developed forehead reveals nobility, a straight nose and high, knob-like cheekbones show a long and successful life, and a broad, even lower jaw indicates wealth.

Complexion is more dependent on outward circumstance than the bone structure of the body. Although general types tend to be influenced by the climate of the respective birth place (see note 23 for a typology), everyone's outward appearance is so individual that one can judge character and destiny quite reliably. Other than the bones, complexion tends to change more rapidly with time. It is therefore an indicator of specific tendencies in a given period and does not provide such profound insights into the destiny of a lifetime. Yet even complexion can be categorized according to basic types, and again the system of the five phases is applied frequently (Hou 1979). For Chen Tuan, the major types are that of resting, withheld, dead, and prospering complexion (cf. note 27), but he also distinguishes between young and old, full and transparent, intense and scattered types.

In addition to complexion, human energy can also be judged by the sound of the voice. In this, the more generic meaning of energy as breath or wind is still obvious. The concept that all life is wind and makes sound is very old in Chinese history. Already the *Daode jing* 道德經 (ch. 5) compares heaven and earth to a bellows, and in the *Zhuangzi* (ch. 2) it is stated about the world that "the Great Clod belches out breath and its name is wind. So long as it doesn't come forth, nothing happens. But when it does, then ten thousand hollows begin crying wildly." It distinguishes the piping of earth, i.e., the sound of the hollows, the piping of human beings, i.e., the breath and the sounds of the flutes and whistles, and the piping of heaven, i.e., the way in which the cosmic energy "blows on the ten thousand things so that each can be itself" (*Zhuangzi* 2; Watson 1968, 36).

In ancient China sound was one of the most common means of divination, the energy of the earth was judged by the means of pitch-pipes (Bodde 1959), just as the voice of man would reveal the nature of his energy. More than that, "armies were appraised by the sound of their approach . . . bird calls were analyzed for their prognosticatory import . . . and pitches were used to determine surnames" (DeWoskin 1982, 37). The energy of the earth was thought to be responsible for sicknesses in man, as the *Huangdi neijing* 黄帝内經 ("Inner Classic of the Yellow Emperor") has it: "Wind enters the body and exhausts man's energy" (ch. 3). So it is not surprising that we find the analysis of the

voice as one of the basic methods to examine energy in the *Mirror of Auras*.

The strongest and most primordial of all constituents of humanity is the spirit. It is understood as light (*ming* 明) or radiance (*guang* 光; section 7), a notion which goes back far in Chinese antiquity. Originally the idea of light was closely associated with the ancestral cult, the word for ancestral spirits meaning “blossom of radiance” (*bixian* 丕顯). Among the moral principles of early Confucian thought, virtue (*de* 德) was defined as “the light of inner vision which directs outer behavior toward the good” (Vandermeersch 1985). Thus spirit is the light of the ancestors, it is also the light active within people as virtue, it is the pure energy of yang, the force of heaven and the sun. The personal light of inner vision is thus the same as the light of the ancestral spirits, it is one with the yang energy of the cosmos. The more these different aspects of the light of the universe radiate in harmony, the stronger they become. The more the adept of Taoism strengthens his inner light the more he is bound to become one with the Tao. Thus the description of higher stages of Taoist realization abound in light imagery. It is said that the practitioner of Taoist cultivation will begin to “radiate a heavenly light” (*zhao tianguang* 照天光; *Zhuangzi* 23; *Zuowanglun* 12a).

The radiance of the light of heaven, of the spirit within human beings is compared to the light that is brought forth from a lamp. As the *Neiguan jing* 內觀經 (“Scripture on Inner Observation,” DZ 641, 5b) describes it:

Light arises from fire, fire arises from burning. Burning in turn arises because of the oil, and the oil needs the wick and the body of the lamp to be contained . . . The same pattern holds true for spirit radiating through the fate of people. Spirit is only present when it rests in the mind. The mind exists only within the body, and the body is only complete through the Tao. Thus we say that spirit is like a light.

The light of the spirit is outwardly visible in the eyes, thus the examination of the eyes reveals more of a person’s inner character than the bones or the complexion. Spirited eyes, as Chen Tuan has it, are fascinating or aweinspiring (section 7); unsteady eyes reveal a failure in society or even a criminal (section 14). The eyes are the direct link to the mind of the individual—a notion emphasized again and again in Taoist texts as well (cf. Wu Yun’s 吳筠 *Xinmulun* 心目論 (“On Mind and Eyes,” DZ 1038). When human beings are in harmony with the spirit, when the mind is at peace, they will radiate the qualities of heaven, purity,

joy, and brilliance, through the eyes. The analysis of a person's glance, of his or her vision in life, is thus the deepest and most important part of the physiognomist's task.

But whereas the professional physiognomist goes to the very depth of a person's being, ordinary people—criticized again and again in the *Mirror of Auras*—know only popular prejudices (some of which might even be shared by the specialist). They rely on an easy typology which can be summarized by the statement that all nicely rounded forms are auspicious and reveal good characters, while all sharp and pointed shapes are indications of an evil disposition and therefore unlucky.

For the Western student of Chinese thought, value judgments of the early Song period are revealed in such criticism or repetition of popular judgments. Adam's apple and prominent teeth are inauspicious signs, thin people cannot be trusted: they boast and cheat, maltreat their kin and take advantage of others. Women—who always merit special attention in the physiognomists' textbooks and with whom many of the common signs take on an entirely different significance—should not look like men or behave as such. They should not assert themselves, but remain in the background.

