The Origin of Chinese Folk Medicine

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The ancient history of China is shrouded by legends and myths describing the ceremonies, customs, industries, taboos, and other related folkways of the different merging cultures. These folkways were orally passed among the migrating tribes from person to person and from generation to generation over the millennia; they were also transmitted in other forms, some of which were as folk arts, folktales, and folk dances and songs. Eventually, with the development of writing, these folkways were recorded, although it is not known how many may have been lost in the course of time. Fortunately, some of these early records have survived in the form of inscriptions on oracle bones and shells as well as other artifacts. From these antiquities we have obtained much of our present-day knowledge regarding the formative development of *min-chien i-hsüeh* (民間醫學) or "folk medicine."

The origin of Chinese folk medicine is found in the plant lore, religio-magical beliefs, and rudimentary medical techniques and faith healings of the Neolithic pastoralists and hunter-gatherers, who, in their daily encounter with nature, were instinctively aware of survival measures, many of which may still be observed in many culture throughout China. The cleansing of a wound or infection by licking (for example, the enzymes and lysozymes found in saliva contribute to arresting disease); the limited use of an injured arm or leg in order to assist its healing; the regulated consumption of particular vegetation to maintain health; lying in the sun or in a cool place for stimulation or relief; or the special attention (or destruction) of sick and injured offspring and adults—all of these techniques may be regarded as being some of the early survival measures within a complex medical tradition, which not only sought to preserve the health of the individual, the family, and the

tribe, but which also endeavored to maintain a harmonious relationship between man and nature. For, according to Chinese tradition, the human body is a part of nature and functions in concert with the principles that constitute and regulate nature. Therefore, it was necessary for one to first maintain a harmonious relationship with nature in order for one to achieve an optimum state of health.

One of the important aspects of this relationship was that it was a manifestation of man's attempt to reckon his place and purpose within his environment or universe and to bring into it an embodiment of conformity by which he could provide meaning and order to his existence as well as an explanation of the workings of nature. In order to accomplish this, according to Professors K. C. Wong and L. T. Wu, "he attributed to all inanimate objects his own sentiments and passions, fancying them influenced by the same things in the same way. . . . He was frightened by the flash of lightning, the eruption of an earthquake, the crash of thunder. The sun, moon, stars, clouds, storm and fire were to him the outward manifestations of gods, demons, devils, spirits or other supernatural agencies. Consequently health and disease were regarded as the work of devils or were devils in temporary possession of the human body, which would only be cured of its infirmity when the intruders were evicted by the application of appropriate incantations, charms . . . ,"[1] and other related techniques.

What caused these strange events to occur? How could these injuries and diseases be treated? Fortunately for the Neolithic pastoralists and hunter-gatherers there were those who could explain all of these strange happenings.

Just as the beginning of Chinese folk medicine is lost in antiquity, so too are the beginnings of its constituent components, one of which was religio-magical beliefs. Over the millennia of Neolithic time the practice of folk medicine developed in accordance with these beliefs, with each reinforcing the other. Apparently, during the formative period of development, a few individuals realized that, with some assistance from nature, they could lead comfortable and respectable lives without having to fish and hunt, tend the animals, till the soil, or fight enemies, all of which required a considerable expediture of labor in terms of survival. These individuals were able to accomplish this by interpreting what they observed concerning the weather, the behavior of animals, the conditions

1. K. Chimin Wong and Lieh-teh Wu, *History of Chinese Medicine* (Tientsin, 1932), 3–4.

of the crops, the diseases of people, and so on. The ability of some of the selective few of these *chen-jen* (貞人) or "interpreters" to accomplish this with the sanction of the tribe(s) contributed in part to the early development of social stratification within Chinese society, with this same process later on effecting the composition of those engaged in the medical arts. Furthermore, it can be assumed that their fellow Neolithic tribesmen were under the impression that these "interpreters" were the only individuals who could make these diagnoses and prognostications. For, granted, certain skilled persons in the tribe(s) could handle the treatment of wounds, cuts, and broken bones associated with daily survival. But when it came to uncommon diseases or afflictions, only the "interpreters" could satisfactorily function under these circumstances. The *kuei* (鬼) or "disembodied spirit(s)" had invaded the sick one; the *hun* (魂) or "ethereal soul" of the sick one has left the body, with its *p'o* (魄) or "carnal soul" unprotected; how shall we drive away the "disembodied spirit(s)" and allow the "ethereal soul" to be reunited with the "carnal soul," thereby ensuring the recovery of the sick one? The "interpreters" endeavored to find the way, which was frequently more accessible to them because of their ameliorating social position within their tribal cultures.

