



CHAPTER FOUR

文 *The Literary Tradition*

Our poems will be handed down with those of great dead poets. We can console ourselves. At least we shall have descendants.

—DU FU

My library was dukedom large enough.

—SHAKESPEARE

THE CHINESE ARE A LITERATE PEOPLE. This is not to say that there is no illiteracy in China, but to emphasize the elevated place afforded works of language and literature in traditional Chinese culture. Moreover, because of the aesthetics of Chinese words, Chinese literary and pictorial arts are intricately interwoven. Illustrated poems, paintings with poetic explanations, and particularly calligraphy—the pictorial realization of the essence of Chinese characters—are all to the present day highly treasured artistic forms.

Western nations also express high regard for literary works and those who create them. To achieve a sense of how the literary values of East and West compare, consider the following two stories. The first is a story about a great French writer, the second the legend of a Chinese poet.

A friend related the following story about lunch with Nobel laureate Albert Camus. “I’ll tell you,” began our friend, an Italian actor, “how the French are crazy for their writers.”

I was to meet Camus at 12:30 at Maxim-s in Paris. I arrived half an hour early. While I waited, I noticed a commotion at the entrance. The Maître d- and the head waiter were making a fuss over a customer who had just arrived. That customer turned out to be Phillipe Rothschild, then one of the wealthiest and most powerful men in Europe. With some commotion, the Baron was escorted to his regular table, and the staff resumed their routine duties.

A few minutes later, Camus appeared in the doorway. You-ve never seen anything like it. This time, the entire staff, including the chefs and the kitchen staff, dropped what they were doing and formed a receiving line, ten to fifteen people long, both sides of the door. They applauded as Camus made his way to the table where I was waiting. It was only then that I understood how crazy the French are for their writers.

Many in the West are familiar with the ceremonial dragon boat races that take place every spring in China or anywhere in the world where Chinese people live in significant numbers. Westerners recognize these dragon boats as characteristic symbols of Chinese culture and life. Yet, few realize that the festival surrounding the dragon boats celebrates the life and death of the great Warring States poet, Qu Yuan.



*The ornate and colorful carving of a modern-day dragon boat
(photo courtesy of Alvin Wang)*

Qu Yuan was not only a poet, but a statesman. Like so many of China's luminary minds, he was not appreciated in his own day. He served as the

Prime Minister of the state of Chu and sought, unsuccessfully, to engineer a political alliance with the neighboring state of Qi to resist the powerful Qin. It was the Qin king who later unified all of the warring states to form the Chinese empire.

Qu Yuan suffered from political intrigues and was twice banished during the course of his political career. When the Qin occupied the capital of Chu, Qu Yuan despaired of ever being able to return to his homeland and save it from the conquering Qin. On the fifth day of the fifth month in 278 B.C.E., Qu Yuan, clutching a heavy stone, threw himself into the Mi Luo River and drowned. For over 2000 years, every fifth of May according to the ancient lunar calendar, Chinese people everywhere throw rice dumplings called *zòngzǐ* into rivers to feed the fish so that they will not devour Qu Yuan's body. They stage the famous dragon boat races to scare evil spirits away from their drowned poet, who recorded his desperation in the epilogue of his famous poem, "Encountering Sorrow."

Forget it! No one in this country understands me. There is no reason, but I must cherish the homeland. There is no one to appreciate the ideal policy, so I am going to follow Peng Xian home.

Peng Xian was a poet and statesman who lived several centuries earlier and threw himself into a river in despair of realizing lofty aims for his country. The deaths of both men exemplify a potent theme in Chinese literature and life: the ultimate sacrifice as a demonstration of undying devotion to the life of the homeland. The celebration of Qu Yuan's death is one of the most important festivals of the year, a festival for a poet who has been dead more than 2000 years. There is no comparable observance in the Western world, events such as a 1960's Parisian lunch notwithstanding.

Recently in Mexico there was a formal state funeral when Octavio Paz passed away. But will Mexicans memorialize Paz's death after 2000 years, or even ten? James Joyce, who is arguably one of the greatest and most influential writers of the twentieth century, was born on February 2. In the United States on February 2 people celebrate Groundhog Day. In the West, even the Bard himself is poorly remembered by comparison to Chinese veneration of Qu Yuan. When was Shakespeare's birthday? What day did he die and under what circumstances? Where few in the English speaking world could answer, or care, every schoolchild in China knows the story of Qu Yuan.

The virtual deification of the poet Qu Yuan is just one example of the unique status afforded to poets in traditional China, illustrating the extremely important role that Chinese literature plays in the lives of Chinese people. Not only have these traditions had a profound influence on Chinese art and culture generally, they have played a fundamental role in the development of traditional medical theory through 2000 years.

Despite the fact that no Chinese author has ever been awarded a Nobel Prize in literature, the literary tradition in China is home to some of the most exquisite, most lucid, and most compelling writing ever authored on Earth. There are explanations for the lack of recognition awarded Chinese writers by Westerners. Many, again, are problems of translation.

The problems of translating the literary art of the Chinese language are overwhelming. Image and meaning, sound and sense are intricately and delicately interwoven. Moreover, the pattern of the weave is all-important, just as the pattern of the strokes of a single character determine its shape, its sound, and its significance. As the Chinese put it when describing literary excellence, "There is a painting in the poem." Too often, once the interwoven sound, sense, shape, and feelings have been unraveled in translation, all that remains are meaningless threads. We are left wondering, "What do they mean?" We are reminded of the dilemma to which the great jazz musician Louis Armstrong referred in answer to the question, "What is jazz?" His answer: "If you gotta ask, you'll never know."

The study of China's literary tradition poses not simply a great difficulty; it offers an insight into the minds that conceived and composed the ancient works that inform Chinese medical theory. In fact, much of the basic theory of medicine in China is recorded in classical books that are both works of medical science and literature. Thus to understand and appreciate them we must devote some time and attention to the Chinese literary arts. Like all works of art, to be understood properly, a Chinese medical classic must be perceived and understood within the context of its origins.

Here we see another stark contrast between the study of Chinese medicine and conventional medical studies in the West. The scientific tradition of past centuries in the Western world has emphasized the segregation of scientific disciplines from both the liberal and fine arts. It is

only recently that Westerners have begun to question the wisdom of imposing categorical separation between the disciplines of the arts and sciences.

The traditions of learning in China are quite opposite to those in Western universities. In traditional China a comprehensive, integrative, and generalist approach to study has prevailed since ancient times. This is reflected in the traditional notion of a “master of many excellences.” Such “excellences” frequently included poetry, calligraphy, painting, medicine, and martial arts. The Chinese ideal of a well-educated individual is far closer to the Western concept of a “renaissance man” than to the highly specialized experts who populate contemporary Western academia. Foremost among the skills that a man of learning had to master in traditional China were the correct and creative use of language. These included not simply basic literacy, but the use of the brush to calligraph characters, and an understanding of the literary and poetic forms used in the course of instruction and in civil service examinations.

Thus appreciation of the traditions from which they spring is a prerequisite for understanding these literary and medical classics. To do this, we must first understand what a book is in China and how books have functioned throughout Chinese history.

The oldest books in China were not originally books at all. Scratched on stone or bones, or burned into the shells of tortoises, the earliest recordings of literary composition in China are thousands of years old. These ancient glyphs and characters form the basis of many traditions of study and practice and are still lively subjects of study both in China and around the world. The oldest “texts” of China’s earliest literary classic, the *Yü J.ng*, for example, were written on “oracle bones” in an ancient script known as *jiá gTM wén*.

Many of the oldest extant copies of several texts we have mentioned, for example, the *Yellow Emperor’s Classic of Internal Medicine*, the *Dào Dé J.ng*, and others, were scrolls made of bamboo and wooden slats, bound together with silk cords. Copies of many of these antique books were discovered in 1973 at a site known as Ma Wang Dui. Such books must have been scarce in 168 B.C.E. when the tombs at Ma Wang Dui were sealed, because China’s first emperor had ordered the entire contents of all libraries burned some sixty years earlier. Medical books, the *Yü J.ng* and a few other specific titles, escaped this imperial edict, one of the world’s most ambitious attempts to revise history by burning it.

With the development of the technologies of paper making in the Eastern Han (25–220 C.E.) and printing in the Song (960–1279 C.E.) books began to take on more recognizable forms. More importantly, the advent of these technologies allowed books to be copied, circulated, and therefore more readily studied.