All in all, the system of physiognomy presented in the *Mirror of Auras* of the early Song is quite comprehensive and provides some insight into the logic of physiognomic analysis as conceived by the Chinese themselves. Of course, the system is only one of many, the understanding of the basic constituents energy, essence, and spirit and the interpretation of their respective appearances in human beings vary greatly from text to text, even though from Song times onwards all texts follow the same basic schema. Chen Tuan's conceptions are deeply rooted in the Chinese tradition, they tally frequently with the notions expressed in the texts of organized Taoism. He does not limit the factors of mundane success and longevity to the physical indicators of physiognomy, but—as becomes a Taoist saint—allows for the influence of spirit and the power of humans to rise above themselves.

TRANSLATION AND TEXT

Mirror of Auras

The following translation renders the prose version of the *Mirror of Auras* as found in the *Yuguan zhaoshen ju* 1.4b-9b. The annotation provides variant readings of the version in verse, found both in the *Tai-ying shenjian* 1.5b-8a and in the *Shenxian quanbian* ch. 6, Liang 1980, 179–

陳搏先生風鑑

人之生也受氣於水稟形於火水則爲精爲志火則爲
 神爲心精合而後神生神生而後形全形全而後色具
 是知顯于外者謂之形生於心者謂之神在於血肉者
 謂之氣在於皮膚者謂之色形之在人²有金木水火土
 之象有飛禽走獸之倫金不嫌方木不嫌瘦水不嫌肥
 火不嫌尖土不嫌濁似金得金剛毅深似木得木資財

181. The two latter texts are abbreviated TQ and SX respectively and cited with their corresponding page numbers. Passages found in the variant versions that supply additional information to the basic text have been included in the translation proper. They are marked off by parentheses { }.

While the older prose version contains about 1700 characters, the two more recent editions in verse are made up of about two hundred lines of seven characters each, i.e., of about 1400 characters altogether. The two later editions give largely the same text, but differ considerably

from the earlier *Yuguan* text. Though many sections are identical in contents, phrasing frequently varies and the same or similar ideas may be found in different sections of the text.

Section numeration and headings are my own; parallel structures of the text have been imitated as closely as possible.

1. *Definitions of main terms.*

Human life receives energy (*qi* 氣) from water (*shui* 水) and is endowed with physical form (*xing* 形) by fire (*huo* 火).¹¹

In people, water is the essence (*jing* 精) and also the will (*zhi* 志); fire is the spirit (*shen* 神) and also the mind (*xin* 心).

When essence is harmonized, spirit is brought forth.

When spirit is brought forth, physical form is complete.

When physical form is complete, complexion (*se* 色) will be whole.¹²

Thus we know that

what is apparent on the outside is called physical form;

what is arising in the mind is called spirit;

what is found in blood and flesh is called energy;

what is evident on the skin is called complexion.

2. *Physical appearance according to the five phases.*

Physical form in human beings follows the different images of metal, wood, water, fire, or earth; it can also be compared to that of birds and beasts.

Metal appearance tends to be angular (*fang* 方);

wood appearance tends to be slim (*shou* 瘦);

water appearance tends to be fat (*ba* 肥);

fire appearance tends to be pointed (*jian* 尖);

earth appearance tends to be coarse (*zhuo* 濁).¹³

Resembling metal and realizing metal: this person has deep resolution.

Resembling wood and realizing wood: this person will be rich in material goods.

Resembling water and realizing water: this person will excel in literature.

Resembling fire and realizing fire: this person will be a great warrior.

Resembling earth and realizing earth: this person will have many a storehouse.¹⁴

{Resembling metal but not realizing metal: this person will meet with sufferings and grieve.

Resembling wood but not realizing wood: this person will be orphaned and lonely.

庫似禽者不嫌瘦似獸者不嫌肥禽肥則不飛獸瘦則
 少力如鸞鳳之形則眉聳目秀與夫形體清瘦如犀鹿
 之象則頭角高聳與夫頤腮豐滿如此之類皆貴矣又
 此者皆賤矣形之在人木形本瘦其色青瘦則不露青
 則不浮青瘦則細而實露浮則蠢而虛世之論木者但
 知其瘦取形不知其有蠢如松柏之木其本以實其葉
 愈青謂之細實至如梧桐之木其內本虛其外不牢謂

Resembling water but not realizing water: this person will suffer frequent defeat.

Resembling fire but not realizing fire: this person will encounter disasters and misfortunes.

Resembling earth and not realizing earth: this person will feel unhappy and miserable. SX 179, TQ 6a.}

3. *Types of bodies according to animal morphology.*

Those resembling birds are usually slim.

Those resembling beasts are usually stout.

A fat bird cannot fly, a thin beast has no strength. For example, one who resembles the form of the *luan* 鸛 or the phoenix has highly curved eyebrows and elegant eyes. His form and bodily structure (*ti* 體) will be clear and slim.

One who resembles the rhinoceros or the tiger has highrising bones of the forehead. His chin and cheeks are round and full.

These types are noble, those of opposite characteristics are low.

{Birds and beasts are many a kind,
Never should one group a bird with a beast.
All slim and long types belong to birds;
All fat and short types belong to beasts.
Those like birds would rather be slim,
For those like beasts it's best to be fat.
If birds are fat they'll never fly,
If beasts were thin, how would they run?
For people like tigers see their necks;
For people like rhinos check their backs;
Phoenix-people have long eyes;
Those like cranes have pointed shapes. SX 180, TQ 8a}¹⁵

4. *The appearance of the wood-type.*

A person with the appearance of wood is basically slim. His complexion is fresh (*qing* 青). He should be slim but not skinny and look fresh but not transparent.¹⁶

If his physical form is slim and his complexion fresh, he is delicate and full. If his physical form is skinny and his complexion transparent, he is coarse and empty.