It is interesting to note at this point the etymological characteristics of the Chinese ideographic binom "*chen-jen*" (貞人) which I have roughly rendered as "interpreter(s)," but which more exactly should be translated as "diviner(s)." The first ideogram "*chen*" (貞) consists of two component parts: (貝) which, according to the late Dr. L. Wieger, means "to divine by looking at the cracks in a tortoise-shell as the heat [from singeing] develops them. The character represents two cracks, one being longitudinal, and the other transversal"; he goes on to say about the second part (卜) that it represents "the salary of the fortune-teller; a sum of (貝) cowries [*Cyprea moneta*] given to the man who singes (卜) the shell."[2] The second ideogram "*jen*" (人) is "a man, represented by his legs; the one who stands upright."[3] We can, therefore, assume that the Neolithic "interpreters" or "diviners" and those who transmitted and augmented the early beliefs and techniques were actively involved in the practice of scapulimancy as a means, among other things, of administering remedies to existent or expectant health-related complications.

By the end of the third millenium some of the smaller tribal cultures

2. L. Wieger, *Chinese Characters* (New York, [1965]), 150.
3. *Ibid.*, 73.

gradually began to merge into larger, stratified cultural units (for example, in northern China, where the proto-Tungustic cultures were primarily located, there arose the *Yang-shao* culture, which evolved into the *Hsia* culture to become China's first legendary dynasty; the *Lung-shan* culture; and the *Shang* culture, which, with the advent of writing, became China's first historical dynasty). These larger cultural units, like their smaller predecessors, had mixed and numerous folk medicine traditions associated with the Ural-Altaic and Sino-Tibetan cultural regions. Therefore, as the merging cultures became more economically, politically, and socially complex, there was a corresponding development in the complexity of Neolithic folk medicine, with the duties and rites of the "interpreters" frequently overlapping and periodically coming into conflict with each other.

During the Shang-Yin dynasty (ca. 1500-1027 B.C.) the "interpreters" were commonly referred to as the *wu* (巫) or "witches."[4] The wu were spiritual mediums or shamans who specialized in quasi-medical practices and religio-magical rites (for example, the preparation of amulets, talismans, charms, and love-potions; the recitation of incantations associated with rain-making, fertility, and so forth; and the casting of divinations). Because of their ascribed ability to contact the spirits, cast spells on animals, crops, and people, as well as influence the weather, the *wu* were regarded as being either good or evil (This can be somewhat compared to our present-day black magic/white magic dichotomy.) It was generally thought, however, that they, especially the women, represented an evil influence, since shamanism was little understood which frequently led to misunderstanding and, in turn, fear followed by superstition.

The *wu* were the transmitters of Neolithic animism involving polytheistic or polydemonistic nature-worship; occasionally their ritual ceremonies involved a single, supreme spirit, but this was not a frequent practice. Their primary function was the maintenance of the general well-being of the tribe or larger social unit in its interrelationship with nature. This was accomplished through various practices and rites, some

4. I prefer to use the Latinized word *wu* instead of its contemporary English counterparts, "witches," "warlocks," or "shamans," since, especially in the case of the word "witches," there are several connotations (for example, ugly, malignant old women; hags; scoundrels; those given to black magic) which could place the individuals being described outside of the desired cultural context of this paper. Therefore, the continued employment of this and other Latinized words will reflect either this intent of mine or the untranslatableness of the word being used.

of which involved ritual exposure in the form of dancing and singing. A case in point was the *p'u wu* (暴巫) or "exposing the shaman" rite which required the *wu* to masquerade as an undifferentiated drought-rain spirit in the open air, exposing his or her body to the sun as a form of sacrifice. It was believed that such an act, with the perspiration from the body of the ritualist symbolizing rain, would assist in invoking the favor of the spirits to provide the needed rain for the livelihood of the settlement.[5]

There were two kinds of *wu*, the *wu* proper, who were women, and the *hsi* (巫見), who were men. Together and individually they functioned as the so-called "sorcerer-physicians."[6] As "sorcerers" they attempted to master and control evil spirits (for example, the *wu* proper were regarded as the embodiment of the metaphysical *Yin* principle (see p. 25), thus, they could entice the rain, which was associated with the *Yang* principle and symbolized semen, to fertilize the earth, a *Yin* counterpart, by way of ritual ceremony. The *hsi*, on the other hand, were regarded as the embodiment of the metaphysical *Yang* principle and functioned accordingly.) When accomplished, the *wu*, or using the binom *wu-hsi* (巫覡), had great power among the people. However, not infrequently, they attempted to cure and prevent disease, which was sometimes associated with other *wu*. If the tribe was overcome by a disaster (for example, crop failure or the death of livestock) it was occasionally attributed to the spell of an evil *wu*, or to some discord within nature. Therefore, it was necessary for the "physician" to detect the cause of the malignant influence and to cure the difficulty it was exerting upon the tribe.