Despite efforts like the book burnings of China's first emperor, the literary tradition survived and developed throughout China's imperial era. At the heart of this tradition is the notion of the Classic. What is a Classic? The word, in Chinese, is *j.ng*. Curiously, this is the same *j.ng* that figures so prominently in Chinese medical theory as the term for the channels (*j.ng luò*) through which *qū* circulates throughout the body. *J.ng* means “to include, to manage or deal in; constant, regular; to pass through; warp (as in the warp of fabric); longitude; and as a result of.” Applied to works of literature, *j.ng* refers to those that have become constants or classics as a result of having succeeded from generation to generation. As they passed from era to era through Chinese history, these classics collected commentaries, revisions, and various other amendments.

A “Chinese classic” is thus an aggregation of material. We can seldom be sure of the authorship of such works. Writers of a later period often attributed their work to earlier authors, whose famous names would lend credibility to their work. Even written “evidence,” therefore, of when, where, and from whom a particular work derives leaves many questions unanswered. The scholarship required to investigate such questions is considerable. Yet, generation after generation, the Classics continue their process of transmitting information that the Chinese continue to find indispensable.



Text pages from a Chinese medical classic

Indispensable, yes. Immutable, no. Successive generations tend to alter the contents of these literary classics, here adding, here taking away, according to a variety of criteria. Changing political climates give rise to scholarly reinterpretations. Development and refinement of technologies permitted closer scrutiny of earlier assumptions, and texts are corrected to reflect such development. The process is further complicated by the vagaries of textual errors, not to mention the physical distress to which these perishable books are often subject.

Five such classical aggregations of ideas emerged some 2500 years ago as the primary sources of knowledge about Chinese culture and thought from what was then already China's ancient past. These are: *The Book of Changes* (*Yü J.ng*); *The Book of Songs* (*Sh...J.ng*); *The Book of Rites* (*Lý Jî*); *The Book of History* (*Sh%J.ng*); and *The Spring and Autumn Annals* (*Ch%ñ Qi%*). To this day these are considered "The Five Classics" of the Chinese literary tradition. But this number comes nowhere near the number of literary works that have been collected during the past 2000 years. Medical classics alone number more than ten thousand. Thus all we can accomplish here is an introduction to the nature of the literary transmission through a brief examination of an important handful of ancient works.



THE *YË J,NG*—*BOOK OF CHANGES*

Any discussion of the literary tradition in China must begin with the *Yü J.ng*. The oldest of all the Chinese classics, its origin cannot be precisely dated. The earliest forms of the "text" of this ancient book of wisdom and prophecy consisted of inscriptions scratched into bones, often the broad shoulder bones of oxen. These "oracle bones" were part of the ancient tradition of magical intervention between two dimensions inhabited both by humans and by a variety of spiritual forces and entities thought to have varying degrees of influence on human affairs.

One interpretation of the origins of the *Yü J.ng* is that ancient necromancers heated the shells of turtles causing them to crack. Meaning was found in the shape and nature of the fissures. In time, from these patterns of cracks, a set of abstractions was codified to which various commentaries, images, explications, and advice were appended.

The traditional explanation of the *YüJ.ng*'s origins describes an event in the life of the legendary "Emperor" of pre-historic China, Fu Xi. "Fu Xi listened to the eight winds," says the ancient story, "and, thus inspired, he set down the eight basic signs [from which the *YüJ.ng* is constructed]."

What is the *YüJ.ng*? Westerners have been trying to answer this question for several centuries now. The first Europeans to discover this ancient text were probably the Franciscan and Jesuit monks who first traveled to China. According to legend, more than one of these unfortunate clerics ended their lives in utter madness, their minds destroyed by something sinister and mysterious, long feared by the Chinese to exist within the ancient text of the *YüJ.ng*.

Like much of traditional Chinese culture, the image of the *YüJ.ng* is severely distorted when it appears in Western translations. The *YüJ.ng* arises from a primitive, prehistoric tradition of necromancy, geomancy, numerology, and word magic. It is the primary literary source of the theory of yin and yang. In its essence, the *YüJ.ng* is a mathematical schematic of the phenomenological universe of man and nature, heaven and earth.



Chart of the order of the eight trigrams according to Fu Xi

This schematic is based upon a binary-like mathematical sequence that predates the binary notation of Leibniz by millennia. In fact, Leibniz had access to early Jesuit translations of the *YüJ.ng*. Joseph Needham mentions in the second volume of *Science and Civilization in China* that Leibniz conducted a protracted correspondence with the Jesuit missionary Joachim Bouvet mainly focused upon Bouvet's translations of the *YüJ.ng* and related materials. We cannot resist the speculation that this ancient Chinese material may have influenced the baroque German scholar.

In his own commentaries upon it, Leibniz wrote that the *YüJ.ng* was an ancient precursor of his concept of binary notation. Needham goes so far as to speculate that it was Fr. Bouvet who first suggested in a letter to Leibniz that the broken and unbroken lines of the *YüJ.ng* could be taken to represent the "0" and "1" of binary notation. Whatever the influence exerted on Leibniz in the course of his development and

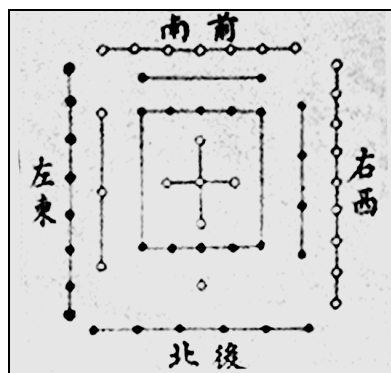
expression of this important aspect of mathematics in the West, the fact remains that thousands of years before it was developed in the West, a kind of binary mathematics flourished in prehistoric China as a medium for developing descriptors of phenomena.

We say “a kind of binary mathematics,” because there are certainly fundamental differences between the mathematics of the *YüJ.ng* and pure binary notation. The gist of these differences lies in the fact that the mathematics of the *YüJ.ng*, though apparently formulated from a base-two system of reckoning, is actually formulated from a base-three notation. Its symbols are understood in terms of two sets of tripartate images: 1) the three realms of heaven, earth, and humankind; and 2) the relationship between yin, yang, and *qû*. These are the central relationships of Chinese thought.

From this viewpoint, the *YüJ.ng* describes the entire range of conditions that exist throughout the universe from which arise all natural phenomena. This is based upon a subset of eight basic structural components, the eight trigrams, which are attributed to the legendary Emperor, Fu Xi. The eight trigrams are themselves formed from the mathematically possible combinations of yin and yang within the three-fold context. This three-fold context, represented as the three lines or places in each trigram, represents the three fundamental aspects of existence that concerned the ancient authors of the *YüJ.ng*: heaven, earth, and humanity. Implicit in this relationship is the relation of yin, yang, and *qû*.

The eight signs or “trigrams” represent eight essential images of the interaction between yin and yang. Each trigram consists of three lines or positions. There are two possible line types: one is yin; one is yang. A yin line is represented by a broken line —. A yang line is represented as an unbroken line, —. The basic form of the trigram is composed by assigning one line to stand for each of the three realms, earth, humankind, and heaven.

There are eight possible trigrams, the mathematical result of two-to-the-third power. The ancient Chinese saw a direct correspondence



Fu Xi's River Chart of the eight trigrams is said to derive from a tattoo on the back of a horse emerging from the Yellow River

between these eight signs and the eight cardinal points (the eight “points” of the compass). For them, wind was the symbol of change that blew through the three realms carrying messages, energies, and influences—hence the legendary explanation that Fu Xi listened to the eight winds for inspiration.

Why? What do these eight simple glyphs represent? The logic is simple, eloquent, and comprehensive. It is embodied in a line from a later literary classic, the *Dào Dé J.ing*:

Dào gives birth to one.

One gives birth to two.

Two gives birth to three.

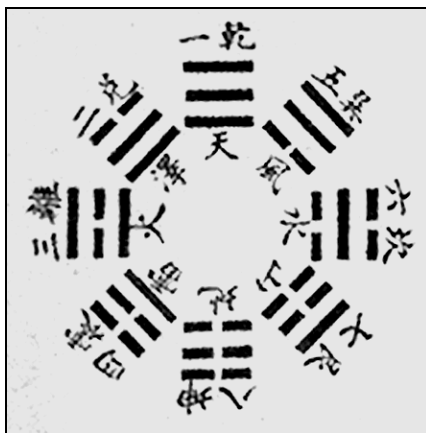
Three gives birth to ten thousand things.