When people of the world speak of the appearance of the wood-type, they only know that it should show as slimness in one's physical form. They do not realize that it could yet be coarse as, for instance, in the case of the pine-tree or the cypress.

A tree is considered delicate when its stem is full and its leaves are fresh. Perfect fullness is found in the *wutong* 梧桐 tree (*sterculia platanifolia*). When the stem is empty on the inside and the outside correspondingly is lacking in firmness, we say the tree is coarse. Empty inside and yet having the physical form of a tree, how can one say it is one integrated whole?

5. *Impure or mixed types.*

When a wood-type is not entirely pure, it tends to encompass (*dai* 帶) metal, but it will also contain fire, water, and earth.

When a water-type is not entirely pure, it tends to encompass earth,

之龕虛然取木之形安可一概而論哉木之形非在其
 一有帶金者有帶水火土者水之形非在其一有帶土
 者有帶金火木者火之形非在其一有帶水者有帶金
 土木者土之形非在其一有帶木者有帶水火金者帶
 其相生則吉帶其相尅則凶如人之始則瘦此木之形
 也中則龕是金形也次而肥是水形也其次厚實是土
 形也始瘦次肥爲水生於木次又厚實此木之得土也
 始若瘦次龕爲滯也始瘦次肥厚此爲發也庶人進財

but it will also contain metal, fire, and wood.

When a fire-type is not entirely pure, it tends to encompass water, but it will also contain metal, earth, and wood.

When an earth-type is not entirely pure, it tends to encompass wood, but it will also contain water, fire, and metal.

6. *Mixtures according to the dynamics of phases.*

When the major phases that make up man's physical form bring forth one another the combination is auspicious. When they overcome

one another it is unlucky.¹⁷

For instance, a person's physical form may at first look slim, i.e., he is a wood-type. Around the middle, however, he is coarser and appears more like the metal-type. Again, he may then look fat, i.e., resemble the water-type. Or he may look really stout as is typical for an earth-type. First slim, then fat means that water is brought forth from wood. When, in addition, he looks solid and stout we have wood realizing earth.

The first instance going from slim to coarse is an obstruction (*zhi* 滯); the second case going from slim to fat or stout is a development (*fa* 發).

As concerns official position and personal wealth, a wood-type slightly obstructed by earth might become a district overseer. But if the obstruction is deep he will be a prefect.

Again, if the face is square and the back stout, we say that there is both wood and earth. Someone with such an appearance entering an official career will be an overseer of troops, when in the military, and an official waiting for appointment, when in the civil service.¹⁸ Yet, if he was pure wood without any earth he would attain the highest possible rank.

7. *Spirit as deep or shallow.*

Within human beings it is desirable for spirit to be deep and not desirable for spirit to be shallow.¹⁹

When spirit is deep, wisdom (*zhi* 智) will also be deep.

When spirit is shallow, wisdom will also be shallow.

When spirit functions, it radiates through the eyes.

When spirit rests, it is gathered in the mind/heart.

Looking at spirited eyes closely, one is fascinated. Looking at spirited eyes from afar, one is awed.²⁰ One with such eyes has a very powerful glance and is easily alerted when asleep. One can compare such eyes to a big lamp. Just as one calls the acting part (*fen* 分) of the mind "spirit" so one calls the flame of the lamp "spirit light." People's light, limited within, is the material soul. The oil corresponds to the essence. When the oil is pure the lamp is bright. This is what we mean by "shining forth."²¹

8. *Energy as pure or turbid.*

Energy in people should manifest in strong resonance and clear expression, it should not be of robust vigor and sound like a martial yell.

When one is at peace within, the will is sincere.

When one is relaxed without, the energy is in harmony.

官員加職木滯土淺爲知縣土深爲郡守又或面方背
 厚此爲有木有土則作職司或武則止於列職之官文
 則止於選人是木無土也其在職司之上神之在人欲
 其深不欲其淺神深則智深神淺則智淺用則開於眼
 合則收於心近觀則有媚遠觀則有威其瞻視有力其
 睡臥易醒譬如燈之大其心之分則謂之神其燈之花
 則謂之神光其四畔之光則謂之魄油乃精也油清而
 後燈明此謂之著也氣之在人要其堅雪清韻而不在

There are those whose energy is pure (*qing* 清).

There are those whose energy is turbid (*shuo* 濁).

There are those whose energy is turbid in purity.

There are those whose energy is pure in turbidity.²²

Speaking now of the energy of people in the regions of the Zhe 浙 or the Huai 淮 we find that the energy of the Zhe people is heavy but not bright, whereas that of the Huai people is bright but not heavy. The energy of southern people is clear, but not thick, that of northern people is thick, but not clear.²³

{A Southerner who looks like he is from the north (big and fat and very dark) will be wealthy and noble.

A Northerner who looks as if he stems from the south (slim and light and very sharp) will excel in many ways. SX 180, TQ 7a.}

When yang energy expands, the mountains and rivers are beautiful and luxuriant. When the sun or the moon rise, heaven and earth are bathed in light. This is the evidence of energy.

