

VAN STRATEN, N. H. *Concepts of Health, Disease and Vitality in Traditional Chinese Society. A Psychological Interpretation.* Based on the Research Materials of Georg Koeppen. Münchener Ostasiatische Studien, Band 34. Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1983. 193 pages. Paper DM 46.—, ISBN 3-515-03770-5.

In this book the author discusses traditional Chinese concepts of health and disease based on his profound knowledge of Chinese culture. His approach is in general psychosocial, while the sex-centered analysis shown in some places reveals his Freudian psychoanalytical position.

Summarizing the author's arguments, the traditional Chinese concepts on life and death or health and disease can be lined up as follows:

- (1) Life is a combination of the forces of *yin* and *yang*.
- (2) *Yin* and *yang* are representative of the vital energy of the universe.
- (3) Death means the separation of *yin* and *yang*, and dispersion into the great stream of the universe.
- (4) The *yang* ascends to Heaven, while the *yin* sinks into the earth.
- (5) The *yin* and *yang* fluids of the universe have their counterparts at the human level in the seminal fluids of the male and the female.
- (6) Because of the connection between the microcosm (the human body) and the macrocosm (the universe) and their dependence on each other, a disturbance in the one has concomitant effects upon the other.
- (7) The best way to safeguard one's existence is to live in complete harmony with nature and to consolidate as much as possible with the *Tao* of the universe.
- (8) Health means equilibrium: a harmonious order between the microcosm and the macrocosm; a correct balance between *yin* and *yang* and the Five Elements (wood, earth, metal, fire and water) and with man.
- (9) Since the vital energy, *pneuma* (ch'i 氣) combines with the idea that seminal essences are the main carriers of this vital energy, the energy is *libido*, which plays a dominant role in the notions about health and disease.
- (10) Disease is caused by endogenous factors (embryonic power, Three Corpse-worms etc.) and exogenous factors (demons etc.).
- (11) Disease is interpreted as excessive loss of vital energy, and its exhaustion is brought by both endogenous or exogenous causes.

The author's psychologically biased view is shown especially in his discussion of sexual demon-possession and 'ku' (witchcraft and sorcery). He states: Chinese society, as every other highly developed society, had a field of tension around aggression and sexuality because the social system placed the individual second to the family, clan and community, and the emotional appeals of sexuality were disregarded (89-90). And *ku* is seen as a concrete embodiment of aggression (164). I would not go so far as to deny that such psychological interpretations have any use. I would like to point out, however, that they do not interpret many factors, especially concerning culture, society and even the individual, which have to be dealt with in anthropological studies. It is difficult for me to understand why the author maintains this psychological context in all his conclusions. Whether one agrees or not, the author's interpretation does not reduce this book's value as a proper introduction into the Chinese traditional concepts of health and disease.

Finally I would like to indicate a minor misunderstanding of the author concerning the term "Great Tradition" (9). Contrary to the author's assumption the term

was first coined by the American anthropologist Robert Redfield, and defined most clearly in his *Peasant Society and Culture*.

REFERENCE CITED:

REDFIELD, Robert

1955 *Peasant society and culture: An anthropological approach to civilization*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

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MONGOLIA

HEISSIG, WALTHER. *Gesar-Studien. Untersuchungen zu den Erzählstoffen in den "neuen" Kapiteln des mongolischen Gesar-Zyklus* (Gesar Studies. Research on the narrative topics in the "new" chapters of the Mongolian Gesar cycle). *Abhandlungen der Rheinisch-Westfälischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Band 69*. Opladen/Germany: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1983. Viii+530 pages. Plates, index. Paperbound DM 124, ISBN 3-531-05083-4. (In German).

Since the early years of this century a number of discoveries have brought to light a series of texts containing chapters of a Mongolian version of the Gesar epic. A printed edition of the epic published in 1956 in Beijing added eight of these newly discovered chapters to the seven chapters that had already been known from a wood-block print edition of 1716. Heissig designates these added chapters as the "new" chapters. They form the subject of his treatise.

Heissig sees himself confronted with a number of problems. First, there is the question of how the "new" chapters relate to the old ones of the 1716 edition. Are they a real continuation or are they completely new and independent creations by one or several authors? Second, what is the relationship of the Mongolian Gesar to the Tibetan Gesar? And third, what is the relationship between the Mongolian Gesar cycle and other Mongolian heroic epics? To find an answer to these problems Heissig employs structural considerations concerning Mongolian epics in general, an internal critique of the extant text and its form(s), and a great amount of circumstantial evidence gathered from cultural and religious history. Both the quantity and quality of his erudition are truly remarkable. One is constantly led to consider the points discussed from a variety of different aspects. Because Heissig always identifies well-grounded conclusions from hypotheses, the reader comes away with a sense of satisfaction, feeling that a competent guide has presented conclusions that go as far as present evidence permits. The style does not fall into a dry, abstract exercise in literary analysis, unappetizing to any but the dedicated specialist. Heissig allows the texts to speak for themselves and succeeds in engaging his readers, despite the length of the book. In his discussion of such central topics as shamanism and folk religion or characteristic figures and personalities, he allows the reader to discover new dimensions to familiar episodes.

Because a full translation of the texts is yet unavailable and because existing summaries lack sufficient detail for any comparative study, Heissig first provides extensive and detailed abstracts of the "new" chapters. He divides them into structural units,