China's ancient metaphysical mathematicians required only the first three prime numbers to evolve a descriptor of the entire universe and all phenomena contained therein. The *Dào*, which you recall from earlier discussions, comes from *wú j×* (infinity). It gives birth to heaven or yang, the number of which is one. This one gives birth to earth or yin, the number of which is two. Yin and yang give birth to *qū* the number of which is three. And, *qū* gives birth to everything, the number of which is ten thousand. In Chinese, “ten thousand” symbolically means “numberless,” hence “all.”

One of the clearest statements than can be made about yin and yang is that everything comes from the interaction of yin and yang. When yin and yang unite, there is *qū* thus there is life. When they separate, there is death. The interplay of yin and yang results in the unimaginable variety of objects and experience that we call existence. Therefore, we should be able to construct a comprehensive, if abstract, description of the universe using only yin and yang as the medium of description.

This was evidently the aim of ancients who developed precisely that: a comprehensive description of the universe using only yin and yang and their invisible coefficient, *qū*. The work of formulating the basic signs was attributed to the legendary Fu Xi. Perhaps they were the inspired effort of one superhuman, or maybe he found them on the back of a turtle or a horse (as variant versions of their legendary origins suggest). More likely they represent the gradual accumulation of insight and understanding over generations.

These eight essential images could not in and of themselves be relied upon to provide the descriptions of phenomena that must have interested the ancient authors of the *YüJ.ng*. Things are, after all, not merely their essences. Things, objects, phenomena, and experiences are the manifestation of those essences. Thus, to express this manifest essence, the ancient Chinese created a set of doubled trigrams or “hexagrams” to be the basic functional unit of the mathematical language used to abstractly express all the possible changes that the world of man and nature experience as a result of the alternations of yin and yang.



The classical correspondences of the eight trigrams with the points of the compass

The *YüJ.ng* is therefore an ancient digital “processor” that sought, in a way analogous to what hardware designers do today, to reduce phenomena to a mathematical grid and then construct functional patterns of “on” and “off” to relay information and instructions concerning the management of that information. This sort of operation in the hands of a competent, modern computer designer is aimed at developing things considered practical and important by cultural standards or demands. In a similar fashion, the goal of China’s ancient sages was to codify experience and insight concerning the essential nature of things and their interrelations.

They sought to extend their knowledge to the utmost. To preserve the integrity of their work, and the power prediction provides, they encrypted it, much as contemporary encryption systems allow us to do today. They used a series of symbolic images which meant absolutely nothing until an initiate held the key that revealed their meaning.

To restate: the *YüJ.ng* is the fundamental treatise on yin and yang. It proposes, and many still believe achieves, a comprehensive description of phenomena based solely on the interaction of yin and yang. Although the gist of the theory of yin and yang developed in the works of the Daoists, its essential form comes directly from the *YüJ.ng*. As such, the importance of this most ancient Chinese classic in traditional Chinese medical theory cannot be overstated. If you ask a hundred doctors of Chinese medicine what they are doing when they treat their patients,

you may well get a hundred different answers. But each one will contain some reference to yin and yang, even if it is not so explicitly stated. Reference to yin and yang is present (or certainly should be present) in the strategic thinking of any adequately trained practitioner of Chinese medicine, regardless of their specialization, regardless of their means, regardless of the formulas prescribed, or the points selected for needling. A traditional doctor of Chinese medicine is always working to bring yin and yang into a relatively more harmonious state.

This should not suggest that every doctor of Chinese medicine is a student of the *YüJ.ng*. Indeed, most of the Chinese doctors with whom we have spoken say frankly that their medical studies leave them no time for such esoteric pursuits. Nonetheless, although it has always been shrouded in mystery and obscurity, the *Y...J.ng* has provided Chinese medicine, and Chinese civilization in general, with the essence of its internal coherence. As we have noted, the unique character of yin and yang is that they are always changing. Change itself becomes the constant, all-pervasive internal coherence, and change is precisely the interplay and harmony of yin and yang.



The Luo Shu, a chart found by the legendary Yu on the back of a tortoise in the Luo River. The nine places on the chart served as the basic pattern for dividing farm land, an essential blueprint of Chinese social structure.

Not only is this dynamism rooted philosophically, mathematically, and literally in the *YüJ.ng*, its life-sustaining currents circulate through the entire body of traditional medical theory. In fact, there is an entire specialization in Chinese medicine which focuses on the direct relationships between the *YüJ.ng* and medicine.

Zhang Jie Bin of the Ming dynasty composed a book entitled *Lèi J.ng Fù Yü* (*Appended Wings of the Classified Classic*), written in 1624 C.E. The first chapter, entitled "Medicine and *Yü*" contains the following explanation. (*Yü* is the *YüJ.ng*).

Yü possesses the rationale of medicine. Medicine acquired the function of the *Yü*. To only study medicine and not *Yü* leaves an impression that medicine is not so difficult. And, indeed, it would be so. But who can know the sight of that which the eyes have yet to see? Who can know the sound of that which the ears have not yet heard?

In the end, we cannot avoid the oneness of the composition of these two [the Yü J.ing and medicine]. For to know only the Yü and not medicine would lead one to say how difficult, mysterious, and vague the theories are; how hard they would be to put to use. It is no different than one who dreads the cold but refuses to wear a fur coat. It is the same as starving and refusing to eat the food one holds in one's own hand. What a pity to miss the opportunity of a lifetime! Thus medicine cannot proceed without the Yü. The Yü cannot proceed without medicine. The Sage Sun (Si Miao) said, "If one does not know the Yü he is not qualified to discuss the Great Medicine."

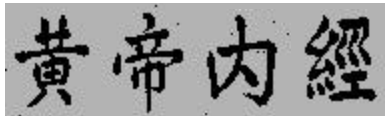
If the rationale of heaven and earth is contained within the Yü then how could the body and the mind not be contained by the Yü? Because of the motility of the Yü because of its changes, the ancient model of anatomy in Chinese medicine is contained in the sixty-four hexagrams.

The application of the *Yü J.ing* to the theory and practice of medicine is an extraordinarily complex subject. Yet the relationship between the *Yü J.ing* and Chinese medicine can not be overlooked by those who wish to understand either subject thoroughly.



ANCIENT MEDICAL CLASSICS

One of the most remarkable aspects of Chinese medicine is that the basic textbooks upon which virtually all others depend for their theoretical foundations are nearly 2000 years old. We have selected three of these ancient classics that represent the earliest extant codification of medical theories, principles of diagnosis and treatment, and the use of herbal medicines.



HUANG DE NEI JING—YELLOW EMPEROR'S CLASSIC OF INTERNAL MEDICINE

This earliest medical work is written as a series of questions and answers. The legendary Yellow Emperor queries his Chief Physician, Q× Bó, on a wide range of issues concerning the nature of health and well-being, the method of attaining longevity, and the theory and practice of

medicine. As with much Chinese classical literature, the authorship of this book is unknown. Without a doubt, it reflects the processes of literary transmission in ancient China that so profoundly shaped the form and content of ancient materials. Those who receive, study, transcribe, and transmit such material invariably add their own commentaries. They commit unwitting errors in transcription, delete material that seems unworthy of inclusion from their particular perspective, and so on.

An edition considered definitive was compiled by the Tang Dynasty physician Wang Bing in the eighth century and has served as the basis of subsequent versions. In fact, this process of constantly reshaping Chinese classical works continues today just as it has for millennia. This can be seen quite clearly in how the *Yellow Emperor's Classic* has come to be understood outside of China.



Huang Di—the Yellow Emperor

The book that is traditionally understood to be the *Huang Di Nei Jing (Yellow Emperor's Internal Classic)* consists of two main parts. The first is called *Sù Wèn* or *Simple Questions*. The second is called *Ling Shu* or *Miraculous Spiritual Pivot* and is largely devoted to the theory and practice of acupuncture. For many years in the West, there was but one major translation of the book, done by the sinologist/sociologist Ilza Veith. Regrettably, her translation included only the *Sù Wèn* portion of the text—only one-fifth, more or less, of the classical text—an omission that has left many Western readers with the impression that this one-fifth is the complete work.

Thus the literary tradition, subjected to the vagaries of translation, has suffered in transmission; and the complexity and difficulty associated with conscientious study is compounded.