9. *Complexion as full or transparent.*

Complexion in man—though only found on the skin—should be full, and not transparent. It should be intense and not scattered. Complexion is brought forth from within and without the five orbs. It adorns the whole body with radiance and smoothness.²⁴

Mistress Tang Ju 唐舉 says:²⁵

“Anything less than direct sunlight appears as color or complexion. When man participates in the light he reveals joy on the outside of his physical body. When he loses it, depression settles in his mind.”

10. *Complexion as young or old.*

There is old (*lao* 老) and young (*nen* 嫩) complexion. ‘Young’ is used to refer to a complexion inappropriate to a person’s age.²⁶ Thus in complexion, ‘old’ is auspicious, ‘young’ is inauspicious.

However, within the methods of physiognomy there are other ways to evaluate complexion. Besides the obstruction of complexion called ‘young’ there are also three kinds of radiance and five sorts of glossiness of the skin. There are moreover three types of dullness and five kinds of dryness.²⁷

11. *Physical form and spirit in terms of surplus and deficiency.*²⁸

Among the combinations of physical form and spirit, there are too much form and insufficient spirit, and too much spirit and insufficient form. In the first case, the person at first sight seems awe-inspiring, but upon longer examination appears rather dull. In the second case, the person at first appears rather dull, but the longer one examines him the more radiant he seems to become.²⁹

When someone has a surplus of both, physical form and spirit, one feels delighted at his sight, whether he is one’s acquaintance or not. When, on the other hand, someone has an insufficiency of both, one need not ask any further: he will be universally disliked.

12. *Interaction patterns of the various constituents*

Physical form and spirit should radiate in mutual harmony. En-

乎剛健強鳴其內平則志篤其外舒則氣和有清焉有
 濁焉有清中之濁有濁中之清若此浙人淮人之氣論
 之浙人之氣重而不明淮人之氣明而不重南人之氣
 清而不厚北人之氣厚而不清陽氣舒而山川秀茂日
 月出而天地光明此氣之著也。色之在人雖在皮膚之
 上要其實不要其浮欲其聚不欲其散生於五臟之表
 裏飾於一身之光潤唐舉先生曰日光不足爲之色人
 之有得則喜形於外有失則憂存於心。有老焉有嫩焉

ergy and complexion should support each other.³⁰

When spirit is whole, physical form is also whole.

When energy is full, complexion is also full.

Spirit can make energy stay, but energy cannot make spirit stay.

Energy can make complexion stay, but complexion cannot make energy stay.³¹

Physical form, finally, only supports the other forces.

It may be stout, it may be thin.

Stout is auspicious, thin is unlucky.

嫩者謂年紀深而帶後生之色色老者吉色嫩者凶然
 相法之中不唯其色之如此者滯凡形嫩者亦如之有
 三光焉有五澤焉有三暗焉有五枯焉¹¹形神者有形有
 餘而神不足者有神有餘而形不足者形有餘而神不
 足者初見似威久視而晦神有餘而形不足者初見似
 晦久視愈明神形俱有餘者識與不識見而悅之神形
 不足者不必更問令人可惡¹²形與神相照氣與色相扶
 神全則形全氣全則色全神能留氣氣不能留神氣能

13. *Thin appearance.*

Among the people of the world one often meets some who easily get their will. They initially attain all that they desire without any problems. But then they encounter some obstacle in their course and in the end they die prematurely. This is because their judgment is superficial and narrow-minded and they can never bear things out in patience.

Thin walls easily collapse;
thin wine easily turns sour;

留色色不能留氣至於形則載之而已有厚焉有薄焉
 厚者吉薄者凶。世人有遭時得志者其始皆欲有爲也
 及其中則滯末則卒皆由度量淺狹不能容載也。牆薄
 則易頽酒薄則易酸紙薄則易裂人薄則易亡水土薄
 則不足以致陰雲之附不度己短專談人過侵削人物
 以爲己惠面前說是背後說非不睦親長却奉外人性
 本輕率佯爲沉重改常棄舊忘恩忽人未貴先盈未富
 先驕未學先滿此大薄矣若此者不唯破相又損其壽

thin paper easily tears;

thin people easily die.

When water and earth are thin, they are not strong enough to support the rain-bringing clouds.

Thin people do not account for their own shortcomings and only talk about the bad characteristics of others. They gradually encroach on others, using them for their own advantage. They say "right" to one's face, but "wrong" behind one's back. They are unkind to their kin and their elders, but serve strangers with great enthusiasm. Their

character is fundamentally frivolous and arbitrary, but they make it look profound and sincere. They change traditions and do away with the old. They don't know kindness and are indifferent to others. Not yet noble, they already give themselves airs. Not even rich, they already parade their pride. Not even graduate, they yet boast of their attainments. This is the typical behavior of the very thin type.

Types like this not only have a disastrous physique, but they also tend to have shortened life-spans. Worse than that, they pass their misfortune on to their children and grandchildren.

14. *Signs of long life.*

However, the physiognomy of long life is not found in an imposing and powerful physical appearance. Rather, one sees it in the eyes. When the pupils move nervously early death is indicated. People with an imposing and powerful appearance, if and when they are magnanimous and goodnatured, are good examples for the mutual support of physical form and energy. But if they are narrow-minded and prejudiced in their judgments, we say that the mind is not in proper accordance.