Within the Shang-Yin society there was also another related body of "sorcerer-physicians" who were referred to as the *fang-shih* (方士) or, according to Professor Needham, "gentlemen possessing magical recipes." Generally speaking, the *fang-shih* or "wizards" were divided into two groups: (1) there were those who came to their callings naturally, that is, they were inspired from within and were considered as being "different" by their peers. They might go into fits or trances naturally, perhaps due to some biophysical or socio-anthropological disorder such as epilepsy or insanity. Furthermore, they did not require any artifices in order to

5. Edward H. Schafer, 'Ritual Exposure in Ancient China,' *Harvard Journal of Asistic Studies*, 14 (1951), 130–184.

6. A later binom, *wu-i* (巫醫) or "witch doctor" denotes the terms "sorcerer-physician," however, because of its later derivation I am not employing it is this historical context.

carry out their practices; and (2) there were those who developed the mental attitudes necessary to carry out their practices. This development was usually acquired through apprenticeship, inheritance, or perhaps election by the tribe. And they usually required costumes and artifices of some sort in order to achieve the desired results.[7]

Throughout the Shang-Yin dynasty there was considerable interaction between the *wu* and the *fang-shih*, both of whom had evolved, as it were, from the *chen-jen* or "interpreters." This interaction was due in part, to the diffusion of new and different theories and techniques of folk medicine which these various "sorcerer-physicians" had either developed among themselves, or had assisted in the transmission thereof from other cultures into their own society. However, during the course of several centuries, this interaction resulted in the formation of two mixed, yet distinguishable groups of folk medical practitioners. There were those who continued on as "sorcerer-physicians;" they were more numerous and generally practiced among the non-literate folk. And there were those who became the "priest-physicians;" they were fewer in number and tended to associate themselves with the nobility and their interests by assisting them in carrying out and amplifying upon the Shang-Yin rites and superintending, among other things, all matters related to folk medicine.

The conjecture can be made that the priest-physicians were a derivation from the *fang-shih*, since the latter were the "*gentlemen* possessing magical recipes" and, therefore, were afforded greater upward mobility into the Court circle to be appointed as priest-physicians. Such an inference is not entirely incorrect, although it is an oversimplification. Granted, many of the *fang-shih* probably did become priest-physicians but one cannot say that the latter was an outgrowth of the former due to an existent class consciousness within the Shang-Yin society. For during this formative period of folk medicine, the sorcerer-physicians and the priest-physicians had not established themselves into a dichotomy of medical professionalism. This was still a period of interaction, a feature which generally tended to characterize the development of Oriental medicine more so than its Occidental counterpart, especially during their respective post medieval periods of history, due to the differences in their underlying philosophical precepts. Eventually, however, the priest-physicians and the sorcerer-physicians did become more antagonistic toward

7. Richard C. Hunderfund, "Magic, Myths & Medicine: A History of Medicine," (unpublished paper, California State University, San Francisco, n.d.), 1.

each other, for example, the "shamaness was gradually removed from the official hierarchy, and forced to practice her divine arts among the people. . . ."[8]

This gradual division between the sorcerer-physicians and the priest-physicians was not based only on the differences between their respective folk medicine theories and techniques (as a matter-of-fact, this was the topic of exchange in which the interaction between them was most accentuated), but, perhaps more importantly, on the changing economical, political, and social structure of the Shang-Yin society, in which not infrequently both groups had considerable psychological influence which could be compared to a form of authoritative leverage. Furthermore, literacy played an equally important role in that, generally speaking, the priest-physicians were literate and the socerer-physicians were not, just as the nobility was and the folk (namely, as artisan-agriculturist-slave composition) were not. This condition of literacy or illiteracy, as the case might be, tended to promote further distinction—if not polarization in come circumstances—between these two groups, especially in the later dynastic periods to come when such great emphasis was placed on the individual's literary talents.

The Shang-Yin dynasty was a period of transition in which tribalism metamorphized into feudalism. "Initial steps towards a cult of heaven had been taken, but the fertility cult was predominant. A state administration had begun to be established, but the priesthood . , . continued to play an important role."[9] The Shang-Yin economy was based on agrarian activities, which contributed to the continuing accumulated experience regarding the medicinal properties of plants. There was a marked concentration in the population which allowed for greater transmission of common communicable diseases and, in turn, a classification of their symptoms.

Shang-Yin medicine was primarily concerned with "trumatic abdominal injuries, diseases of the ear, nose, eyes, mouth, and teeth, and bone fractures. Stone needles were used for opening boils and abscesses, and the principle of trepanning was also understood."[10] Medical writings were basically of a religio-magical and philosophical nature, as can be seen from the following etiological and therapeutical data: The etiology

8. Schafer, 157.

9. Wolfram Eberhard, *The Local Cultures of South and East China*, trans. by Alide Eberhard (Leiden, 1968), 29.

10. Stephen Pálos, *The Chinese Art of Healing*, Bantam Books (New York, 1972), 11.

of disease was attributed to "causation by Heaven; causation from the ill will of a lesser god; causation from demon's worms; [and] causation from changes in the weather, i.e., wind, snow, a phases of the moon etc."[11] The therapeutics of disease were carried out in accordance with cosmologic, animistic, and medicinal methodologies, some of which included the use of amulets and talismen, remedies based upon plant lore, acupuncture, moxibustion, massage, enemas, and graded exercise. These beliefs and techniques were further advanced and expounded upon by the *wu* and their descendants during later dynasties, and we shall return to some of them for a closer analysis later on in this paper.