The problem is analogous to the trade in ancient Chinese artifacts such as ceramics, paintings, and other works of art. Copying and forging works of art is an occupation that has flourished in China for thousands of years. The people of one period, favoring the works of a particular prior epoch, collected artifacts from that time with which to ornament their homes. When the supplies of a particular period ran low, or

when demand forced prices high, craftsmen seized the opportunity to provide eager buyers with ingeniously forged copies. Thus, it is possible today to find Ming Dynasty forgeries of Tang Dynasty ceramics. The quality of scholarship and expert sensitivity required to properly sort such work is amazing.

It is important to perceive the contents of a book such as *The Yellow Emperor's Classic* in the rich and complicated matrix of culture, art, and science from which it arose. One awareness we develop studying these traditions is that things are seldom what they may seem to Western eyes. This literary tradition contains a strong predilection towards letting subtle and complex material emerge slowly from the interaction of student and teacher. The books themselves were never meant to stand alone in the way we think of modern textbooks. Traditionally, the transmission of medical arts and sciences in China consisted not just of studying the ancient texts but of having them illuminated by a teacher who had been similarly enlightened.

Thus when we look at the *Yellow Emperor's Classic of Internal Medicine* we should understand that it is an early blueprint of Chinese medicine. It contains the main theoretical elements. It describes the ways in which these elements interrelate. It provides definitions for basic terminology. The word *qū* for example is used with some 270 different meanings in this one book alone.

The *Huang Di Nei Jing* defines disease, and more importantly it contains a comprehensive definition of health. It asserts the fundamental strategy that a student and practitioner of the medical arts must follow to benefit from the wisdom of China's ancient sages. In this regard it is important to stress again another basic issue already mentioned earlier. This is the spiritual or philosophical dimension of Chinese medicine. One of the things that clearly distinguishes traditional medicine in China from the modern, scientific and technological medicine of the West is this spiritual dimension. Chinese medicine differs in a fundamental way from Western medicine that can be summarized thus: since its earliest origins, Chinese medicine has focused intensively on the spiritual, emotional, psychological, and philosophical aspects of disease and well-being.

The roots of such concerns are found in the *Yellow Emperor's Classic*. The implications for contemporary healthcare professionals are considerable, for from this broad and comprehensive approach to medical theory

a uniquely Chinese strategy of preventive medicine emerges. The passage mentioned in Section 3.1 contains the gist of this strategy:

The ancient sages did not treat those who had already become ill; they did not try to rule those who were already rebellious. Instead, they preferred to educate the people before they rebelled. They treated their patients before they could get sick. Treating people who are sick with herbs and acupuncture can be compared to the behavior of people who only start forging their weapons after they are engaged in battle or to those who only think of digging a well after they feel thirsty. Aren't such actions just a little late?



NÁN JĬNG—THE CLASSIC OF DIFFICULT ISSUES

Originally called *The Classic of Eighty-One Difficulties*, this book, like the *Yellow Emperor's Classic*, is of uncertain origin. It resembles the *Yellow Emperor's Classic* in an important way: both are written as dialogues. Both books were probably compiled in the first or second century B.C.E., the *Yellow Emperor's Classic* likely being somewhat earlier.



Detail of a painting showing pulse diagnosis

The eighty-one questions that comprise the text of the *Nan Jing* are divided into several categories. Questions one through twenty-two deal with the subject of pulse diagnosis. This subject was illuminated in this series of questions and answers for the first time. Here we find the definitions of the three positions for taking the pulse: *cùn*, *guǎn*, and *chý*, each on the radial artery at the wrist. Based on this early material, pulse diagnosis later developed into a fundamental skill of medicine in China.

Questions twenty-three through twenty-nine concern the study of the *j.ng luò* or channels and network vessels through which the *qū* circulates throughout the entire body. Questions thirty through forty-seven deal with the internal organs, their structure, function, and interrelationships. From question forty-eight through sixty-one the subject of inquiry is illness and the processes leading to disease. Questions sixty-two through

sixty-eight discuss the location and function of acupuncture points, and questions sixty-nine through eighty-one deal with the acupuncture theory and techniques. Thus the *Nan Jing* is a comprehensive outline of basic medical theory, internal medicine, and acupuncture treatment.

This book also develops the theories of the *mùg mén* or “gate of life” and the “triple burner” or *sān jiāo* that are found in the *Yellow Emperor's Classic*. This early codification of medical theory and principles of treatment contributed greatly to the development of medicine in later eras, making the *Nan Jing* an indispensable classic of traditional Chinese medicine.



**SHĀNG HÁN LÙN—
ON COLD DAMAGE**

This work was originally entitled *Treatise on Damage from Cold and Miscellaneous Diseases*. Unlike the two works discussed above, its origin has long been established with virtual certainty. Its author was one of China's most famous doctors, Zhang Zhong Jing, who lived in the Eastern Han period (25–220 C.E.). The book's influence on the development of medicine in China and throughout East Asia has been profound. Today there are entire departments in colleges and universities of traditional medicine in China devoted to the study of this single work.



Portrait of Zhang Zhong Jing, courtesy Lifu Museum, China Medical College, Taiwan

The preface of the book states that there are sixteen volumes, but this conflicts with the number known to exist. For some eight centuries, the book was handed down as a single composition, but in the Song Dynasty, it was subjected to the same process of reexamination and correction that was applied to a wide range of intellectual and academic disciplines at that time. The “Imperial Bureau of Rectifying Medical Texts” issued a revised and corrected version which separated material from the original book into two parts. One was entitled *Essential Prescriptions from the Golden Cabinet*; the other was called *Treatise on Damage from Cold*. Even today this remains the organization of the material that has survived.

The work systematized the study of clinical medicine, establishing and defining the basic principles of diagnosis and treatment through the identification and differentiation of patterns of disease. It also presented hundreds of formulas of herbal medicine along with the indications for their use. To this day, these formulas comprise the backbone of traditional Chinese pharmaceuticals. They are so highly respected throughout the Orient that in Japan, for example, only those herbal prescriptions based on formulas from the *Shang Han Lun* will be reimbursed by health insurance.

Zhang Zhong Jing is revered as the “Sage of Medicine.” His book is known as the “book that brings people life.” Generally, in Chinese the term “classical formula” is reserved to refer to formulas he composed. He is indisputably one of the greatest theorists of traditional Chinese medicine. His theoretical contributions include not only the specification of cold damage and the effect of external influences on human health, but also the design of a disease progression theory that has influenced traditional Chinese medicine until today. Although the *Shang Han Lun* “six-channel pattern identification” theory Zhang Zhong Jing refined from the *Inner Canon (Nei Jing)* would be constantly adapted, particularly by the later text *Wen Bing (Warm Disease)*, the theory, its diagnostic indications, and treatment patterns are one of the mainstays of traditional practice.



THE ART OF WAR—*BING FA*

The *Art of War* is one of the world's classic treatises on strategy and warfare. The author, Sun Zi, was a general of the State of Qi during the Period of Spring and Autumn (770–476 B.C.E.). The principles of military strategy contained in this book have informed the Chinese military ever since, and is widely studied in military academies around the world.

Recently, this Chinese classic has become popular in the United States. Corporate executives study it. One Hollywood mogul was rumored to have made it required reading for his entire staff. The book has found such widespread acceptance as a source of strategic wisdom that it could rightfully be called a contemporary classic as well as an ancient one. Perhaps

Western business people, recognizing that sooner or later they would find themselves in competition with their Asian contemporaries, have taken up the *Art of War* to prepare themselves for inevitable confrontations. Perhaps, noticing the remarkable success of the overseas Chinese in a wide variety of commercial ventures and the staggering economic expansion currently underway on the Chinese mainland, Western readers seek to educate themselves in what may well be a superior approach to strategic thinking.

Regardless of what motivates these thousands of Western readers, the most important thing to note is the value Chinese thinkers place on strategic thinking and a well conceived and logical plan of action. This is the central lesson for those who embrace Sun Zi's *Art of War*. As a landmark in Chinese cultural history, the *Art of War* clearly indicates the importance of strategy for those who have recorded and transmitted the Chinese legacy from generation to generation.



Rubbing from a Han dynasty tomb carving, depicting ritualized gestures employed on the battlefield which illustrate Sun Zi's Art of War

To Chinese thinkers, the ability to assess situations and make practical, successful strategic decisions looms large. It is not therefore solely racial stereotyping, or ill-spirited racism, when people around the world describe the Chinese as “crafty” or “inscrutable.” The Chinese people possess and prize a tradition of cunning, as reflected in the first of Sun Zi's thirty-six stratagems that epitomize traditional Chinese strategic thinking: “No deception is too great.” *The Art of War* serves as an important vessel for this tradition, and it should be well studied and understood by any who seek to understand traditional Chinese culture and its various artifacts.