Common folk usually only know that signs of longevity are hair growing above the eyebrows and inside the ears. They have heard that it shows a ripe old age when the bone of the forehead goes as far as the ear, when the nose is straight and long, and when the proportions of the face are even and clear. But they don't realize how these things come about.³²

Actually, the bones are nothing but essence and energy solidified within. Only when essence and marrow penetrate to the outside does hair grow above the eyebrows and inside the ears. Only then are the proportions even and clear, and only then can the nose be really straight and long. One can compare this phenomenon to a tree. Its trunk must be strong and solid before any branches or leaves can sprout forth on its surface. It is also comparable to a lamp. A lamp only shines bright when it contains plenty of oil. Similarly the human body is only at peace when it contains sufficient essence.

As Mistress Tang says:

“Everybody knows that tiger's bones and dragon's pupils are auspicious. Everybody knows that an Adam's apple and prominent teeth are unlucky. But the auspicious may not always mean good luck and the unlucky may not always indicate misfortune.”

15. *The importance of the mind.*

Though Adam's apple and prominent teeth are indicators of a point-

殃及子孫³⁴然壽之相非在乎形貌恢偉眼目浮凹便言
 矣矣形貌恢偉之人若有時情寬性厚此謂之形氣相
 附也若度量偏窄此謂心不稱也世之人惟知其眉上
 兼耳內生毛多壽骨入耳兼人中深長法令分明便言
 有壽然不知其有所稟也此蓋精氣內實其骨乃從精
 髓而透出然後毫毛方始生於眉耳法令方始分明人
 中方始得深長如樹之根本牢實上面方始發生枝葉
 似油盛燈明精足則身安唐先生曰虎骨龍睛世人皆

ed physique,³³ yet sometimes there is some auspicious factor in the mind. A person like this might actually be found in a noble position. He will then, however, only think of his personal advantage and have no consideration for his wife and children. So we have quite a number of noble people who belong among the type of threefold pointedness and five-fold prominence.³⁴

If only their spirit and energy is profound and pure, they can yet be accepted.³⁵ People whose spirit and energy is profound and pure are at peace in their bodies and tranquil within themselves. They do

知其吉結喉露齒世人皆知其凶然而吉者未必爲吉
 凶者未必爲凶¹⁵結喉露齒雖則劣相有時心地吉者又
 貴矣但利其身不利妻子如三尖五露之人貴者多矣
 但其神氣深粹皆可取也神氣深粹之人形安體靜不
 隨語行不隨嘿止不隨色動不隨色轉安而定詳而雅
 如此之人皆知分也今之人享富貴而心不足不快者
 多矣其神氣安靜之人心地空閑而所爲放心¹⁶然形氣
 色之於人有滯者多矣形滯八年則塵埃神滯四年則

not go because someone says so, they do not stop because someone keeps silent. They do not become agitated because of sexual attraction, nor do they turn away because of it. They are stable and at peace, careful and polite. People like this always know their limits.

Most people these days are very fond of wealth and high position, but they are never content at heart. There are so many who are not happy at all. Yet those whose spirit and energy are at peace and tranquil are usually unconcerned and relaxed in their minds. That is what we call "freedom at heart."³⁶

16. *Obstruction.*

However, there are many whose physical form, energy, and complexion suffer from obstruction. When physical form is obstructed for eight years, it is completely defiled. When spirit is obstructed for four years, one's personality becomes inflexible and obstinate. When energy is obstructed for three years, the mind suffers a break-down. When complexion is obstructed for one year, the spirit is exhausted and worn out.

{When form is obstructed, the walk will be heavy;
when spirit is obstructed, the body will be vulnerable;
when energy is obstructed, the voice will be harsh;
when complexion is obstructed, the face will be swarthy. SX 180, TQ 8a.}

17. *Yin and Yang.*

There is *yin* and *yang* involved in this process. *Yang* cannot encompass *yin*, and *yin* cannot encompass *yang*. For example, if a man has a female physique, he is weak and cannot maintain his position. If a woman shows male features, she is dominant and will not find a husband.

Women should be soft and obedient; men should be strong and upright. The wife of an honest citizen should have authority and not be seductive. A winehouse girl should be very seductive and not show any authority.³⁷

But ordinary people usually only examine the faces of others and never go to the roots of their appearance.³⁸

18. *Noble and humble.*

Let us now look at the bones protruding above the eyebrows, the nose and the jaws. Everyone equally has them. In noble persons these bones have grown directly from essence and marrow, thus they are fine and elegant. In lowly and poor people, on the other hand, these bones are rather floating on the surface and thus appear very coarse. Therefore the cheekbone in common people goes as far as the ears. If it does not go any further than that, it indicates long life. If it goes neither beyond nor stands out visibly, it shows future wealth.

In people who will become overseers, these bones go only as far as the whiskers. In those who will serve in a prefecture, they go as far as the temples. In those who will be Grand Prefects, they appear like rounded mounds and end at the corner of the eyes.³⁹

The lower jawbone indicates the possession of storehouses and slaves. One whose lower portion of the face is well developed and

身硬氣滯三年則心傾色滯一年則神困有陰有陽焉
 陽者不可帶陰陰者不可帶陽若男帶女相懦而無立
 女懷男相主失其夫婦人要柔而順男子要剛而正良
 人之婦有威而少媚娼家之婦有媚而少威然世之相
 者但觀其面部之多而不究其相本如骨者凡人於眉
 鼻兩頰之上皆有也在貴人則有從精髓內生出故其
 骨乃秀而細及貧賤之人則浮於上而麓如顴骨上一
 位庶人入耳不過有壽不露不過有富至若作監司之

strong will have granaries, servants and slaves. If the lower portion is undeveloped, however, he will not even have a proper residence for himself. How could he have slaves to drive and granaries to fill?