The religio-magical beliefs and ritualized traditions of the *wu* remained relatively intact for the next millennium. Not until the latter half of the following Chou dynasty (ca. 1021–256 B.C.) did this institution metamorphize into a new form which was to remain ingrained in Chinese society until the twentieth century. Many of the changes that transpired during this dynasty can be attributed to the signal influences of the various schools of philosophy, for during this period (ca. 600–200 B.C.) China experienced its golden age of philosophy. Three such influences, which were particularly important in plotting the direction of Chinese folk medicine, were the concepts of *Tao* (道), *Wu-hsing* (五行), and *Yang* (陽) and *Yin* (陰).

The *Tao* or "Way" was regarded by the Chinese as being "the source of all being governor of all life, human and natural, and the basic, undivided unity in which all the contradictions and distinctions of existence are ultimately resolved."[12] Thus, if one led his life in accordance with the "way" it was believed that he would be in harmony with the Universe. And, in keeping with this principle, it was believed that one who has attained an elderly age was one who had lived his life in perfect accord with the "Way." Therefore, it is not uncommon to find many folk beliefs and related medical practices associated with longevity and other health aspects that have their philosophical reasoning based on this ancient Chinese concept.

The *Wu-hsing* or "Five Elements" are not "physical substances but metaphysical forces or modes which dominate or control certain periods of time, commonly the seasons, in a fixed succession."[13] These elements

11. Frederick F. Kao, "China, Chinese Medicine, and the Chinese Medical System," *American Journal of Chinese Medicine*, 1 (1973), 6.

12. Wm. Theodore de Bary and others, eds., *Sources of Chinese Tradition* (New York, 1960), 49–50.

13. *Ibid.*, 198.

are: wood, fire, earth, metal, and water, which, in terms of one's physiology, were believed to correspond to the liver, heart, spleen, lungs, and kidneys.

The *Yang* or "positive element" and the *Yin* or "negative element" in Nature are the primordial twin potencies that regulate the entire cosmos. "According to the doctrine of the art of healing in Chinese antiquity, there is a constant struggle in the human organism, just as in Nature, its environment, between opposing and unifying forces. Good or bad health is determined by the fluctuations of these conflicting forces."[14] Attempts to cure disease through the employment of amulets or charms symbolizing these potencies was common practice (for example, if one was beset with the illness of liver-rot (hepatic distomatosis) this was regarded as being a problem related to the *Yang* potency, since the liver, in accordance with the "Five Elements" concept, is an organ associated with this potency).

An early example (540 B.C.) of the interraltionship between these concepts and the influence the generated in medical and philosophical thinking is found in the *Ch'un-ch'iu* or "Spring and Autumn (Annals)," a Chou dynasty classic, in which Ho the Physician advises the Duke of Chin, who has not been well, that "there are six heavenly influences [*Lu-ch'i*],[15] which descend and produce the five tastes, go forth in the five colors, and are verified in the five notes; but when they are in excess, they produce the six diseases. Those 6 [*sic*] influences are denominated [*by*] the *yin*, the *yang*, wind, rain, obscurity, and brightness. In their separation, they form the four seasons; in their order, they form the five (elementary) terms. . . ."[16]

"The abiding values of Chinese medicine," according to Doctor Hume, "lie elsewhere. It is not to be judged by its elements of magic and superstition, or by its cosmic and animistic theories. It was a reflective, philosophical system, always thinking of man in his relationships to

14, Pálos, 26.

15. ***Lu-ch'i*** (六氣) or the "Six Pneuma" of the *Yang* and *Yin* potencies are: *feng* (風) or "wind," *huo* (火) or "fire," *han* (塞) or "cold," *shih* (濕) or "moisture," ***shu*** (暑) or "heat," and *tsao* (燥) or "dryness." According to Professor Needham (see footnote 21, 266–267), "this classification into six is of extreme importance because it shows how ancient Chinese medical science grew up to some extent independently of the Naturalists [or the *Yin-yang chia*], which classified all natural phenomena into five groups associated with the Five Elements."

16. James Legge, trans., *The Ch'un Ts'ew with the Tso Chuen*, vol. 5 of *The Chinese Classics* (Hong Kong, 1872), 580–581.

the vegetable and mineral kingdoms, as well as to man and other animals. It cannot be regarded as a truly experimental system, for it was experimental only in a fragmentary, occasional way. If the example of those who created its earliest life had been followed, it would have advanced immeasurably; but there appeared in the environment factors that prevented, rather than facilitated, the spirit of inquiry."[17]

During the Chou dynasty there were many different schools of philosophy, all of which recognized, if not generally accepted, these above concepts and their underlying values. In terms of the development of Chinese folk medicine, these schools can be loosely divided into two main groups: the *Tao-chia* or "Taoists," many of whom were *wu* (that is "sorcerer-physicians"), the transmitters of animism and other early cultural traits. The Taoists were primarily concerned with the preservation of life and the avoidance of injury as well as the development of one's understanding of the laws underlying the changes of things within Nature; and the *Ju-chia* (儒家) or "Confucianists," who were primarily concerned with the ethical and moral behavior of man. Confucianism reflected a later development of philosophical thought and in its early stage of development was associated also with the *wu* (that is, "priest-physicians"), who had since evolved into the *ju-i* or "Confucian physicians" in Chinese society.