It may be less apparent, but this same approach to strategic thinking informs much of traditional Chinese medicine. The roots of the logic that express as treatment principles, herbal formulas, and acupoint prescriptions grow in a soil fertilized by the *Art of War*. Thus its study in the context of Chinese medicine is not merely an interesting sidelight, but a beacon that illuminates the underlying intellectual mechanisms of medical theories and techniques. Many doctors of Chinese medicine conceive of medical intervention as a war between the “righteous *qǔ* (*zhèn qū*) and the “evil *qǔ* (*xié qū*). This is reflected in a number of Chinese medical terms.

For example, the aspect of *qū* that relates to the body's protective mechanisms (functions generally ascribed to the immune system in biomedical thought) is termed “defense *qū*” or *wèi qū* in Chinese medicine. The Chinese word *wèi* comes directly from military parlance where it refers to the guards who stand at the perimeter of an army's encampment to defend against invaders. A complementary concept, again reflecting this martial sensibility, is contained in yet another aspect of *qū* *yǎng qū*. The word *yǎng* originally meant “camp” or “construction” (in the sense of setting up an army camp). The *yǎng qū* is the aspect of the *qū* that circulates the nourishment derived from food throughout the body so that it can be used to construct new tissue and repair organs, flesh, and sinew. In terms of this martial metaphor, it is the *yǎng* encampment of the body that is defended by the *wèi* guards.

This martial metaphor can be seen in the use of another important pair of medical terms, *xū* and *shù*. These terms have been given many English equivalents, including empty and full; insubstantial and substantial; deplete and replete; vacuous and replete; deficient and excess. In Chinese medicine these are the key terms used to describe the complementary and contrasting conditions from which disease processes and disharmonies result. Thus, if acupuncture points are found to be *xū* or vacuous, a doctor will treat them with a supplementing technique, to fill the vacuity. If a point is pathologically *shù* or replete, it must be drained to draw off the damaging or blocking *qū* that it has accumulated. Diseases are likewise categorized according to their prevailing characteristics in terms of *xū* and *shù*. It is this differentiation which allows a doctor to prescribe herbal formulas to supplement what is *xū* and drain what is *shù*.

In the following passages taken from the *Art of War*, we see that before vacuity, x%₀ 虚, and repletion, shx 实, were employed as medical terms, Sun Zi used them to describe principles governing the conduct of military maneuvers. In Chapter Five, Sun Zi says:

The arrangement of military attacks is like throwing a stone at an egg. The key lies in x%₀ and shx

He elaborates in Chapter Six:

Thus military force is like water. The movement of water always avoids the high places and tends towards the low. The deployment of military force avoids the shx to attack the x%₀ following directions to accord with the physical features of the place [of battle]. The victory of the military accords with [conditions of] the enemy. Thus the army does not have a fixed method of deploying its forces just as water has no fixed shape. If the changes of the enemy are ascertained and lead to victory, it is called mysterious [literally shén—spirit, mystery, marvel]. Thus the five phases have no fixed order of restraint. The four seasons have no fixed position. The day's length appears long or short. The moon waxes and wanes.

Here Sun Zi is probably referring to a concept of ancient Chinese lunar astronomy describing 28 constellations separated into four groups according to the four seasons. The formulation of the ancient calendar depended upon this system of reckoning to determine the appearance of the night sky in each season. Due to the nature of this ancient Chinese lunar calendar, the position of these constellations appears to change slightly from year to year.

Sun Zi also relied on the concept of qū to describe principles of how to gain military victory. In Chapter Seven he states:

Even the qū of numerous troops can be captured if the heart of the commander can be captured. The qū of morning dashes out. The qū of midday is indolent. At dusk the qū is exhausted. One who is adept in the use of military force avoids the dashing qū and attacks when



Portrait of Sun Zi

it is indolent or exhausted. Thus he controls the qū Use order to treat chaos. Use tranquility to treat an uproar. Thus, control the heart.

It is more than a coincidence that the language at the end of this passage sounds almost as if Sun Zi is describing medical concepts. Compare, for example, the following passage from “The Great Treatise on the Manifestations of Yin and Yang” in the *Yellow Emperor’s Classic of Internal Medicine*:

Thus, in diseases of the yang, treat the yin. In diseases of the yin, treat the yang. This is only one example among a vast number that can be cited to demonstrate the internal coherence that develops from the theory of yin and yang. This internal coherence binds the theory and practice of medicine together with a wide range of philosophical, literary and cultural phenomena. In fact what appears from outside the Chinese cultural milieu as separate subjects—military strategy, philosophy, medicine, and art—can be considered as distinct manifestations of a single paradigm when viewed from within.

From the clinical point of view, a curious fact about Chinese medicine is that ten different clinicians may devise ten different treatment principles for the same patient. When we interview these ten practitioners, however, we find that each employs a sense of strategic thinking in arriving at his or her conclusions and that the gist of the principles of strategy thus employed will often have origins in the *Art of War*.

老庄

THE DAOIST CLASSICS

There is much lively debate among academicians concerning the identity of the authors, editors, and creators of the key works of Daoism. Who came first, Zhuang or Lao? Which *Dào* is the real *Dào*? Such questions, if satisfactorily answered, may have an enormous influence upon our reading and understanding of Daoist texts. They are, however, as yet both unknown and not necessarily germane to understanding Chinese medicine. In the simple view, there is a common understanding of the two texts that most exemplify the Daoist literary tradition. It is a tradition that is rich and complicated, despite the absolute simplicity of its

most fundamental precepts. The *Dào Dé Jīng*, attributed to the legendary Lao Zi, is the cornerstone of Daoist thought. But beneath this cornerstone lies a single word which forms the most important cognitive artifact of this unique philosophical and literary tradition.

The Chinese word *dào* contains a powerful metaphor from which countless meanings have arisen. In its simple, literal sense, the word means “road.” In contemporary Chinese it is used to identify streets of a certain size, capacity, or characteristic. In much the same manner as the English words, “boulevard,” “avenue,” “street”, “lane,” and “way,” Chinese words like *dào*, *jīf*, and *lù*, categorize the streets of a Chinese city by their varying widths, lengths, capacities, and ambiance. The word “*dào*” also has other modern meanings more closely related to its ancient sense and philosophical use. This metaphoric usage derives from the juxtaposition of the elements of the word itself.

Since ancient times, the word symbolized a way of seeing, thinking about, and living in the world. “Awareness in motion” or “the way you go as a result of thinking,” are somewhat awkward English-language phrases that nevertheless convey the essential nature of this character. (See p. 81 for a further discussion of the meaning of the character.) Considered as such, the word “*dào*” expresses an important precept of Daoist thought which is seldom mentioned in the texts themselves; indeed in Zhuang Zi there is no direct mention of it. This precept is the notion that the world and everything in it is essentially a work of the imagination, a product of the mind as it moves along.

This *dào* of Zhuang Zi characterizes perhaps the best known of Zhuang Zi's fables. It is the story of himself, dreaming he is a butterfly. When he awakens, he experiences a typically Daoist paradox concerning the nature of reality. He doesn't know, in that moment poised between waking and dreaming, whether he is Zhuang Zi waking from a dream of being a butterfly, or if he is a butterfly dreaming of being Zhuang Zi.

The character *dào* contains this dimension of meaning, that is, the central role of the process of consciousness in the nature of “reality.” To understand the multidimensional outlook of the Daoists, we must look further into the literary roots of the subject. The literature of Chinese traditional subjects can be understood like a series of postcards from ancient correspondents. In order to streamline their messages to future generations, these ancient custodians of wisdom condensed their understanding into as few strokes as possible.

The kernels of their wisdom thus lie waiting in the words themselves. These Daoist texts have been preserved for nearly 2500 years. The precepts and concepts they convey are alive today in the theories of Chinese medicine.

道德經

THE *DÀO DÉ JĬNG*



Detail from a hanging scroll by Shang Hsi,
"Lao-tzu passing the barrier"

The *Dào Dé Jĭng* (*Classic of the Way and Moral Virtue*) has a unique position in the literary tradition of ancient China. None can deny the power and influence that this book has had both within China and around the world. It presents and defines a concept that is extraordinarily difficult to catch hold of.