Who sees far will have far-reaching wisdom.

Who sees high will have high-reaching wisdom.⁴⁰

Who sees low will have low-reaching wisdom.

Who sees slanted will have poisoned wisdom.

One whose pupils keep revolving unsteadily will kill others.⁴¹

One who wavers in his glance, is drawn above and below, will never be

人生入兩鬢兩府之人則生入天倉其作太守之人則
 堆成峯而入兩眼之尾而已至下輔主倉庫奴婢若其
 地閣濶厚自有倉庫奴婢設使地閣缺陷是無宅可居
 安有奴婢之驅兼倉庫哉視遠智遠視高智高視下智
 下視斜智毒睛屢轉者殺人或流視迫上迫下此瞻視
 不常之人不可共立事矣有天者貴有地者富有人者
 壽有天有地人事不修是徒有相也

solidly established in anything.

Those who have strong parts of heaven (forehead) are noble.

Those who have strong parts of earth (chin) are wealthy.

Those who have strong parts of humanity (nose) are long-lived.

But anyone who has strongly developed parts of heaven and earth, yet in dealing with the world does not cultivate himself, will waste his auspicious looks.

NOTES

1. This story is told in Yuan Tiangang's biography in *Jiu Tangshu* 舊唐書 biogr. 61, p. 5093 of the Beijing: Jinghua edition. It is also found in *Xin Tangshu* 新唐書 biogr. 95, p. 5801; *Taiping guangji* 太平廣記 ch. 221, p. 1694; as well as in *Tushu jicheng* 624. Mention of the story is also made in Fitzgerald 1955: prologue.

2. The analysis of complexion is closely connected with diagnostics in Chinese medicine (cf. *Huangdi neijing suwen* 黃帝內經素問 ch. 5 on the "Interaction of Yin and Yang"). The various colors of man's face were also used as indicators for possession in Taoist exorcism. For a detailed discussion of their use in physiognomy see Hou 1979.

3. Physiognomic texts dating prior to the tenth century tend to represent only parts of later integrated methods. The manuals found in Dunhuang 敦煌, e.g., can generally be considered forerunners of modern standard physiognomy, but some of them are still written in a quite different cultural atmosphere, i.e., under less restrictions regarding physical exposure. Another early text on physiognomy, the *Yuebodong zhongji* 月波洞中記, has a much stronger and more explicit connection to the Taoist tradition than later works. Also, some systems it presents are entirely different from the later standard methods (Kohn 1986).

4. Chen Tuan was born in Henan 河南 toward the end of the ninth century. From an early age he turned to the Tao which he studied first on Mount Wudang 武當山 in Hunan and later in Sichuan 四川. He settled on Mount Hua in the first half of the tenth century. Summoned to the throne several times, in 956, 976, and 984, he was famous for his *Yijing* 易經 exegesis, which supposedly influenced Zhou Dunyi's 周敦頤 *Taiji tu* 太極圖, as well as for his exceptional mastery of Taoist meditation and, last not least, for his skill in prognostication. For more information on his life and legend see Knaul 1981.

5. This story is discussed in Knaul 1981, 64. It is found in Chen Tuan's biography in Zhao Daoyi's 趙道一 *Lishi zhenxian tidao tongjian* 歷世真仙體道通鑑 of the early Yuan 元 dynasty: 47.6b; in Zhang Lu's 張輅 *Taihua xiyi zhi* 太華希夷志 of the year 1314: 2.1ab; in the *Songshi jishi* 宋史紀事 5.23b; and in the *Xiangshan yelu* 湘山野錄 as quoted in *Tushu jicheng* 62.454.

6. Wang Shize passed the *jinshi* 進士 examination under the reign of Taizong (976-984). His official biography is recorded in *Songshi* 488. The story connecting him with Chen Tuan is found in *Lishi zhenxian tidao tongjian* 47.7b; *Taihua xiyi zhi* 2.3a and *Mianshui yantan lu* 濯水燕談錄 1.1b.

7. See Knaul 1981, 114. The most detailed version of this story is found in the *Xu Xiangshan yelu* as quoted in *Tushu jicheng* 62.454; shorter variants are given in *Lishi zhenxian tidao tongjian* 47.6a, *Taihua xiyi zhi* 1.2a; *Liexian quanzhuan* 列仙全傳 247; *Xuanpin lu* 玄品錄 5.11a; *Sandong qunxian lu* 三洞群仙錄 20.1b.

8. See Knaul 1981, 121. The original text is contained in *Dongxuan bilu* 東軒筆錄 3.1a. In an abbreviated version the story is also mentioned in *Fozu tongji* 佛祖統紀 43.401; *Xuanpin lu* 5.11b; *Dongdu shilue* 東都事略 118.1b; *Wenjian qianlu* 聞見前錄 7.11a; *Guier ji* 貴耳記 30.

9. *Shenxiang quanbian* 8; Liang 1980, 230. Wang Kezheng is mentioned in ch. 250 of the *Songshi* as one of the more distant relatives of Wang Shenqi 王審琦. Chen Jingong could not be identified.