It is interesting to note at this point the etymological characteristics of the Chinese ideogram "*i*" (醫) or "physician." It consists of three component parts: at the top left corner is a quiver (匸) for arrows (矢), thus, we have (医); at the top right corner is a hand (又) making a jerky motion (几), thus, we have one taking out an arrow from the quiver (医) in order to shoot (殳) it; and at the bottom is symbolized the work (工) of the *wu* (巫), namely, their religio-magical incantations, thus, we have two *wu* dancing (巫). For through dancing, which frequently led to autohypnotic trances, the *wu* were supposed to be able to journey to the abodes of gods and demons, enabling them to converse with these spirits and return afterwards with the desired results.[18]

Originally the ideogram "*i*" was written this way (醫). However, later in the course of Chinese history, the third component part (巫) was changed to (酉), which originally represented an ancient vase, a kind of amphora, used for making or keeping wine; today it is the symbol for wine. Therefore, one might say that originally the complete ideogram

17. Edward H. Hume, *The Chinese Way in Medicine* (*Baltimore*, 1940), 128.

18. Needham, 132.

denoted the *wu* employing weapons in order to kill or drive away the demons of sickness, whereas, later the *wu* are replaced by wine, signifying the practice of medicine was not any longer confined to the incantations of the *wu*, but that it had been taken over (from an official standpoint) by the "priest-physicians," who administered elixirs or wines as treatments for their patients.[19]

"The whole history of the social position of doctors in China might be summarised as the passage from the *wu*, a sort of technological servitor, to the *shih*, a particular kind of scholar, clad in the full dignity of the Confucian intellectual, and not readily converted into anyone's instrument."[20] The duties of the Confucian physicians, like those of their predecessors, the "priest-physicians," were to superintend all matters related to medicine and to collect drugs for medicinal purposes, These duties, which reflected the different forms of treatment, were divided into four main categories, which not infrequently overlapped.

I. *Medical Specialization among the Confucian Physicians:*

a. *Physicians* were primarily concerned with the treatment of infectious and physiological diseases. The former included viruses, fevers, bacteria, fungi, worms, and protozoans, which were passed from person to person, or from aminal to person, either directly, via fomites, or by vectors. The latter included arthritus, insanity, diabetes, hemophilia, which were frequently caused by the activities of the above infectious diseases.

b. *Surgeons* were primarily concerned with the treatment of injuries (for example, wounds or injuries received in battle, while hunting, or from accidents).

c. *Herbalists* were primarily concerned with the prevention of disease stemming from improper nutritional intake in accordance with Confucian philosophy.

d. *Veterinary Surgeons* were primarily concerned with the same treatments as their surgeon colleagues, except that they treated the illnesses of animals (especially horses) instead of those of men.

One of the factors that hindered the medical progress of the Confucian physicians was their philosophical doctrine pertaining to "ancestor worship," namely, the loyalty and respect of the individual towards his ancestors through observed ritual behavior. This behavior became conventionalized through the preservation of one's body from any form of

19. Wieger, 300.

20. Joseph Needham, *Clerks and Craftsmen in China and the West* (Cambridge, 1970), 265.

multilation. For, according to this doctrine, it was believed that an individual should not return to his ancestors after his demise except in a state of physical completeness, since any other condition would be regarded by the ancestors as an indication of disloyalty and disrespectfulness. Because of this doctrine, surgery, anatomy, and midwifery did not develop as rapidly as some of the other fields of Chinese medicine.

Among the Taoists, on the other hand, the medical traditions of the "sorcerer-physicians" and the techniques of Chinese folk medicine were continued and expounded upon. But this does not mean to say that the Confucian and Taoist physicians did not consult one another, or that a sick person relied upon the medical attention of either one or the other physician. The overlapping of duties and treatments within the different "schools" of thought also existed between them. However, in Taoism the major goal was the achievement of material immortality through observation and experiment, whereas, the Confucianists excluded all nonhuman phenomena, which included material immortality, from consideration. According to the Taoists, in order for one to become a *hsien* (仙) or "immortal" it was necessary to undergo considerable training. This training involved several different but related techniques, many of which had their roots in the rudimentary medical techniques of the Neolithic "interpreters." These techniques included respiratory, heliotherapeutic, gymnastic, sexual, alchemical, pharmaceutical, and dietary practices.[21]

The purpose underlying these techniques was founded on the princi- of the *Tao* which meant that one should maintain a state of harmony between oneself in this world and the beyond by conducting one's behavior to correspond completely with the decencies of the other world. Given China's heritage of hunting and gathering, later followed and supplemented by pastoral and agrarian activities, from all of which the Chinese derived their livelihood, it is not surprising that the Taoists (and Confucianists alike) developed both theoretical and practical foundations for their relationship with nature.