Confucius is reported to have said, after his first and only meeting with the legendary author of the *Dào Dé Jĭng*, "Lao Zi is like a dragon!" In the introduction to his explications of Lao Zi, the great Tàij_x master Zheng Man Qing succinctly states:

Although Lao-tzu [Lao Zi] was a profoundly practical man, human emotions disgusted him greatly, and he longed to get away. He hoped for a new beginning though metamorphosis, or, as the phrase has it, "his step leaves no footprint." How much more difficult it is to find the tracks of Lao-tzu-s mind! Only one man understood, and that was Confucius. Did he not say Lao-tzu was like a dragon? How right he was! How can any flying or walking creature compare with dragon-like Lao-tzu?

The *Dào Dé Jĭng* contains the essence of a philosophical system that grows from two indigenous Chinese sources. The first is a naturalistic metaphysics that deposits the source of all things, all energies, all actions in "limitless-ness" or *wú j_x* and "non-action" or *wú wéi*. The second influence is an epistemology and cosmology deeply rooted in the

ancient Chinese concept of yin and yang. The “*dào*” of Lao Zi is a shadowy thing from which arise all phenomena in the universe. The Sage’s advice in the presence of such knowledge is to relax, give up all strenuous effort, and follow the natural timing of change.

For most it is a philosophy which simply defies adherence. Many rant against it as a source of indolence and sloth, although these are hardly virtues that could have survived through the esteem of a community that struggled to eke its survival from the land. Yet despite what has been characterized at times as a despicable impracticality, this philosophy of following the natural way has persisted as a constant thread in the tapestry of life in China.

Chapter 48 of the 81 brief chapters that comprise the traditional classic gives poignant advice as to how to pursue this way of thinking and living:

*To pursue learning, accumulate day after day. To pursue the *Dào*, day after day you must lose. Lose and lose until you reach non-action. Non-action but nothing left undone. To gain mastery of the world you must get to the point of no undertakings. If motivated for gain, once you begin to act you won’t get anywhere.*

The book is full of similar admonitions. Although its esoteric philosophy presents considerable difficulties to those who seek to follow the *Dào*, in the two thousand years since its composition, more than fourteen hundred writers have offered interpretations of it.

The text itself reflects the paradoxical nature of a philosophy that seeks to harmonize human consciousness and human action with the great *Dào* of nature. Its images and meanings are alternately concrete and ethereal. One of the themes or motifs that winds through this puzzling labyrinth of poetic passageways is the “Mysterious Female, Mother of All Things.” Chapter One says:

*What has no name is the origin of heaven and earth;
what has a name is the Mother of all things.*

The White Cloud Daoist temple in Beijing is the site of a shrine to this Mother of all things. It is situated in the centermost room of what may well be Daoism’s most sacred place. Above the threshold there is an inscription to this Mother. Inside, the room is absolutely empty. Lao Zi makes constant reference to this notion of emptiness, this Mysterious Female as the source of all things. In Chapter Six he wrote:

*The spirit of the valley does not die, and is called Mysterious Female.
The door of the Mysterious Female is called the root of heaven and earth.*

In Chapter Four we read:

The Dào is empty, yet when used is never filled up. So deep it seems to be the ancestor of all things.

Lao Zi wrote of the “indescribable marvels” which could be achieved by conforming to the principles and movement of the Dào. The method he advised was itself, like its subject, “shadowy and indistinct.” In Chapter Three, Lao Zi provided some concrete instructions to those who would seek to follow his subtle and esoteric path:

The Sage governs himself by relaxing the mind, reinforcing the abdomen, gentling the will, strengthening the bones.

Tài jǔ quán, developed in the Song Dynasty as a method of self-defense and personal cultivation through the principles of Daoism, conforms to this advice and stands as an ideal illustration of ways in which successive generations of Chinese philosophers sought to interpret and apply their understanding of Lao Zi. In the slow-moving and relaxed postures of the solo exercises of *tài jǔ* one sees the Daoist principles embodied and animated in the movements. Later authors, inspired by their Daoist ancestors, wrote that *tài jǔ* is like a great river, rolling on unceasingly.

In such remarks they evoked an image that flows everywhere through the *Dào Dé Jīng*: the image of water. For Lao Zi, water was like the highest good. In water's complete non-resistance to the forces it encounters, Lao Zi found the ideal metaphor for the movement of the *Dào*.

*Water is a positive benefit to all things without competing with them.
It seeks out places abominated by man. Thereby, it approaches the Dào.*

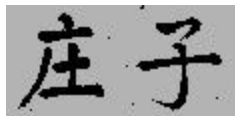
Using this metaphor of water as his standard, Lao Zi advised readers to “attain utmost emptiness. Maintain profound tranquillity.” Only thus could earthly affairs be brought into a state of balance and equilibrium. It is this attitude which gave rise to the statement that governing a great nation was like “cooking a small fish.” The message is remarkably similar to the political philosophy of Thomas Jefferson, who said, “That government which governs least, governs best.”

In Chapter Sixteen of the *Dào Dé Jīng*, Lao Zi emphasized keeping to the roots of primitive naturalistic philosophy that run deep throughout Daoism and into traditional medical theory:

All things are stirring about. I watch their cycle. Things flourish and each returns to its root. This is what is meant by returning to one's basic nature. Returning to one's basic nature is called constancy. To understand constancy is called enlightening. Not to understand constancy is to blindly do unfortunate things.

This way of thinking and of expressing thoughts has had a profound influence on the development of culture in China. Though it has never actually been embraced and utilized as a blueprint for governing the country, the *Dào* of Lao Zi has insinuated itself into virtually every aspect of traditional Chinese culture.

Medicine benefited immeasurably from the influence of Lao Zi's enigmatic philosophy. Doctors of Chinese medicine come to understand their patients as puzzles or riddles, best understood and remedied through the comprehension of the specific imbalances of yin and yang that each individual patient presents. This is but a part of the legacy of China's quintessential Old Man. It has served to quicken the perception, animate the imagination, and deepen the understanding of medical theorists for over 2000 years.



ZHUANG ZI

In contrast to the esoteric magic of Lao Zi, the second essential text of Daoism uses earthy parables to illustrate principles of Daoist thought. This text is known by the name of its author, Zhuang Zi. His whole name is Zhuang Zhou, and, according to oft-repeated legend, he lived in the Warring States Period, two or three hundred years after Lao Zi.

Like Lao Zi, Zhuang Zi preferred non-action. He has always been viewed as the paragon of high moral character and purity of spirit. One story illustrates these qualities well.

One day Zhuang Zi was fishing in the Pu River which runs through what is now Henan Province. The king of the state of Chu sent two emissaries to convey a message to the sage.

“The King sends his regards,” began the officials, when they came upon Zhuang Zi beside the river. “He instructs us to inform you that he entrusts you with the affairs of state and recognizes the bitter work that awaits you.”

Without so much as turning his head, Zhuang Zi replied, “I have heard there is a divine tortoise in Chu which has been dead for 3000 years. I heard the king put it in a bamboo basket and covered it with silk. It sits, so I’ve been told, in the position of great esteem within the temple. But I wonder whether this divine tortoise would rather have its shell and bones become treasure or still be dragging its tail through the muddy water.”



“Secluded Fishermen on an Autumn River,” Tang Yin

The two officials answered with a chuckle, “Of course, it would rather still be alive, dragging its tail through the mud!”

Zhuang Zi held his fishing rod still. “You’d better go now. For I, too, prefer to drag my tail through the mud.”

In stories like this, Zhuang Zi communicated a body of concepts that came to have profound influence on Chinese thought. This way of thinking pervades the work of medical theorists. At the center of this body of concepts is the notion of the *Dào*. In Zhuang Zi, the concepts of *Dào* and *qū* are closely interlinked. In *Zhi Bei You (Traveling to the North)*, he wrote, “The whole world is just *qū*”

Living is the gathering of qū Death is the separation of qū Life is the companion of death. Death is the beginning of life. Who can know where the beginning is? Who can know the rule?

Such remarks contributed heavily to the skeptical mysticism of Daoism.

The subtle machinations of *qū* taken together, comprise the *Dào*. This concept of the universality of *qū* as characterized in the *Zhuang Zi* became a cornerstone in the foundation of Chinese medical theory where it was further refined and developed. Certainly it is the most important point of view in diagnostics. This sense of *qū* as the medium for the interconnections of the universe and all of its phenomena provided Chinese medical theorists with an ideal model for explaining the relationships between individuals and the environmental factors that

result in disease. In fact, it served as the typical explanation of the wholeness of the patient's body, mind, and spirit as well as their complex interrelationships with the environment. The *qū* of nature was seen to move through its changes in the natural world, and these movements were understood to influence the body, the mind, the spirit, and the whole state of being through processes understood as seamless extensions of environmental phenomena.