10. Knaul 1981, 77; Qian Ruoshui passed the official examination around the year 980, later he served as a minister in the government. He is the author of the

Taizong huangdi shilu 太宗皇帝實錄 (*Songshi* 266). The story is told in *Fozu tongji* 43, 369; *Taihua xiayi zhi* 2,1b-2b; *Guier ji* 29; *Wenjian qianlu* 7,11a. Mayi daoze is cited as Chen Tuan's teacher in other stories as well. He supposedly received his teaching from the famous Lü Dongbin 呂洞賓, patriarch of inner alchemy and various Taoist techniques since the Song as well as of the Quanzhen 全真 school of Taoism. Like Chen Tuan, Mayi is known for his physiognomic talents as well as for his *Yijing* speculation. A text allegedly going back to him is found in the *Jindai bishu* 津逮秘書, the *Mayi daoze zhengyi xinfa* 麻衣道者正易心法. This work consists of forty-two poems of 4×4 characters. They deal with a type of *Yijing* exegesis which links physiognomy with the trigrams and the hexagrams. In the Song dynasty, this is especially found in Shao Yong's 邵雍 *Huangji jingshi* 皇極經世.

11. The variant version (SX 178, TQ 5b) reads: "Human life is endowed with essence (SX: energy) and spirit."

12. This section is found in the variant edition, too, but here essence is located in the kidneys. The text then continues (SX 178, TQ 5b): "Thus we know that complexion arises from physical form while energy appears through the sound and voice."

13. The same categories are found in the variant version, but only after the first quarter of the text (SX 179, TQ 6a). The passage is also quoted as from the *Mirror of Auras* in the commentary part of SX 1; Liang 1980, 21. The five phases are the most important foundation of physiognomy and many different categorizations are based on them. See, e.g., SX 4; Liang 1980, 116.

14. This is also found in the other version (SX 179, TQ 6a) with minor changes. For *bingji da* 兵機大 it reads *weiwu da* 威武大.

15. The latter part of this passage runs in the SX variant:

"For tigers see the jaws,
for rhinos check the horn.
For phoenixes the eyes;
and for cranes the body's form."

The "horn" that likens a person to a rhinoceros is the vertical bone in the center of the forehead (TQ 1,16a). Further details in the description of these types are found: Tiger—SX 9, p. 261; *Yuguan* 3.3b-41. Rhinoceros—SX 9, p. 270; *Yuguan* 3.4b-5a. Phoenix—SX 9, p. 266; Lessa 1968, 35. Crane—SX 9, p. 266.

16. Although not found in the later variants, this description is yet quoted under the name of Chen Tunan 陳圖南 (Tunan being Chen Tuan's agnomen) in the commentary of ch. 1 of the SX (Liang 1980, 15). Here it forms part of a list including all the five phases: "A metal body is angular and upright, its complexion is pale and whitish. It shows neither fullness of flesh nor thinness of bones. A wood body is slim and erect, its bones and joints are strong. With fresh (greenish) complexion such a one is truly eminent. A water body is round and thickset, heavy and of darkish complexion. With a hanging belly and a curved-in back he is truly of *po* 魄 energy. A fire body is exquisite and sharp; it looks reddish and always hot. The *fan* bone standing out, all energy dried up, such a one is never well for long. An earth body is staunch and well formed with a radiant (yellowish) complexion. With buttocks and back standing out a tranquil and happy character is found."

17. These two sentences are also found in SX 179. In addition, the subsequent section is given in SX 179 and TQ 6b, if somewhat abbreviated. Here the text runs (commentary sections are included in parentheses): "If a body (of the wood-type) is primarily slim and only later fat, this is most auspicious (i.e., water produces wood). If, on the other hand, a body is primarily slim and later dried and emaciated, then

wood is obstructed by metal and many calamities will arise." Whereas the older edition limits the discussion of the dynamics of the phases to the case of the wood-type, the more recent versions go on to delineate possible developments of the metal-type: "Similarly if a body is basically angular and upright, yet shows signs of being staunch and erect, this is most appropriate. Yet when an angular type develops pointed features and leanness, metal is obstructed by fire and many misfortunes will result."

18. According to the variants (SX 180, TQ 7b), someone with a square face and a stout back would look "vulgar and ordinary and his back would not be erect."

19. Here the variants state that a strong spirit will be obvious in strong and clear bones, whereas a shallow spirit will make the bones look like they were sticking out (SX 179, TQ 7b).

20. This is also found in SX 179, TQ 6b and continued with: "Looking at them for a long time one will find the first dark traces in their brightness."

21. The comparison of spirit or essence in man to the oil in the lamp is mentioned again later (section 14). The variant version reads (SX 178, TQ 5b): "Spirit and energy are like the oil, people are like the lamp. When spirit (SX: the person) is tranquil, essence (SX: spirit) is full. When the oil is clear, the lamp will shine bright. At night it rests in the mind in complete quiet. During the day it sparkles through the eyes." Not limited to physiognomic literature, the metaphor of the lamp is quite common in Taoist mystical texts.

22. The variants cite this passage directly after what is section 9 in the older edition (SX 178; TQ 5b-6a): "Sometimes it is turbid in purity; sometimes it is pure in turbidity." Following the image of the lamp and the oil, reference here is made to an occasional phenomenon rather than to a specific type.

23. The typology of people according to their country of origin is already found in the *Huainanzi* 淮南子, ch. 4: "All regions bring forth particular types. An area with mountainous energy has more men, one with marshy energy more women. Places in which energy is obstructed have more dumb people, those with lots of wind more deaf. Forest-type energy is responsible for an abundance of people with heart diseases, and hunchbacks are frequently found in regions where trees are standing alone. On the riverbanks one often finds men suffering from swellings, whereas one is more likely to encounter strong men in places full of strong energy. A constantly rising and falling energy brings forth plenty of goitres. Heat can be said to cause people's early death, while colder climates make for longer lives. The energy of valleys causes rheumatism, that of hills, madness. In places with fertile breath people tend to be rather compassionate, while those who come from areas with deteriorated energy are rather avaricious . . ."