The Taoist *wu* or "sorcerer-physicians" were divided into two groups which reflected different—yet, frequently overlapping—functions. There were the *wu* and the *fang-shih*, both of whom can be classified as *k'an-yü* (堪輿) or "necromancers," specializing in the art of divining the future through alleged communication with the spirits; and there were the

21. Joseph Needham, *History of Scientific Thought*, vol. 2 *of Science and Civilisation in China* (4 vols.; Cambridge, 1955–71), 143.

hsien-men (羨門) or "coveters,"[22] in the sense that they sought to obtain material immortality, their *sine qua non* of their quest in life.

II. *Medical Specialization Among the Taoist Physicians:*

a. *Necromancers*, like their Confucian counterparts, the temple priests, concentrated their efforts on quasi-scientific research, all of which was related to divination, which during the Chou dynasty included:[23]

1. *Pu* (卜) or "scapulimancy," namely, divination by observation of singed mammalian shoulder-blades and tortoise carapaces;

2. *Shih* (筮) or "drawing of lots," namely, divination by random casting or selecting of stalks of a plant known as the yarrow or Siberian milfoil (*Archillea sibirica*);

3. *Pu-kua* (卜卦) or "divination by use of the symbols found in the *I-ching* (易經) or 'Book of Changes';"

4. *Hsing-ming* (星命) or "astrology," namely, divination based on the supposed influences of the stars upon human affairs and of forecasting terrestrial events by their positions and aspects;

5. *Hsüan-che* (選擇) or "chronomancy," namely, divination to determine the favorable time for one to do something;

6. *T'ui-ming* (推命), or alternatively *lu-ming* (祿命) or "fate calculation," namely, divination involving the use of the twelve horary ideograms called *chih* (支) or "branches," known also as the "twelve earthly branches," and the ten ideograms called *kan* (干) or "stems," known also as the "ten heavenly stems." Prognostications were calculated based upon the combinations derived from these denary and duodenary cyclical ideograms;

7. *Feng-shui* (風水) or "geomancy," namely divination "based on the premise that certain locales are more auspicious than others. Geomancy teaches that man should not bring about disorder in the geomantic harmony of nature (however, it allows for corrections of geomantic disharmony of nature) by modifying either natural and/or

22. Professor Needham translates the binom *hsien-men* as "a magician or adept who has attained material immortality." However, I disagree with this rendering, *since* hsien means, among other things, "to covet" and *men* means "gate." Thus, one would assume that the binom *hsien-men* would refer to those individuals who coveted the thought of passing through the "gate" into the realm of material immortality in their quest for oneness with the *Tao*. It should also be pointed out that *men* can also mean "profession," "sect," "school," "party," or "family." But given any of these renderings, one would still arrive at the conclusion that the binom *hsien-men* refers to a sect of coveters. Therefore, my translation yields what I believe is the most precise meaning, since these individuals were striving for material immortality.

23. Needham, *History of Scientific Thought*, 346–364.

cultural landscapes. Moreover, in the attainment of one's prosperity, the selection of an auspicious place for a house or burial site must be made according to geomantic principles. Thus, geomancy is a quasi-religious and pseudo-scientific system which regulates human ecology by influencying man in the selection of various locations;"[24]

8. *Hsiang-shu* (相術) or "physiognomy," namely, divination that attempts to determine the temperament and character of an individual based on his or her outward appearances;

9. *Shou-hsiang-shu* (手相術) or "palmistry," namely, divination based on the practice of reading a individual's character or aptitudes and describing his or her past possible future from the general character and shape of the individual's palms and fingers, and the lines, Mounts, and marks found thereon; and

9. *Chan-meng* (占夢) or "oneiromancy," namely, divination by means of interpreting an individual's dream(s).

b. "*Coveters*," like the Confucian physicians, traced their medical traditions back along the pathway of folk medicine and its contribution to Chou medicine. But, unlike the Confucian physicians, who institutionalized their heritage into a rational system of medicine, the "coveters" concentrated their efforts on furthering research related to the rudimentary medical techniques of Chinese folk medicine listed below, while seeking their quest of material immortality. "These practices were always connected with the desire for liberation from physical hinderances, so that all blemish of the body and spirit might disappear and individuals be enabled to attain Tao."[25] Furthermore, the "coveters" had been considerably influenced by the teachings of Tsou Yen (ca. 4th century, B.C.), whose theoretical teachings were, in turn, greatly influenced by those of the *Yin-yang chia* or " 'Naturalists' " school" of philosophy. The "Coveters' " medical techniques included:

1. *Hu-hsi fa* (呼吸法) or "respiratory doctrine;"

2. *Fu jih mang chih fa* (服日芒之法) or the "method of wearing the sun rays," (the modern term is *Jih-kuang liao-fa* (日光療法) or "heliotherapy") consisted in "the exposure of the body to the sunlight, while holding in the hand a special ideogram (the sun within an enclosure) written in red on green paper;"