This is reflected in the terminology of Chinese medicine, as we will discuss in greater detail in Chapter 7. One clear example of this understanding is the names given acupoints. Acupuncture points were named after springs, hills, and valleys, in an analogy between *qū* and the water and wind that flowed through the “external” world. Zhuang Zi set forth the philosophical antecedent of this correlative thinking.

Another important concept from Zhuang Zi is the notion that everything is in a constant state of change and development. “There is no movement that does not change. No time fails to move on.” This fundamental concept also found its way into many aspects of Chinese medical theory—for example, in the theory of disease transmission between various “levels” of the body. Thus, in Chinese diagnostics, the patient's presenting symptoms are not indicative of a fixed entity but of a stage within a shifting picture of disease. By clearly identifying the active stage and correctly correlating it with the appropriate theoretical pattern of change and progression from one stage to the next, the traditional doctor can treat not merely the present symptoms but can take effective steps against a likely future progression.

In other words, according to the most fundamental advice of the *Yellow Emperor's Classic*, a well-trained doctor of Chinese medicine can treat patients before they become more seriously ill. For the development of such subtle skills, doctors, even today, owe a debt of gratitude to the ancient sage, Zhuang Zi, whose whole attitude can be summed in one phrase: “Follow nature.”

Like Lao Zi, Zhuang Zi placed a high value on the ability to quiet the will and seek repose in non-action.

Content in nothingness, non-action; holding the same position as heaven and earth: this is true virtue. Follow the middle way of nature as law. This can protect one's self, one's nature. This way one can enjoy and prolong life.

An interesting point relating this saying of Zhuang Zi with Chinese medicine is that the word meaning “middle way” is the same word used to name the circulatory *qū* pathway or *jīng luò* of the *dào* channel, the extraordinary vessel channel that runs up the spine. This *dào* channel is the meeting point of all the yang *qū* in the body. It commands or governs the movement and activity of the yang *qū* of the whole body just as Zhuang Zi suggests the “middle way” can take control of one’s life and make it enjoyable and long. It becomes clear from such examples that the aims of medicine are closely linked to the aims of philosophers like Zhuang Zi and his followers.

Again, the philosophical orientation of traditional medicine in China is one of its distinguishing characteristics. To proceed into clinical practice, therefore, without a thorough grasp of the philosophical roots of traditional medical theories is not simply ill-advised; it constitutes a significant disservice to patients. For Chinese medicine is far more than a series of clinical techniques. It is a comprehensive system of logically derived interventions designed to foster, restore, and otherwise enhance the balance between the individual and the environment. Without access to this logic, the interventions lose their meaning and their efficacy. Without understanding the nature of its Daoist influences, the logic of Chinese medicine would be virtually impossible to grasp.



THE CONFUCIAN CLASSICS

Often referred to as “The Four Books,” the classical books attributed to Confucius stand as cornerstones in the foundation of Chinese philosophy. The four books are *Dà Xué*, *Zhǐng Yǐng*, *Mengzi*, and *The Analects*. The ideas and language contained in these books have had a profound influence on life in China for 2000 years. Even Chinese people who have never read them are conversant with many of their themes. They play a role in the coursework of every Chinese university student that is comparable to but even more intense and dramatic than how Western students study Thomas Paine, Karl Marx, or Plato. If anything, their influence in China is even more widespread than their Western counterparts. Indeed, after they were edited and revised by the Song Dynasty scholar

Zhu Xi, the Confucian classics served as the basis of the Imperial civil service examination. Thus, for the next 700 years, virtually every Chinese civil servant had to prove his knowledge of these books to achieve an official position.

Nor did the importance of these books stop with officialdom. For countless generations, the Confucian tradition has symbolized Chinese thought and attitudes. Even the core of Chinese family and community life reflected the influence of these Confucian texts.

Since the earliest days of contact and exchange between China and the Western world, the contents of these Confucian texts have been translated, both poorly and exceedingly well, and have filled everything from the pages of lofty sinology journals to fortune cookies. The history and interpretation of these texts is so long and complicated that it serves as the subject for doctoral dissertations for those who wish to devote lifelong study to this quintessentially Chinese tradition of wisdom.



The Song Dynasty scholar Zhu Xi

We present the barest introduction to the works known as *Dà Xué* (*The Great Learning*) and *Zhǐng Yǐng* (*The Doctrine of the Mean*). Our selection of these two in no way implies that the other books are less significant. Neither should readers satisfy themselves with only our commentaries. We hope only to emphasize the enormous importance of the Confucian classics and stimulate you to investigate them more fully.

The rationale for focusing on these two works is that Confucian doctrine contains an important and sometimes overlooked idea. In his introduction to his translation of *Zhǐng Yǐng*, Ezra Pound pointed out that “the second of the Four Classics, *Chung Yung* [a variant romanization of *zhǐng yǐng*], the *Unwobbling Pivot*, contains what is usually supposed not to exist, namely the Confucian metaphysics.” He went on to characterize it thus: “Only the most absolute sincerity under heaven can effect change.”

There is a constant theme in both texts of “rectifying the heart” as the fundamental act of bringing oneself and one’s actions into harmony with the “right way.” Thus we come to know the *dào* of Confucius clearly

through *Zhǐng Yǐng*. It is a way of thinking that permeates the Chinese mind, reflecting the central importance given to balance, harmony, and reserve in virtually every aspect of human behavior. It also exemplifies the attitude of humility with which a well-trained doctor of Chinese medicine approaches his or her study and practice.

The reason for focusing on *Dà Xué*, *The Great Learning*, is that it contains a virtual blueprint for the Confucian ideal of rectifying the heart, through the process of “precise verbal definitions of its inarticulate thoughts,” leading to the ability to penetrate the deepest mysteries of existence. The influence of such a process is then delineated as the text instructs us how a well-ordered household and family life serves as the basis of order in the State and in good government.

This systematic sense of organized harmony developing from the ability to completely grasp the essence of things is a critical element in Chinese medical theory and application. There is no clearer iteration of the principles upon which such sensibilities are based than these two Confucian texts.



DÀ XUÉ

The Great Learning, as it is frequently translated into English, is one of the most studied of the Confucian classics. Like so much of the classical literature of China, this treatise on the relationship between acquiring knowledge (particularly of one's innermost nature) and the pursuit of harmonious conduct within family and social institutions can be interpreted in many different ways.

In his translation as well as his illumination of the text, Ezra Pound developed an English-language version which excels in bringing the spirit of the original to non-Chinese readers. We have consulted a number of Chinese scholars, and the general consensus we encountered is that Pound's interpretation of the text is not only basically sound, but poetically accurate. He provides an English version that has a hint of the original's flavor. Pound's translation focuses intently upon the deeper meanings of the individual characters. In short, his work of translating the text becomes an extension of the work itself in the finest sense of a Chinese literary classic. The Confucian text urges that one engage in the

process leading to “precise verbal definitions,” and Pound responded by doing precisely that. This can be seen clearly in the following passage.

The men of old, wanting to clarify and diffuse throughout the empire that light which comes from looking straight into the heart and then acting, first set up good government in their own states; wanting good government in their states, they first established order in their own families; wanting order in the home, they first disciplined themselves; desiring self-discipline, they rectified their own hearts; and wanting to rectify their hearts, they sought precise verbal definitions of their inarticulate thoughts [the tones given off by the heart]; wishing to attain precise verbal definitions, they set to extend their knowledge to the utmost. This completion of knowledge is rooted in sorting things into organic categories.

There are many things that could be said about this passage. For instance, one sees reflected in it an important piece of traditional anatomical understanding. In Pound's parenthetical note (set off in brackets above) he points out the literal definition of “thoughts” in the Chinese text. In the phrase, “the tones given off by the heart” we can quite clearly see how ancient Chinese conceived of the heart as the seat of consciousness. This same sensibility appears in traditional Chinese diagnostic terminology for certain mental disorders. “Phlegm confounding the orifices of the heart” is a phrase that describes a category of mental illness characterized by various, relatively mild symptoms and symptomatic patterns of behavior. It is, however, an altogether different diagnosis when liver fire rises to harass the heart and more virulent symptoms appear.