In this early reference the connection between medical diagnosis, physical appearance and climate is already quite obvious. The *Huainanzi* also gives a clear definition of southern, northern, eastern and western types, categories frequently referred to in physiognomic literature. On the southern type, for instance, it says: "The south is where yang energy accumulates, it is hot and humid. People there are tall, slightly thinner in the upper parts of the body, and have big mouths and sharp corners of the eyes. Their major sense is hearing. The ears are related to blood and the pulse. Their complexion is reddish, red is the color of the heart. Such men are strong while still young, yet they tend to die at a rather early age." A person from the northern part of the world is described as "usually thickset with short neck, big shoulders and low buttocks. His or her major sense is the yin-feeling to which the bones are related. The complexion is darkish, the color black is related to the kidneys. Such a person is simple and dull, but lives very long."

24. The variants here have (SX 180, TQ 7b): “Energy and complexion should be in harmony, because complexion shows on the skin when there is energy in the blood. It comes to the surface like a silk thread spun in a cocoon, it leaves again like a horse-tail suddenly vanishing.”

25. Tang Ju, originally from the state of Liang, was one of the most famous physiognomists under the Han. She lived in the third century B.C. and is reported to have made a prediction for Li Si 李斯, prime minister to the first emperor of China, Qin Shihuang 秦始皇. “Within a hundred days you will obtain the power of the empire.” (*Shiji* 史記 79, *Qianfu lun* 潛夫論 27). Tang Ju is also mentioned in Xunzi’s 荀子 *Feixiang pian* 非相篇. None of her works survive or are mentioned in the dynastic histories. The *Shenxiang quanbian* quotes two titles as well as various shorter sections in her name (Kohn 1986, 233).

26. The variant found in SX 179, TQ 6a reads: “An old person with a young complexion will decline rapidly.” TQ 6b has: “. . . his star of long life will soon set.” These versions emphasize also in a more general way that “old people should not look like youngsters. Yet, it is quite auspicious for a young person to look older.”

27. The analysis of complexion as described in the final chapters of the SX does not proceed according to any of the categories mentioned here. The standard categories are rather the five phases, the four seasons, and the months of the year. Some insight into the theoretical worldview regarding complexion can, however, be gained from ch. 11 of the SX (Liang 1980, 310) which quotes Chen Tuan as follows: “A complexion without radiance cannot properly be called complexion. Rather, it is an ‘empty complexion.’ Calamities and joys are not yet developed, yet no one can avoid them. So first check complexion according to the the major types of resting (*xiu* 休), withheld (*qin* 囚), dead (*si* 死), or prospering (*wang* 旺). Then go on to analyze all the different positions according to good (*ji* 吉) or bad (*xiong* 凶) fortune, good (*shan* 善) and evil (*o* 惡) attitude. They can be clearly told, you will not be wrong even once in ten thousand times. The sky itself will show you the proper complexion in the clouds and the mists. People’s lives and bodies are as predestined as heaven and earth themselves. Whatever energy an individual receives it will move and change. Whatever complexion arises thus will have a definite structure.”

28. These categories have been taken up independently by the TQ where we find sections on the surplus and insufficiency of spirit (3.4ab) as well as on the surplus and insufficiency of physical form (4.3ab). The text has then found its way into the SX 1 (Liang 1980, 42).

29. This is also found in SX 180, TQ 7b.

30. SX 180 states that “energy and complexion should be in harmony, because complexion shows on the skin where energy is in the blood.”

31. In the later editions (SX 178, TQ 5b) the interaction of the different forces is described in the very beginning of the text: “After spirit has arisen, energy is complete. After physical form has been completed, complexion will arise. Thus we know that complexion arises from spirit. It makes it visible. The power of energy can be judged from the sound of the voice. Examining physical form is not as good as analyzing the bones, but the bones provide as much information as the spirit itself. Still better than examining spirit, look at energy. When spirit is in harmony with energy, it blossoms like spring.”

32. SX 180 states: “You should know that appearance comes from heaven. Whatever I look like, it’s not mere polish on the surface.”

33. These signs are mentioned in TQ 7b as indicating trouble with one’s family.

34. SX 181, TQ 7a state that these signs are very unlucky.

35. This is also mentioned in SX 180, but not in the TQ.
36. The variants (SX 181, TQ 7a) do not grant man such freedom from circumstance. Rather they state: "Talking of physiognomy without regarding the mind is like looking at the affairs of man with disrespect to the rhythm of heaven. Just as heaven's rhythm and the affairs of man go together, so the physique will reflect the mind in its true form."
37. The later versions (SX 179, TQ 6a) give the following variant: "A man should not have female features, a woman should not look like a man. *Yin* and *yang* are opposites—combined wrongly they will reduce one's life. Husband and wife belong to different types—women should be soft and obedient, men should be strong and firm. Women are *yin*, thus basically quiet. To laugh without being spoken to first does not become them. An honest wife should be strong and not seductive, while a winehouse girl needs qualities of seduction and not of authority."
38. This complaint is also voiced in SX 180, TQ 8a.
39. The same evaluation is also found in SX 179, TQ 7a.
40. SX 180, TQ 7a have: "One who sees far will have far-reaching ambition, one who sees high will have a strong will."
41. SX 180 describes the criminal type as one whose eyes are heavily bloodshot.

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