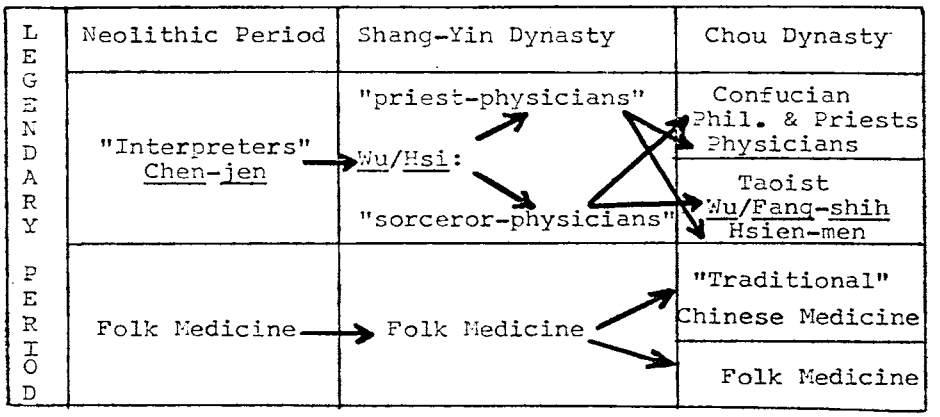
3. *Tao yin* (導引) or "extending and contracting the body," (the

24. Hong-key Yoon, "Geomancy: Its Impact on the Man/Nature Relationship in Korea," (unpublished paper, University of California, Berkeley, nd), 2.

25. Hume, 51.

modern term is *T'i-ts'ao fa* (體操法) or "gymnastic doctrine") which also included *mo* (摩) or "massage;"

4. *Yin-yang yang seng chih ta* (陰陽養生之道) or "the method of nourishing the life by means of the *Yin* and the *Yang*," (the modern term is *Hsing-chiao liao-fa* (性交療法) or "copulation therapy"), aimed at conserving as much as possible of the *ching* (精) or "seminal essence" and *shen* (神) or "divine element," especially by *huan-ching* (還精) or "causing the *ching* to return;"[26]
5. *Lien-tan-shu* (煉丹術) or "alchemy;"
6. *Yao-liao-fa* (藥療法) or "pharmacotherapeutica;" and
7. *Yin-shih liao-fa* (飲食療法) or "dietotherapy."



The distinction which gradually arose between the Confucian physicians and the Taoist practitioners and, in turn, between what eventually became known as *Chung-i* (中醫) or "('traditional') Chinese medicine" as compared to Chinese folk medicine, was due to part to more than just ideological contradictions; it can in large measure be attributed to the politico-social changes that transpired during the Chou dynasty. For this was a dynastic period of feudalism in which the "ruling class was entirely different from the priesthood of the Shang [-Yin, whose] kings were dependent on their priests, [whereas,] the Chou took little notice of magic creeds and performed its cult of Heaven without priests. Most important of all, this upper class was thinly spread over an enormous area as feudal lords who created their own princely courts.... These princely courts

26. Akira Ishihara and Howard S. Levy, *The Tao of Sex*, Harper & Row Books (New York, 1970).

rendered possible the development of the first literati . . . partly because they could write. . . ."[27] Some of them, like the families from which many of them descended, entered into medicine to become Confucian physicians in the tradition of their earlier colleagues, the "priest-physicians." The Taoist practitioners, on the other hand, were not as closely associated with these princely courts, since many of were illiterate and their religio-magical beliefs and techniques were castigated by their professional rivals, the Confucian physicians, with their literary backgrounds.

These changes led to the establishment of a distinct secular medical tradition and profession. Traditional Chinese medicine, unlike folk medicine, attempted to sever itself from its origin of religio-magical beliefs related to the anthropomorphic gods of then-currently viable myths. Nevertheless, such a severance was not entirely completed, since many of the treatments were so closely identified with an idealized historical past and related philosophical theories.

There were three legendary figures, *Fu-hsi* (ca. 2853–2738 B.C.), *Shen-nung* (ca. 2738–2698 B.C.), and *Huang-ti* (ca. 2698–2598 B.C.), who were regarded by the Confucian physicians as their professional forebearers. Furthermore, these three legendary figures symbolized the three basic approaches to the treatment of disease practiced by the Confucian physicians during the Chou dynasty and continuing into the beginning of the twentieth century.

An accurate description of these three legendary figures in terms of how they symbolized the three basic approaches to the treatment of disease is provided by Doctor Hume, who states that "*Fu Hsi* represents the approach through a cosmic philosophy that believes that the universe is at the same time a unity and yet made up of dual, opposing forces. While closely connected with the metaphysical side of medicine and honored also as the first to bring men an understanding of the pulse, he must be regarded as the prototype of magic and superstition, with its amulets and talismen and its search for the elixir of life.