One of the identifying characteristics of Chinese medical theory is its comprehensive approach to the body as an integrated whole. Ancient anatomists and physiologists were more concerned with the overall function of the living organism than with a detailed description of the material dimension of being human. They beheld a dynamic system of interdependent mechanisms, functions, structures, and substances and sought to evolve a method for intervening when disease and dysfunction occurred. More importantly, they were guided by ancient advice to treat their patients before they became ill, to prevent rather than to treat disease.

This sort of strategic thinking relates directly to the passage quoted above from the *Dà Xué*, as it does to several other Chinese classics discussed in this chapter. The selection of a treatment principle in Chinese

medicine can also be understood as an exercise in strategy similar to that employed on the field of battle. Alternately, medical intervention can be understood as the governance of the empire of the body. These two metaphors, at less variance in the ancient feudal world than they may seem today, are fundamentally aligned in their conception of the body in terms of natural, social, and military structures which must be wisely managed in order to maintain the harmony of yin and yang, *qū* and blood, *j.ng* and *shén*.

In *Dà Xué*, Confucius presents a method or formula for placing a whole nation in a state of harmony and balance. This formula, relying on intimate self-knowledge—listening to the tones given off by one's heart—is also perfectly applicable to the management of medical intervention. It has indeed informed the thinking of Chinese medical experts for centuries. This subject is developed in even greater detail in another of the Confucian classics, *Zhǐng Yǐng* (*The Unwobbling Pivot*, as Pound termed it).

The whole Confucian strategy is aimed at self-cultivation, self-development. The ideal the Master recommended, and which was subsequently adopted as a standard, was expressed by the term “*j%ān zǎo*” which has been translated into English by various translators in various and interesting ways. “Gentleman” is perhaps the most common, if not the most accurate. According to Confucius, the *j%ān zǎo*, or “superior man” as translated by Baynes from Wilhelm's German version of the *YüJ.ng*), possessed a number of esoteric qualities that he enumerated in the *Dà Xué* and more fully developed in *Zhǐng Yǐng*.



ZHǐNG YǐNG

When we talk of the root of Chinese culture and civilization, nothing comes closer to a verbal description than the phrase “*zhǐng yǐng*.” What does this phrase mean? As we discussed in Chapter One, the Chinese developed a linguistic predilection for a concise, condensed precision of expression. There is perhaps no greater example of this than the phrase *zhǐng yǐng*. It contains a whole outlook and approach to living that is central to the Chinese way of thinking and the Chinese way of life.

The modern character *zhǎng* appears as 中. In essence, the character means “central,” but through its uses and the various meanings that have derived, *zhǎng* has taken on many profound connotations. Thus, as we have mentioned, China in the words of its native population is *zhǎng guó*, the central country. In medicine, *zhǎng*, the center, is the focus of the earth phase of the five-phase theory.

Much of the deeper meaning of *zhǎng* derives from its use in the phrase *zhǎng yǎng*. The significance of the word *zhǎng* in this phrase modifies and amplifies its inherent meaning so that the character *zhǎng* itself has the flavor of the phrase *zhǎng yǎng*. The meaning of *yǎng* in this phrase acts to expand and emphasize the meaning of *zhǎng*.

Taken alone, *yong* means “normal,” “not outstanding,” “not particularly good, not particularly bad.” The phrase *zhǎng yǎng* can be literally understood to mean “in the middle and not sticking out.” It is a phrase which is commonly used to describe an approach to conduct that favors leaning neither to one side nor the other but staying in the center. Don-t agree; don-t disagree; *zhǎng yǎng*.

Another way of translating the phrase could be “follow the middle way and don-t attract attention.” It is common to find Chinese children who have been taught this attitude by their fathers and mothers. “If you speak out, who knows what sort of trouble you might cause. Keep silent and you will harm no one.” These words, according to one close Chinese friend, were the very ones used to instruct her in the discipline of correct conduct. They echo a phrase from the Confucian commentaries on the *YüJ.ng*, which resound in the passages of the *Zhǎng Yǎng*. In the text, Confucius speaks of the way of the superior man:

The master man finds the center and does not waver; the mean man runs counter to the circulation about the invariable. The master man-s axis does not wobble. The man of rare breed finds this center in season, the small man-s center is rigid, he pays attention to the times and seasons, precisely because he is small and lacking all reverence. He said, “Center oneself in the invariable.” Some have managed to do this, they have hit the true center, and then? Very few have been able to stay there.

This theme runs throughout the entire text, as seen in the following brief quotations:

He stands firm in the middle of what whirls without leaning on anything either to one side or the other. The man of breed pivots himself on the unchanging and has faith.

The meaning of *zhǎng yǎng* is an amplification of the importance of centrality, the middle way. The character has an enlarged sense that incorporates this expanded idea. This sheds additional light on the significance of the Chinese name of their homeland: *zhǎng guó*, the land of the middle way. To be Chinese is to pivot on this center.

Another major theme of the text is the process and devotion to the acquisition of knowledge and the attainment of a state of existence in which this knowledge is allowed to develop and take charge of one's affairs, of one's entire life. This devotion to knowledge and the processes whereby one comes into possession of it are centrally important to Confucianism and the role it has played throughout the development of Chinese civilization.

Indeed, the *Zhǎng Yǎng* opens with the following words:

What heaven has disposed and sealed is called the inborn nature. The realization of this nature is called the process. The clarification of this process [the understanding or making intelligible of this process] is called education.

The influence of these Confucian ideas has proven to be deep and long lasting. In these words we find the germ of the entire system of education and examination for the civil servants who effectively ruled China for 2000 years. Taken together, these two essential concepts of the *Zhǎng Yǎng* can be paraphrased as follows: through study and learning, one can gain knowledge of conditions and discern the middle way; through holding steadfastly to this middle way and not seeking to exert extreme influence, one can conserve and cultivate one's knowledge and one's survival, thus contributing in the most effective way possible to the health and wellbeing of the whole country.

Many Western scholars who have studied Chinese civilization in its various aspects, perhaps most notably Joseph Needham, pose the question, "Why did China, possessed of great wisdom and technological prowess at such an early date, fail to develop modern science as in the West?" There are several answers to this questions, many of which cite the philosophical influence of the Confucians and particularly the neo-Confucians of the Song dynasty as likely candidates for the cause of this shortcoming. It seems to us, however, that such questioning misses the point. Indeed, it is like asking why a man setting out for New York fails to arrive in Chicago. He simply wasn't headed there.

If our metaphor has merit, it is to effectively show that a class of Confucian scholars who administrated Chinese authority, charted and steered a course of gradual, restrained, and sustainable development for over 2000 years. The map for this course can be found in *Zhǎng Yǎng*. Its influence in Chinese thinking and Chinese life is virtually all-pervasive.



"The Noble Scholars," handscroll by Tang Yin

Perhaps a more productive line of questioning is for Westerners to ask how Chinese civilization managed to survive the endless cycles of invasion, revolution, destruction and reconstruction that have characterized its millennial history. Certainly China has gone through periods of enormous hardship during which social values and standards declined. At times in China's past, the suffering of her citizens has equaled or surpassed any in human history. Yet China survives. And it is this unparalleled survival that prompts us to ask not, "Why has China failed to become like Western nations," but rather, "What has kept her moving steadily forward against tides of history that have crushed and washed away other ancient cultures?" Without a doubt, China's ancient culture survives today, changing as it has throughout its long history, but surviving nevertheless.

There is no better starting place to look for the answers to this question than in the *Zhǎng Yǎng* and the other literary classics we have discussed here. To understand the philosophical background of medical theories and healthcare strategies, we could do far worse than to study the *Zhǎng Yǎng*. Conversely, to understand China's long-term survival, we must comprehend the significant role traditional medicine has played in achieving that survival. Indeed, for a civilization to have endured as China has, it must have developed a workable system of caring for the health of its people. For if the people perish, there is no civilization or culture.

At the core of China's ancient native healthcare system is the concept of an orderly and harmonious arrangement of the people. This has always been understood to apply to people as individuals, people as entities in the natural environment, and people as social beings in the context of their civilization. The concept of balance in medical terms can be understood as an expression of an ideal which has been substantially shaped by the texts and interpretations of Confucian writers. The place of honor accorded to the *Zhǐng Yǐng* is evidence of the value and workability that Chinese scholars—including Chinese doctors—have discovered in its pages. These discoveries abide there, to be received by those who seek them.