Shen Nung represents the approach through medication. He is a symbol of the belief in empirical knowledge which has been so characteristic an aspect of China's mental equipment through the ages. He typifies, moveover, that almost universal acceptance of the idea that medicaments are potent not only because they produce measurable pharmacological effects, but because they correspond, in some mysterious way, to the patients affected organs, and possess some magic power to

27. Eberhard, 29–30.

drive harmful spirits away.

Huang Ti represents the approach through sound methods of diagnosis. He is a symbol of the increasing reliance on pulse studies and other physical signs, as well as the development of physical therapy by means of massage, moxa, enemas and graded exercise. It was he who recommended the use of mineral and organic medicaments, as well as visits to hot springs and mountain sanatoria for treatment by rest and sunlight."[28]

The two most famous and possibly earliest medical treatises written during this ancient period of Chinese history are the *Pen-ts'ao* (本草) or "Herbal" and the *Huang-ti nei-ching* (黃帝內經) or "Yellow Emperor's Inner Classic." The authorship of both of these treatises is unknown, there having been numerous entries periodically included in both works over a considerable period of time; nevertheless, in line with the Confucian traditions and values, the former treatise is attributed to the legendary *Shen-nung* and the latter one to legendary *Huang-ti*. These works reflect the strong literary background of the Confucian physicians and their tendency to concern themselves with the ethical and moral behavior of man. This propensity was particularly harmful in reinforcing a conservative, agrarian society's tendency to scholasticism and reverence for past authority (for example, the above three legendary figures, *Fu-hsi, Shen-nung*, and *Huang-ti*, were Confucian creations that succeeded in instating into the Confucian medical and philosophical genealogy an origin of reverential derivation, thereby, affording it greater eminence within Chinese society.) In turn, traditional Chinese medicine became distant from the folk, who were illiterate and could not appreciate the literary qualities of these and later medical treatises, and who were socially removed from the scholar-gentry and noble classes within Confucian society from whom such knowledge could have been acquired. Furthermore, there was the considerable expense involved in obtaining the treatments and medicines associated with traditional Chinese medicine which prohibited the vast multitude of Chinese from receiving them.

For the peasants, artisans, peddlers, soldiers, and the like, there was Chinese folk medicine, most of which was practiced by medicasters. As Professor Croizier states, "there were also large numbers of lower-grade doctors, apothecaries, 'surgeons,' itinerant medicine peddlers, and quacks of every description who usually fully merited the low esteem in which they were held. As everywhere, it was the common fate of the lower

28. Hume, 123–124.

classes to fall into their hands in the time of illness, and their performance probably justified the popular image of doctors as peoples who kill more than they cure. It was, then, hardly surprising that superstitious and religious healing methods persisted side by side with, and often mixed into, popular medical practices."[29]

By the end of the Chou dynasty in the third century, B.C., there was, generally speaking, three distinct groups of people theorizing and practicing medicine: (1) the Confucian physicians, who represented what may be called the "official" position of what was to become known as "traditional" Chinese medicine; (2) the Taoist practitioners, who were the transmitters and developers of Chinese folk medicine; and (3) the common peddlers or medicasters, who cannibalized the medical theories and practices of both the Confucianists and Taoists in order to eke out a living at practicing "medicine" and, in turn, being supported by the miseries and illnesses of the illiterate folk.

The Taoists' philosophical position was polemic to that of the Confucianists. Because of this state, Chinese folk medicine tended to be either on the periphery or outside of the official circle of medical theories and practices which made it subject to rejection by those in authority. Furthermore, it eventually became downgraded because of its association with medicasters, who found easier access into Taoist circles than Confucian ones.

Chinese folk medicine may be regarded as being a "natural medicine," for it evolved on the basis of human reason and experience, but not independently of religio-magical beliefs from which many of its faith healings were derived. Indeed, Chinese folk medicine is a combination of empirical knowledge and supernatural supposition, both of which afforded the Neolithic tribesmen, its originators, and later their Chinese descendants a means of rationalizing their interrelations with their environment and the ensuing transformations resulting therefrom. As the early Neolithic cultures emerged and developed into larger and more complex social units, so too did Chinese folk medicine become transformed. But this is not to say that the theories and practices associated with this early art of healing were originally and inherently simple in their scope and direction, and that as Chinese society began to change and expand that Chinese folk medicine, in turn, developed in a Darwinian-like progression into an all-encompassing, complexive system of

29. Ralph C. Croizier, *Traditional Medicine in Modern China* (Cambridge, 1968), 32.

"natural medicine." Granted, as Chinese culture changed and expanded there was a corresponding development in Chinese folk medicine in terms of new and untried religio-magical influences and other types of natural medicine, many of which became infused into the existing structure; the result of this development was that Chinese folk medicine became more expansive and complexive in its scope and direction. For it was a reflection of this process of changing philosophical concepts and medical techniques infused with social, economical, and political changes. The Neolithic period, followed by the Shang-Yin dynasty, and ending with the decline of the Chou dynasty represents the formative stage of this development in the history of Chinese folk medicine.